

Fukushima-is-still-news

- vol. 12 –

**Vested Interests -
Transparency - Corruption
2012-2016**



Odile Girard



Référence bibliographique

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INTRODUCTION

J'ai « découvert » l'écologie au début des années 70, croisant dans le même temps la pollution, les luttes paysannes et la malbouffe, la médecine qui avait (déjà) perdu son âme, les mouvements sociaux et bien sûr le nucléaire qui a occupé une grande partie de ma vie.

Après la catastrophe de mars 2011 au Japon, j'ai suivi chaque jour une partie des grands journaux japonais anglophones pour essayer de sauvegarder un maximum d'articles ayant trait à Fukushima. L'idée était de conserver une sorte d'archive accessible à tous, qu'ils soient écrivains, journalistes ou tout simplement intéressés.

Le blog « [Fukushima-is-still-news](http://fukushima-is-still-news.com) » a été poursuivi jusqu'en 2019. Ci-dessous, la conclusion parue le jour où j'ai décidé d'arrêter mon blog.

End of March 2019: Time to stop this blog

29 Mars 2019

Rédigé par fukushima-is-still-news et publié depuis Overblog

I have been collecting and spreading information on the Fukushima disaster for more than 8 years.

More than ever I am convinced that the name of my blog « Fukushima-is-still-news » was aptly chosen. Or perhaps I should have called it « Fukushima should still be news ». What I'm getting at is that I know the disaster is going on and we cannot simply forget Fukushima and turn the page. But the mode of action I chose 8 years ago has its limits and it is time for me to stop this blog.

I don't want the contents to be lost, so I will try and publish the lot with the Éditions de Fukushima so that the information remains available online.

Good bye for now. I am not doing a disappearing act. I'm still there tracking what's going on in the world of nukes.

C'est maintenant chose faite. Le blog *fukushima-is-still-news* est désormais disponible aux Éditions de Fukushima. Une fois de plus merci à mon ami Pierre, qui m'a convaincue à l'époque de tenir ce blog et m'a aidée à le lancer.

Odile Girard

Avertissement

La mise en page de dizaines de milliers de pages étant trop fastidieuse, nous avons préféré dans un premier temps éditer les volumes 7 à 16 sans mise en page particulière plutôt que de risquer de ne jamais les éditer. Chacun de ces livres est donc, dans la version présente, constitué des articles du blog copiés de manière brute. Les articles sont disposés a priori chronologiquement. Nous nous excusons donc pour l'absence de table des matières. La recherche peut toutefois facilement être effectuée par mot clé avec la fonction CTRL + F

Le présent volume est le douzième d'une collection de 16 ouvrages :

Vol. 1 : Daiichi Nuclear Plant (2012-2014)

Vol. 2 : Daiichi Nuclear Plant (2015-2019)

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and Decommissioning**

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Lack of transparency update Feb 12, 2012

February 12, 2012

TEPCO provided radiation map to U.S. before Japanese public

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120212p2g00m0dm019000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. provided a contamination survey map of its crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant to the U.S. nuclear regulator nearly a month before its official disclosure to the public in Japan in late April last year, company officials said.

The revelation follows a series of revelations that the government data from the System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information and the Japan Meteorological Agency's data on the projected radiation spread were provided to the United States and other international institutes before disclosure of the information in Japan.

TEPCO started making the map which described the amount of radiation at up to 150 spots around the buildings in the power plant site on March 22 and provided it the same day to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission at the request of its staff members dispatched to Japan after the March 11 earthquake and tsunami triggered the nuclear crisis, the officials said.

TEPCO officials and NRC staffers continued to share updated versions of the map almost every day via e-mail, they said.

TEPCO only started providing the data to Japan's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency on March 23. It waited until April 24 to make the map public, only after the media reported details of the map a day before.

An official at TEPCO's public relations department said the company had provided data on the radiation amount at the Fukushima No. 1 complex at press conferences even before the official disclosure of the map, adding the utility "received advice" from the NRC.

February 11, 2012

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120210006779.htm>

Govt to make TEPCO more transparent / 3 committees to oversee management

The Yomiuri Shimbun

The government plans to require Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, to introduce a committee governance structure to increase management transparency.

The policy is included in the draft comprehensive special business plan, which will be compiled by the government's Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund and TEPCO in March.

TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata is set to resign to take responsibility for the nuclear crisis. His successor will be recruited from outside the company to increase the transparency of TEPCO's management.

TEPCO tentatively decided Thursday to accept the fund's demand that it hold a one-third stake in the utility through a capital injection using taxpayers' money.

With the veto power that comes with a one-third stake, the fund will be able to overturn decisions in shareholders meetings concerning TEPCO's management policy.

The government decided TEPCO's opaque management practices--including high labor costs and donations as part of its expenses that are used to determine electricity charges--need to be changed if the utility is to regain public trust.

By making it possible for outside entities to oversee TEPCO's management system, the government aims to make it easier to gain the public's understanding over using public funds to assist TEPCO.

In addition to introducing a committee system, the draft plan for new management will introduce an internal company system to encourage TEPCO's internal divisions to compete with one another to reduce costs.

Concerning a financial assistance scheme for TEPCO, the fund will inject 1 trillion yen as additional capital while banks will loan a total of 1 trillion yen.

Alternatively, the banks could buy TEPCO's bonds, instead of extending loans.

To minimize the burden on the banks, hundreds of billions of yen out of the 1 trillion yen will be set aside as a line of credit from which TEPCO would be able to borrow money when necessary.

The fund plans to present the scheme to banks in the near future.

On Thursday night, a TEPCO executive said, "We assume the government wants to hold at least one-third [of a stake in TEPCO] through the injection of capital, as that percentage comes with veto power."

However, the government demands at least a majority of voting rights in TEPCO, which still leaves some gaps between the two parties' positions.

Under the committee-company system, TEPCO will have three committees within the board of directors--the nominating committee, which selects and dismisses members of the board; the audit committee overseeing the work of board members; and the compensation committee, which determines board members' salaries.

For all three committees, more than half of the members will be outside directors.

Under the system, executive officers will be appointed to carry out separate functions of business operations from the board of directors, which oversees management.

(Feb. 11, 2012)

February 07, 2012

Pro-nuclear energy town councillor's firm had 700 million yen in nuke plant contracts

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120207p2a00m0na023000c.html>

TAKAHAMA, Fukui -- A town assembly member here calling for the continuation of nuclear power is also president of a company that has received at least 700 million yen in nuclear-related construction contracts, it has been learned.

Akio Awano, 62, is vice-speaker of the municipal assembly of Takahama, which hosts a Kansai Electric Power Co. nuclear plant. He is also part of a local organization promoting nuclear power plants.

According to the Fukui Prefectural Government and other sources, Awano's firm, a metal processing company, has around 15 employees and earned about 200 million yen in fiscal 2010. It has an office in the Takahama nuclear plant and has expanded its business on a diet of nuclear plant-related construction.

Construction records show that Kansai Electric began contracting Awano's firm directly in the 1990s, and has forked out some 536 million yen to the company for 67 jobs in the past five years. Furthermore, Awano's company took 66 subcontracted jobs at the utility over the same period. Most local construction businesses get at most about 15 power company jobs per year.

In September of last year, Awano submitted a written statement seeking continuation of nuclear power generation, including the restart of Takahama plant reactors off-line for regular inspections. The statement was approved by an overwhelming majority of the town assembly.

However, Fukui Gov. Issei Nishikawa has said, "Unless the national government submits new safety standards reflecting the knowledge gained from the Fukushima nuclear disaster, I cannot agree" to a restart of the reactors. Oi and Mihama, two other towns in Fukui Prefecture also hosting nuclear facilities, have not passed resolutions in favor of restarting reactors.

Awano has defended himself by saying, "I submitted the statement after looking at the country's energy situation and judging that nuclear power is necessary. My actions as an assembly member and my management of the company are completely separate, and I was not influenced by the construction contracts."

The No. 1, 2, and 4 reactors at the Takahama plant are off-line for inspections. In January Kansai Electric submitted a safety evaluation of the No. 1 reactor to the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, a prerequisite for it to be restarted. The agency and the Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan will look at the evaluation and Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda will make a decision on the restart based on local opinions. Kansai Electric has declined to comment on individual contracts, saying only that its business partners are "evaluated and registered in a fair manner, with the most appropriate company for a construction job chosen and contracted."

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

February 06, 2012

Nuke plant operators paid \$2 bil. to localities

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120206_27.html

Newly disclosed documents show that nuclear power plant operators in Japan have paid more than 2 billion dollars to local authorities hosting their facilities over the past 4 decades.

NHK obtained information about the payments from 44 prefectures and municipalities based on the information disclosure system.

The information shows that the payments have reached 2.1 billion dollars since construction of nuclear plants began in the late 1960s.

Of the amount, Tokyo Electric Power Company which operates the disabled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant paid nearly 460 million dollars. Other utilities have continued making payments ever since the accident at the plant.

Power companies pay the money to promote the construction of nuclear plants. Some local governments ask for donations to invest the money in the regional economies.

The utilities view the payments as part of the cost of generating power and pass the expense on in utility fees.

But an economy ministry panel said last week that the payments should not be counted as a cost.

Host communities have spent the money in various ways. They include public works projects, events and scholarships as well as statues of animation characters and promotional videos.

The host communities also receive subsidies from the central government, but the payments decrease in stages. Until 2003, they were only allowed to use the money to construct public facilities.

The payments are apparently convenient for some communities that are struggling to find ways to maintain the facilities.

Kyushu men sent to Fukushima nuke plant under falsified labor deals

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120206p2a00m0na013000c.html>

As efforts to tame the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant continue, laborers from as far as Kyushu have been dispatched there under illegal labor deals and forced to work inside at least one of the crippled plant's highly contaminated reactor buildings.

A man in his 40s from Nagasaki Prefecture recently related how he carried lead sheets weighing some 20 kilograms each up as high as the sixth floor of one building. A Geiger counter dangling from his neck sounded noisily and his mask misted over as temperatures climbed above 30 degrees Celsius.

"I was really angry because I was treated like a slave," Yosuke Nakayama, a pseudonym, said of his some 40 days at the Fukushima plant, starting in July last year.

The lead sheets were installed inside the plant's No. 1 reactor building to block radiation. Nakayama, however, was not angry about the hard work, but about the treatment he received upon returning home to Nagasaki.

He said he was paid 11,000 yen per day he worked for a company six layers down in a seven-layer outsourcing pyramid, with only the top-tier firm receiving orders directly from plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. He had been promised 14,000 yen per day, and had also been assured he would not have to enter the reactor buildings.

When Nakayama demanded an explanation for the 3,000 yen difference, his subcontractor mentioned the name of a Fukuoka-based crime syndicate.

"We don't care if yakuza show up," the contractor said, apparently threatening him.

A third-tier company to which Nakayama's employer dispatched laborers via two other firms has been slapped with administrative punishments twice for its ties to crime syndicates.

Contacted by the Mainichi, Nakayama's employer acknowledged the dispatch of workers without a license. "We received about 13,000 yen from a fifth-tier firm and we'd lose money unless we deduct expenses," the company said.

Businesspeople familiar with the Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Genkai Nuclear Power Plant in Saga Prefecture say a significant number of laborers have been sent to Fukushima.

A utility work firm in Saga has been recruiting laborers from across Kyushu since last December, ostensibly for work at nuclear plants in Kyushu and Shikoku. The names of about 20 laborers are written on the firm's white board, along with their destination: "Fukushima No. 1."

An executive of the firm says it started sending laborers to Fukushima in response to requests from its business partners. "People from Kyushu are in demand because they're serious. We will send them again if requested."

A Saga man in his 30s did a job similar to Nakayama's at the Fukushima plant after being dispatched from a seventh-tier firm. He contacted the company after seeing a posting at a job-placement office and got the Fukushima job.

He received about 300,000 yen for some 40 days of work, and absorbed a radiation dose of some 10 millisieverts. "There are no jobs in my hometown, so it can't be helped," he says, adding he is waiting for another Fukushima assignment.

February 04, 2012

Falsified labor deals rampant at Japan's nuke plants, says suspect

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120204p2a00m0na016000c.html>

A power plant construction and maintenance firm has falsified worker contracts for temporary labor at nuclear plants across Japan for years, according to statements by one of the company's employees charged with involvement in the fraudulent agreements.

Hideo Ichise, 58, and two other people were indicted on Feb. 2 for the dispatch of a worker to the Oi nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture under a false contract, a violation of the Employment Security Law.

Ichise's employer Taihei Dengyo Kaisha Ltd. -- where he now serves as business manager after a stint as the firm's Oi operations chief -- along with Fukui Prefecture-based plumbing company Takada Kiko were also charged.

Investigators have discovered a dossier on falsified worker contracts at more than 30 Taihei Dengyo branches, further suggesting the firm has been involved in illicit labor deals involving nuclear power plants across the country.

Police have furthermore discovered cases of various personnel agencies siphoning off the wages of temporary workers at nuclear plants, while involvement of the Kitakyushu-based crime syndicate Kudo-kai has also been uncovered.

According to investigative sources, Ichise said, "We have participated in (illicit nuclear labor practices at the Oi plant) for many years. We have been doing the same thing at other nuclear power plants."

Taihei Dengyo's operating officer was also quoted as telling police, "Our company alone cannot hire many workers, so we (falsified labor contracts) knowing it was illegal."

Other sources involved in work at nuclear power plants have provided similar information, including one Saga Prefecture man in his 50s who worked at the Genkai Nuclear Power Plant there during regular inspections about three years ago. He was dispatched to a construction company by a temp agent called simply "boss." Although there was ostensibly a contract with the construction company and the man worked directly under a construction company employee, "boss" apparently took 5,000 yen out of his 13,000-yen daily wage.

A year earlier, the Saga man had also worked at the Genkai plant during a regular check as an employee of an electrical firm for about two months. A fellow worker in his 50s had to take more than two weeks off after injuring his ankle at the plant but had to pay his own medical bills.

In this case, the Saga man worked under the guise of the electrical firm. "There were gangsters among those bosses, and sometimes two bosses raked off my wages," the Saga man recalls.

A temporary personnel agency operator says, "Parent companies send us requests for a certain number of workers, and we submit a list of people who then go and work under those parent companies at nuclear power plants. We give the workers their wages after deducting our share." Another agent told the Mainichi, "There are times when gangsters are involved in recruiting workers. It is easy for us to hire them because they save us the trouble."

It is not clear why such unlawful labor practices have been overlooked. An inspector at a labor standards office stated, "It is very difficult to get a full picture of the labor practices at nuclear power plants because corporate parent-subsidary relations change depending on their line of work. It is also difficult to conduct surprise on-site inspections of nuclear power plants because advance notification is necessary as part of antiterrorism measures."

Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano instructed electric power companies to abide by the law and bar crime syndicates from involvement in work at nuclear power plants. However Takayoshi Yoro, a professor emeritus of labor law at Ryukoku University, says, "Falsified labor contracts have been rampant for so long. If the government is dead serious about stamping them out, nuclear power plants will stop running. Power companies and general contractors simply have to directly hire workers, but I wonder if they have the determination to do so."

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

February 03, 2012

Indictment of contractors exposes illicit work at nuke plants

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120203p2a00m0na018000c.html>

FUKUOKA -- Three people and two firms were indicted Feb. 2 on charges of dispatching a worker to the Oi Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture under a falsified contract in violation of the Employment Security Law.

Those indicted by the Kokura Local Public Prosecutors Office are Hideo Ichise, 58, of Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, Yoshimi Tomita, 59, of Maizuru, Kyoto Prefecture, and Kanae Ikegami, 36, of Kitakyushu's Wakamatsu Ward. Prosecutors also indicted Taihei Dengyo Kaisha Ltd., a Tokyo-based power plant construction and maintenance firm, and Takada Kiko, a plumbing firm in Takahama, Fukui Prefecture. The Kokura Summary Court on Feb. 2 fined Ichise and Tomita and the two firms 500,000 yen each and Ikegami 250,000 yen. Ichise is the Fukui business manager of Taihei Dengyo, and he previously served as the firm's Oi operation chief. Tomita is president of Takada Kiko while Ikegami is an executive of Dream, previously known as Soshin Kogyo, a plumbing and housing equipment firm. She is also the wife of a gang leader with ties to the Kitakyushu-based crime syndicate Kudo-kai.

"Many documents showing illegal labor were found, one after another, during our search. They proved many years of shady deals," says a senior officer with the Fukuoka Prefectural Police. The case sheds light on not just one firm or one nuclear power plant but the nuclear power industry as a whole.

Sixty-one-year-old Masaki Yoshimura (pseudonym) in Kitakyushu was dispatched to many nuclear power plants in Japan while working for a construction company for a period of 14 years that ended seven years ago. There were many companies involved in his work between his employer and general contractors such as nuclear power plant manufacturers. One of those companies was Taihei Dengyo.

Repairing plumbing was the main part of his job, but instructions came from different companies depending on which nuclear power plants he was working at. Electric power companies, operators of nuclear power plants, paid general contractors a daily pay of 100,000 yen, but Yoshimura got only 18,000 yen. More than 80 percent of his daily wage was siphoned off.

"It's the world of siphoning off. It's a system in which big companies make money handsomely," he says. The nuclear job scandal involving Taihei Dengyo uncovered the fact that **illegal labor supports nuclear power businesses**. Fake contracts and unlicensed dispatches of workers are peppered with acts of siphoning off pay. These practices have put laborers in an unstable position and invited crime syndicates' involvement.

"The Geiger counters quickly sound, so you can't work for so long. Fifty to 100 people have to work together. People at the bottom of society are there," Yoshimura says.

Radiation zones are divided into a scale from A to D, and workers assigned to D, the highest radiation zone, have to wear protective gear and layers of gloves. "Competent workers brought with them other workers' Geiger counters so they would not to exceed the dosage limits and to improve their work efficiency," Yoshimura said.

Stopping a nuclear reactor for just one day reportedly results in a loss to the owner of 100 million yen. A retired electric power company official says, "Electric power companies have repeatedly requested shorter inspections. But to shorten checks without changing the number of items to inspect, you have to either cut corners or force workers to work throughout the night," he says.

According to the Japan Nuclear Energy Safety Organization, about 90 percent of some 83,000 nuclear power plant workers who were exposed to radiation in fiscal 2009 were not employed directly by nuclear power plant operators. **Their average radiation dosage was 3.6 times the level suffered by employees of those operators.**

The Committee on Poverty of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations last year conducted a survey of nuclear power plant workers. Lawyer Tatsuo Watanabe, a member of the committee, says, "From an ethical point of view, we should check unlawful labor at nuclear power plants that is being done for economical reasons."

More than 1,000 workers are necessary for a regular inspection of a nuclear reactor, but postings for these jobs do not show up at job-placement offices. Most part-time nuclear workers find employment through personal connections and introductions. A labor bureau official says: "(The connections) are extra careful to not hurt the electric power companies. Those with strong personal connections have strong solidarity and are tightlipped. They are in a world of their own."

February 01, 2012

Editorial: Nuclear regulatory reform must weed out entrenched interests

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/perspectives/news/20120201p2a00m0na004000c.html>

Bills relating to a shift in the nation's nuclear power policy were approved by the Cabinet on Jan. 31. In addition to the establishment of a new nuclear regulatory agency under the Environment Ministry, the government is aiming to legislate the lifespan of nuclear reactors, and require plant operators to outline specific measures against severe nuclear accidents.

Significant harm has been done by allowing the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA), an administrative body tasked to regulate nuclear power safety, to exist under the umbrella of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), a major promoter of nuclear power. Divorcing nuclear regulation from nuclear promotion and centralizing regulatory duties into one agency stands to reason. Changing the agency's name from the originally proposed "nuclear power safety agency" to "nuclear power regulatory agency" is likewise pertinent, considering the new agency's nature.

However, the mere alteration of a name and rearrangement of an organization will not result overnight in a highly independent agency specializing in regulation. Because many of the new agency staff members are likely to come from NISA, specific measures are necessary to secure the independence of the new body.

It remains unclear how a nuclear safety investigation committee, envisaged in one of the bills approved by the Cabinet, will contribute toward ensuring the safety of nuclear power. Since the Cabinet Office's Nuclear Safety Commission (NSC) lost the confidence of the Japanese public over its response to the

ongoing nuclear disaster, the new committee cannot expect to gain it back without demonstrating its independence and competence.

The handling of the continuing nuclear crisis has been problematic particularly due to the government's lack of readiness, which has generated suspicions that the disaster could have been mitigated had the government been more capable of crisis management. Crisis management will be an important duty of the new regulatory agency, and must be attended to adequately.

Meanwhile, some things have slipped through the centralization of regulatory responsibilities. Safety research conducted by the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA) and the inspections and other safeguards implemented by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology to prevent the diversion of nuclear material toward the production of nuclear weapons will not fall under the jurisdiction of the new regulatory agency. It remains to be seen how these tasks will be integrated into the new scheme.

Included in the latest bills are the designation of a 40-year lifespan for nuclear reactors and the implementation of "back-fit" measures that would hold existing reactors to the latest technological standards. The government claims that the combination of these two mandates would make it extremely difficult for reactors to continue running more than 40 years. The bills, however, include special exemptions allowing reactors to operate for up to 60 years. Stringent criteria must be set to prevent "exceptions" from undermining the rule.

We hope also that the proposed legal reforms lead to a stronger nuclear disaster prevention scheme. In the case of the Fukushima disaster, the off-site emergency response center failed to function. A fundamental review of Japan's nuclear crisis preparedness is imperative. Along with an expansion of disaster protection zones emphasizing nuclear disaster countermeasures, there is a pressing need to reassess national and regional disaster prevention plans.

Numerous corporations and organizations make up the national framework that had heretofore promoted nuclear power, and their role in "amakudari" -- literally "descent from heaven," referring to the practice of former bureaucrats taking advisory posts in industries they previously regulated -- has been pointed out. For effective regulations to gain ground, it is important to extend reform to such organizations with entrenched interests.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

Money and nukes Feb 13, 2012

February 13, 2012

Professor who promoted lenient standards for nuclear containers received donations

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120213p2a00m0na018000c.html>

A Tokyo Institute of Technology professor received a large amount of donations from engineering firm OCL Corp. before he promoted lenient inspection standards for spent nuclear fuel casks that the company produced, the Mainichi has learned.

Professor Masanori Aritomi was the driving force behind the standards, which favored OCL Corp. The Atomic Energy Society of Japan (AESJ) adopted the standards for inspections of transportation casks.

The finding highlights campaigns by proponents of the so-called "nuclear village" establishment to adopt such lax standards -- rather than the national standards -- to their advantage.

According to minutes of the AESJ's deliberations and people familiar with the issue, the AESJ decided on the inspection standards, also known as "AESJ standards," to apply to the safe design and inspections of transportation casks for spent fuel, new mixed oxide fuel and high-level radioactive waste. After soliciting opinions from the public, the government will formally set new standards this year.

The AESJ normally comes up with its own atomic energy-related standards after a sectional committee writes a draft that is then checked by experts and standards committees. The society's panel on nuclear fuel transportation casks began deliberations in 2010. The deliberations were held at OCL's conference room and the draft was drawn up by a member of the panel from OCL.

Aritomi served as head of the panel on transportation casks and its umbrella organization, the nuclear fuel cycle department. He also took on the position of deputy chairman of the decision-making standards committee.

Tokyo Institute of Technology records show that Aritomi received a total of 14.85 million yen in scholarship donations from OCL between fiscal 2006 and 2010. Another researcher, a Tokyo Institute of Technology associate professor and a member of the sectional committee, received a 1 million yen scholarship donation in fiscal 2010.

The deliberations focused on whether heat transfer inspections to check how heat stemming from spent nuclear fuel would be transmitted to casks should be conducted on all new casks. The AESJ draft says sample inspections are acceptable so long as cask manufacturers have a good track record, but the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) is demanding inspections of all transportation casks. During a meeting of experts in June last year, a safety examiner from NISA expressed the agency's opposition to sample inspections.

In spite of the opposition, however, the lenient inspection standards were approved by an overwhelming majority through balloting by members of the standards committee between Dec. 23 last year and Jan. 19 this year, with only a member from NISA dissenting. A member from the Japan Nuclear Energy Safety Organization abstained.

According to experts familiar with transportation casks, a large transportation cask can store as many as 38 spent nuclear fuel rods. Heat transfer inspections impose a heavy financial burden on the manufacturers because the number of electric heaters they have to install has to match the number of spent nuclear fuel rods.

Aritomi told the Mainichi he has no intention of deliberately siding with OCL.

"If all transportation casks are checked, shipments will slow down and the processing of spent fuel will not progress," he said. "We, the AESJ, determined that sample inspections were OK."

However, when asked about his involvement in the entire decision-making process, he said, "It cannot be helped if suspicion is raised over my neutrality. I think I should resign at least as the head of the sectional committee or deputy chairman of the standards committee."

Nevertheless, Aritomi also argued: "Unlike nuclear reactors, the transportation cask is not something which you can write a thesis about, and there are not many researchers. I realized there were many problems with the deliberation structure, but there were few people who could get involved."

OCL Managing Director Kazuo Kawakami dismissed any suspicions arising over the issue, saying, "The committee is operating in accordance with the principles of fairness, justice and openness, and does not cause any suspicion."

A NISA official commented, "Transportation casks should be subject to tough standards because they are transported near citizens. We cannot adopt the (AESJ) standards as government standards."

Aritomi was appointed as an adviser to the Cabinet Secretariat by then Prime Minister Naoto Kan shortly after the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

Government approves additional funds for TEPCO

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120213_29.html

Japan's industry minister has warned Tokyo Electric Power Company, operator of the troubled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, that it must accept state control in order to get a capital injection.

Yukio Edano told TEPCO President Toshio Nishizawa on Monday that the company will not receive public money unless the government gets adequate voting rights in return.

He said the government will not otherwise accept the business revival plan the utility is to submit by the end of March. TEPCO needs a large amount of financial aid to cover compensation payments to victims of the nuclear disaster at the plant and for alternative thermal power generation in place of nuclear energy.

Nishizawa said TEPCO will bear the government's requirement in mind in working out its revival plan.

The president told reporters after the meeting that his company will discuss details of a capital injection request with a government-backed organization for the victims.

Providing that it acquires the voting rights, the government has decided to give the utility **nearly 9-billion dollars in additional financial aid to be used for compensation payments**. The money is separate from the proposed capital injection fund for TEPCO.

Government's responsibility - but to what extent ?

February 14, 2012

Editorial: Govt' must be aware of responsibilities if it takes over TEPCO

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/perspectives/news/20120214p2a00m0na005000c.html>

Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano has approved additional financial assistance of some 690 billion yen for the troubled Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, to provide funds for the massive compensations for nuclear disaster-induced damage. Apart from this, the government is poised to inject public funds into the utility to place it under virtual state control and prevent the firm from becoming insolvent. The minister's approval had been delayed due to rows between the utility and the government over the latter's demand to share TEPCO's management rights.

If the unproductive conflict between the government and the utility lingers on and results in a delay in compensating the victims of the nuclear catastrophe, however, the situation will turn into a case of the tail wagging the dog. If the government is to share TEPCO's management rights by injecting public funds, the government needs to be aware of its responsibility to take on the task of bringing the nuclear crisis under control at an early date, rescuing nuclear disaster victims and maintaining a stable energy supply.

Following the government's approval of the additional financial assistance, TEPCO released its settlement for April-December 2011, in which the utility incurred some 620 billion yen in net losses -- due mainly to increased fuel costs following the suspension of nuclear power plants. If it were not for the injection of public funds, the utility would likely turn insolvent in the business year ending March 2013. That is why a capital injection at the 1-trillion-yen level has been under consideration.

Because TEPCO's total market value currently stands at some 320 billion yen, the government would be able to acquire up to three-fourths of its management rights by investing 1 trillion yen into the flagging company. If the government acquires more than two-thirds of TEPCO's management rights, the government would be entitled to making such key managerial decisions as restructuring. Industry Minister Edano demanded of TEPCO President Toshio Nishizawa that the utility hand over "sufficient voting rights" to the government as a precondition for the additional financial support. It appears that the government is aiming to take over a certain managerial control of the utility by acquiring a majority of its voting rights, after which it would push through a reform of the entire energy system, including separating electricity generation and transmission.

TEPCO, meanwhile, has been opposing the handing over of its management rights to the government. President Nishizawa stated as he released the utility's settlement, "We will discuss the issue by taking the industry minister's ideas into full consideration."

What significance, however, does this tug-of-war between the government and the utility have? They need to be reminded that **the aim of providing financial support for TEPCO is to bring the nuclear crisis under control at an early date, compensating the nuclear disaster victims swiftly and maintaining a stable energy supply.**

TEPCO is poised to draw up a comprehensive special business plan incorporating the injection of public funds by the end of March, in conjunction with the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund. While it goes without saying that TEPCO is required to do its utmost to streamline its management, the government also needs to bear due responsibility as an investor in the utility.

However, there are also discrepancies within the government over its attempt to acquire a majority of TEPCO's voting rights, with the Finance Ministry opposed to the move on the grounds that it could increase the government's financial burden for decommissioning nuclear reactors and compensating nuclear disaster victims. As long as there is a conflict of opinions within the government over taking over the responsibility for the nuclear disaster and its aftermath, we can't be sure if the government can be tasked with TEPCO's management.

Unless TEPCO reactivates idled nuclear reactors and raises utility bills, the company is estimated to take only a year to use up the one trillion yen to be injected by the government, because of increased fuel costs. There is also a limit to the effectiveness of the government entirely taking over the utility and downsizing it. The government is urged to exercise its responsibility in settling the structural problems if taxpayers' money is to be injected to bring the utility under state control.

Click here for the original Japanese story

Govt and TEPCO play tug-of-war over voting rights

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120214_17.html

Difficult negotiations between the Japanese government and the operator of the tsunami-hit nuclear plant over voting rights of the company will soon begin in earnest.

Tokyo Electric Power Company wants the government to have less say over the funds it provides the firm.

Industry minister Yukio Edano told TEPCO President Toshio Nishizawa on Monday the government would not accept the company's business revival plan unless it gets adequate voting rights. The plan includes an injection of public funds to boost the firm's finances.

Some government officials think it should have majority voting rights over the company if it is to receive public funds.

Others say over two-thirds voting rights is necessary, to allow the government to veto all proposals at a general shareholders meeting.

TEPCO seeks to minimize state control, saying it wants to maintain autonomy as a private firm.

Some inside the government support TEPCO's stance. They worry about the huge responsibility the government may bear in compensating victims and decommissioning the plant.

Agreement on funding and voting rights is urgent for TEPCO as it forecasts a net loss of nearly 9 billion dollars for the business year through March. It could also affect financing from banks.

Transparency (lack of) again

Japan official faults nuke design, defends secrecy

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120215p2g00m0dm015000c.html>

TOKYO (AP) -- The government official who outlined Japan's worst-case scenario for the unfolding nuclear disaster last March defended how his study, warning that millions of people might have to flee, was kept secret.

Authorities would have had as much as a week or two to expand the evacuation zone if the worst-case scenario had started to unfold, said Shunsuke Kondo, who heads the Japan Atomic Energy Commission that helps set government nuclear policy.

But he also acknowledged Tuesday that the design for the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant had been faulty and he had not expected the "Chernobyl-style disaster" that occurred.

Kondo was commissioned by then-Prime Minister Naoto Kan to write the worst-case scenario on what might happen after the March 11 tsunami crippled the plant and caused three reactors to melt down.

But fearing widespread panic, officials kept secret the 15-page document he delivered March 25. It was obtained by The Associated Press last month.

The document said evacuation zones possibly would have to be expanded, including the Tokyo area with a population of 35 million people, if massive radiation began to leak from the plant, 230 kilometers (140 miles) from the capital.

Workers ultimately were able to bring the reactors under control.

But at the time, just two weeks after the disaster, it was unclear whether emergency measures would succeed, and an aftershock or another tsunami could have set off explosions and leaks at the crippled plant.

Kondo, 69, a former engineering professor at the prestigious University of Tokyo, said the government responded properly to his scenario, which he prefers be called "contingency," instead of "worst-case." "Thinking of contingencies is Common Sense Crisis Management 101," said Kondo, while noting the secrecy decision was not his but politicians'.

"Implementing cost-effective measures was the proper response," he told The Associated Press at his office in a rare interview.

Nearly a year after the disaster, the probability of the nuclear crisis spiraling out of control was tiny, according to Kondo, a stately looking man with white hair and sharp eyes.

The only task left undone from his scenario is relatively minor [??]-- covering the pools of spent nuclear fuel rods sitting next to each reactor at Fukushima Dai-ichi, he said.

Spent fuel rods are still highly radioactive. Hydrogen explosions blew apart two of six containment buildings at Fukushima.

Kondo's scenario had warned the radiation equivalent of two reactor cores might leak if the spent fuel started to burn.

Now, the rods are immersed in water and are stable.

Kondo, a longtime advocate of atomic technology as clean energy, acknowledged the design of Fukushima Dai-ichi had been faulty.

It failed in crucial "venting," to release pressure and prevent explosions, spreading radiation into the environment in what Kondo likened to the 1986 Chernobyl disaster.

Kondo had erroneously expected problems at a Japan plant to be like the Three Mile Island accident, where radiation leakage was limited.

"That was our biggest mistake," he said.

Decades will now be needed before Fukushima Dai-ichi can be fully decommissioned.

Authorities evacuated 59,000 residents within 20 kilometers (12 miles) of the Fukushima plant. Thousands more left other towns later.

Kondo still has sleepless nights.

"I can't sleep when I think of all those people who had to evacuate, all those mothers worried for their children," he said.

update on government-TEPCO battle, Feb 15

February 15, 2012

Govt, TEPCO battle over management rights

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120214005775.htm>

Takeo Miyazaki and Kunihiko Yasue / Yomiuri Shimbun Staff Writers

A fierce tug-of-war between the government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. over the utility's management is becoming more apparent as the government seeks a level of control over the company.

On Monday, Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano urged TEPCO President Toshio Nishizawa to concede the company's management rights to the government.

However, TEPCO has not changed its unyielding stance that the company should remain private, not government-run.

The fight between the government and TEPCO is making the prospects of solving important issues, such as rate hikes and management reform, unclear.

"I have no intention to approve injecting public funds [to TEPCO] while it does not give the government voting rights proportionate to the amount of money it provides," Edano said at Monday's talks with Nishizawa.

"The [finance] minister's stance is not something we can take lightly. However, to utilize the power of private enterprise is essential in the business world, and the electricity industry is no exception. We want to carefully discuss [management rights] before drawing a conclusion," Nishizawa said after the meeting. The government plans to obtain a certain amount of TEPCO shares after injecting about 1 trillion yen in public funds to the power company. The point of contention is the proportion of voting rights the government would acquire. Edano plans to obtain at least a majority of voting rights, and, if possible, intends to acquire two-thirds of voting rights. The minister is believed to have the aim of taking over TEPCO's management and taking the initiative in reforming it. In the end, this could pave the way for separating power generation from power transmission and distribution--all of which are presently handled by utilities.

However, TEPCO has resisted conceding unconditionally to Edano's requests.

TEPCO's bottom line is to maintain its status as a private enterprise with management independence. TEPCO is able to maintain a hard-line stance because the government does not have a unified opinion on the amount of voting rights it should have.

On Monday, Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura distanced himself from Edano's remarks on voting rights. "His remarks have not achieved consensus in the government," Fujimura said at a press conference Monday.

Observers say Edano's remarks reflect his irritation with TEPCO's unyielding stance. The economy minister tried to break the impasse by also taking a tough stand with the utility, the observers said.

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TEPCO's electricity rate hike plan

One of the major reasons Edano hardened his attitude toward TEPCO is the company's plan to raise electricity rates without consulting the government.

In January, TEPCO announced it would seek an average 17 percent increase in electricity charges for corporate users without sufficiently explaining the plan to Edano.

Earlier, the power company had announced its intention to raise electricity charges for households, although the government had not yet decided its stance on the issue. The announcement created a stir in the government.

Earlier this month, the economy ministry asked power companies to revise their methods of calculating household electricity charges. The ministry asked the companies to lower the wage levels they used in calculating labor costs, which are significantly higher than wage levels of ordinary companies.

The current method for calculating the electricity rate for households is to first add up all costs--including labor and fuel costs--and then decide on an amount of profit to be added.

The ministry also asked power companies to exclude donations to industry organizations in calculating electricity rates.

The power companies' review on calculating rates for households is expected to end by summer. Nishizawa has suggested the power company would reduce the average 17 percent rise in electricity rates for large-lot users--factories and offices--after the summer. Observers said Nishizawa intends to secure a profit through the 17 percent increase, and then reduce rates.

However, TEPCO's plan provoked an angry backlash from the Tokyo metropolitan government, other local governments and private companies. Edano is demanding the utility reflect the company's revised cost calculations as soon as possible in deciding rates for corporate users.

"I would like to ask [TEPCO] to promise the review on calculating the cost will be reflected in charges for corporate users," Edano said Monday.

However, Nishizawa refrained from making a firm commitment to Edano. "There has been a lack of explanation to corporate users [on electricity rate hikes]. We'll improve the situation and explain the matter thoroughly," he said.

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Reconstruction plan still vague

The utility plans to draw up its business reconstruction plan in March.

Edano has urged TEPCO to show the details of the "new" TEPCO in the reconstruction plan. However, details of the plan are still unclear.

According to sources, a proposal to introduce a committee governance structure to increase management transparency will be included in the plan. However, it is not clear how much Edano, who is demanding bolder steps from TEPCO, will see his intentions reflected in the reconstruction plan.

"I would like to ask [TEPCO] to recognize that the company is starting afresh, and to clearly show [in the reconstruction plan] that it will take bold steps in restructuring its business and changing company mentality," Edano said.

"We are now discussing a new style for our company, but there are ideas that need to be developed--we want to reveal the details in the reconstruction plan," Nishizawa said.

Takashi Shimada, director general of the Nuclear Damage Liability Fund, was not optimistic. "It is uncertain how much the government can do [to reform TEPCO] as a creditor and within the framework of the current electricity system," Shimada said.

Why the rush ?

February 21, 2012

Experts criticize Nuclear Safety Agency

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120221_11.html

Japan's nuclear safety agency has been criticized by its own panel of experts for rushing to approve stress tests for halted nuclear reactors.

The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency last week gave its first nod of approval for the test results on 2 reactors at the Ohi nuclear plant in western Japan.

The agency reached the conclusion after cutting off debate by the panel of experts days earlier.

At the panel's meeting on Monday, Professor Emeritus Hiromitsu Ino of the University of Tokyo said

discussions hadn't been exhausted, and he feels deceived.

Masashi Goto, a lecturer at the Shibaura Institute of Technology, said the panel's job is to fully review plant safety to prevent another nuclear accident.

Goto said he cannot understand why the agency was rushing to reach a conclusion.

An agency official pointed out that the experts' panel had met 8 times since last November. He said the agency thought conditions were met to endorse the results at the Ohi nuclear plant.

Having a stress test approved is a key step for restarting the country's nuclear reactors. Most of them were halted for regular inspections after the March 11th disaster.

Tuesday, February 21, 2012 10:17 +0900 (JST)

More "nuclear money"

February 23, 2012

Assembly member realtor's high rent for factory linked to promotion of nuclear power

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120223p2a00m0na008000c.html>

TAKAHAMA, Fukui -- A town assembly member who runs a real estate company has received unusually high rent from a subsidiary of Kansai Electric Power Co. (KEPCO), apparently in return for promoting the utility's nuclear power plant in the town, it has been learned.

Tomio Yamamoto, 53, a member of the Takahama Town Assembly in Fukui Prefecture and president of OHC Fukui, a real estate company in the town, received over 100 million yen from a subsidiary of KEPCO for renting an unused factory over four years until fiscal 2010. The subsidiary firm used the factory as storage.

The town of Takahama is home to KEPCO's Takahama Nuclear Power Plant, which has four nuclear reactors.

According to the revelations, senior officials of the Takahama Municipal Government solicited KEPCO to make the property contract with OHC Fukui, in which the rent was set at almost twice the standard in the area, according to realtor sources.

In September last year, Yamamoto cooperated with the town assembly's proposal for an opinion statement seeking the reactivation of the nuclear power plant -- setting another example of local assembly members receiving "nuclear money" for promoting nuclear energy projects.

The opinion statement was proposed by Akio Awano, 62, vice speaker of the town assembly, and was endorsed by Yamamoto and two other town assembly members before it was submitted to the assembly. The proposal eventually passed the assembly in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March last year.

According to the town hall and other insider sources, Yamamoto established a company to produce new material from used tires in 2004, for which he built a factory on the approximately 5,910-square-meter

land lot he purchased from the town for 88.65 million yen. However, the project failed and the factory became out of use.

Although it has not been clear how much money was paid in rent to the real estate company in fiscal 2007, 50 million yen was paid to the firm annually by the KEPCO subsidiary from fiscal 2008 to 2010, according to the sources.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

Tokyo conference on Fukushima

February 24, 2012

Foreign nuclear experts discuss Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120224_36.html

Foreign nuclear experts are discussing the Fukushima nuclear accident at a conference in Tokyo.

The Japanese government panel investigating the disaster is sponsoring the 2-day conference as part of efforts to verify what happened.

The panel invited 5 experts from abroad, including the head of the French Safety Authority, Andre-Claude Lacoste, and Richard Meserve, a former chairman of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Most speakers said the operators are primarily responsible for dealing with nuclear plant accidents. But they added that in the case of Fukushima, it was unclear which roles the Japanese government and Tokyo Electricity Power Company were playing.

The experts noted the importance of truthful disclosure of information. They said the Japanese government should have frankly admitted to lacking certain knowledge. They also said that if the public trusts the government, no confusion will arise over information it supplies.

On Saturday, the 5 experts are due to discuss how the investigation into the Fukushima disaster should proceed.

The Japanese government panel in December issued an interim briefing on the Fukushima disaster. It will use the experts' opinions in drawing up a final report, which is expected to be issued by late July.

Call for greater transparency

U.S. frustrated at lack of information from Japan after disaster

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120224p2g00m0dm024000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- A U.S. official, who was sent to Japan shortly after last March's earthquake and tsunami as head of a Nuclear Regulatory Commission team to see what was happening with the nuclear disaster, recently recalled the frustration the U.S. side felt over the lack of information from Japan in the early days of the crisis.

Nuclear regulator Charles Casto told Kyodo News in a telephone interview from Atlanta this week that the Japanese government did not accept the United States' offer to permanently station nuclear experts at the prime minister's office and indicated that it was 10 days after the March 11 disaster that communication between the two countries became smooth.

Casto also said the NRC had predicted that a radioactive plume from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant could reach as far as 38 kilometers northwest of the plant in Fukushima Prefecture. Based on the estimate as well as opinions in the U.S. military, which had been concerned over the slight rise in radiation levels at the U.S. Navy's Yokosuka base in Kanagawa Prefecture, he said the U.S. government issued an advisory for nationals to evacuate from areas within 80 km of the plant -- roughly double the projected figure.

Casto, who arrived in Japan days after the disaster, said one of the first issues his team had to handle was evacuating U.S. citizens and "ensuring immediate action to get water on the spent fuel pools and the reactors."

But the team's efforts hit a snag as Japan rejected a proposal made on March 14 by U.S. Ambassador to Japan John Roos to then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano to place a member of the U.S. team at the prime minister's office.

Casto said the purpose of the U.S. request was to be able to "get information...to protect American citizens" without "overly burdening" Japanese officials, as the U.S. team member would be able to see the information directly and report back to the ambassador.

Following Japan's rejection, Casto said he dispatched his team's members to such entities as the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency -- Japan's nuclear regulator under the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry -- the Defense Ministry and Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Fukushima plant, to gather information.

The first meeting between Japanese and U.S. officials took place on March 16 under the lead of the Defense Ministry, but confusion continued because the ministry did not have enough of the information the United States was seeking, he said.

Finally, a meeting involving experts and officials in charge from the two countries was held on the night of March 21 at the proposal of Goshi Hosono, who was a special adviser to then Prime Minister Naoto Kan, and it was followed by regular communication between the two sides.

"Frustration was built from the 16th to the 20th, of lack of information, confusing stories," recalled Casto, who was the U.S. team's head until he left Japan on Feb. 2 and visited the Fukushima Daiichi plant six times during the 10-and-a-half-month period.

"It's an honor," Casto said of his mission in Japan, emphasizing that it is important that the United States and Japan work together to overcome the unprecedented nuclear disaster. "I love Japan. I love the people. It feels like it's my second home now," he added.

Casto's current formal title is deputy regional administrator for construction in Region 2, based in Atlanta. He will move to the NRC's Chicago office soon.

Get rid of them all

February 25, 2012

Gov't to demand resignation of entire TEPCO board

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120225p2a00m0na011000c.html>

The government is set to demand that all 17 board members of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), operator of the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant, resign at the utility's next shareholder meeting in June, government sources said.

In return for the planned infusion of about 1 trillion yen in public funds, officials have deemed it necessary to replace all TEPCO's board members to clarify their responsibility for the nuclear crisis.

The plan will be incorporated into a comprehensive business plan that the government-backed Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund (NDF) and TEPCO will work out in March.

The government will force TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata, who has announced his intention to step down, to give up his retirement allowance, and halve the number of the utility's board members.

The government intends to appoint an outsider such as a private company president to replace Katsumata.

Many government and NDF officials are calling for the appointment of younger TEPCO employees to the board, citing the need for a smooth handover of the handling of nuclear crisis compensation. NDF and other relevant bodies are selecting deputy general managers and department managers at the TEPCO headquarters as well as branch managers to fill positions on the board excluding chairman.

Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano has apparently deemed it necessary for not only the TEPCO president and chairman but the entire board to step down to avoid giving the public the impression that the infusion of public funds is aimed solely at bailing out the utility, according to government sources.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

Restore public confidence ?

February 26, 2012

Foreign nuclear experts advise on Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120226_02.html

Foreign experts have told a Japanese government panel that its final report on the Fukushima nuclear accident should include lessons learned and proposals for ensuring safety.

Five foreign nuclear experts gave their opinions at the conclusion of the 2-day conference in Tokyo on Saturday. The meeting was sponsored by a Japanese panel of experts in various fields, charged with investigating the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant last March.

The head of the French nuclear safety authority, Andre-Claude Lacoste, said the final report should be more than a list of facts and include lessons and proposals.

Former chairman of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission Richard Meserve said the accident led to a loss of public trust in the government and power companies. He said they must ensure openness in their activities in order to restore confidence.

The foreign experts also proposed that the Japanese government panel should try to identify the current status of the crippled reactors through computer simulations, in order to ease public fears.

After the conference, the head of the panel, Yotaro Hatamura, said the experts noted **it is most important to prepare for accidents based on the idea that what is improbable is possible**. He said Japan had lacked this idea.

Hatamura said the panel will compile their final report by late July, taking the foreign experts' opinions into account.

Report on the handling of the disaster

February 28, 2012

Report takes former PM Kan to task over Fukushima nuke disaster handling

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120228p2a00m0na016000c.html>

The office of former Prime Minister Naoto Kan came in for scathing criticism in a Feb. 27 report on the handling of the Fukushima nuclear crisis' opening days, with the document accusing the PM's office of "grandstanding" and causing "useless confusion."

The report, put together by the private Fukushima nuclear disaster independent investigative committee, concludes that the Prime Minister's Office's first response to the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant "increased the risk of worsening the situation through stress and useless confusion." Furthermore, "grandstanding led to badly muddled crisis management measures" which did little or nothing to help prevent a worsening of the disaster. The report also rebuked the highest levels of government for meddling in emergency response measures.

The investigative committee, which began its work in September last year, is made up of six scientists and legal experts. Fukushima No. 1 plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) refused to cooperate with the committee's inquiries.

One focus of the report is the Prime Minister's Office's dispatch of electricity trucks to the No. 1 plant when it lost all power in the March 11, 2011 tsunami, knocking out the reactors' cooling systems. When the trucks arrived, there were no electrical cords to hook them up to the plant.

"That's the point at which we (the government) began to distrust TEPCO," then Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano (now economy, trade and industry minister) is quoted as saying in the report. However, the

investigators concluded that government distrust of TEPCO was a factor behind the direct intervention of the PM's Office.

The report also stated that "Orders by the Prime Minister's Office and industry ministry that gas building up in the reactor vessels be vented right away (to reduce pressure) were not at all helpful," citing the loss of power at the plant and the fact that TEPCO was waiting for local residents to be evacuated.

The report also takes Kan to task over the injection of sea water into the No. 1 reactor, stating that he confused the situation and risked making it far worse when, at a meeting at around 6 p.m. on March 12, he "vehemently" expressed worries that the injection would cause the reactor to go critical again and ordered a reappraisal of the planned operation. Fukushima No. 1 plant chief Masao Yoshida, however, began injecting sea water at 7:04 p.m., and ignored orders from both the Prime Minister's Office and TEPCO's Tokyo headquarters to stop.

"Had Yoshida obeyed the order from the Prime Minister's Office, there was a real danger that the operation would have been started too late," the report states. However, it furthermore concludes that the fact Yoshida took action in direct opposition to government and TEPCO orders was "a very serious risk in terms of crisis management."

The report is not entirely damning of Kan's actions, however, stating that his refusal on March 15 to allow TEPCO to abandon the nuclear plant "in the end compelled TEPCO to remain steadfast" as the crisis unfolded.

On the other hand, the report also states that Kan was aware he was making Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan Chairman Haruki Madarame and his Cabinet ministers uncertain about any objections they had to his decisions with his strong, top-down command style and insistence on his own opinions.

Furthermore, as leader, Kan's "self-assertion was a positive in that he could judge the situation and implement countermeasures, but was a negative in that it became a form of psychological control of others involved and caused a withering of their roles in the crisis.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

Panel denounces govt. handling of disaster

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120228_32.html

An independent panel investigating the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant has criticized the government's responses as ad-hoc, stopgap measures.

A report issued by the panel on Tuesday says then prime minister Naoto Kan and several other lawmakers told the panel that they had no understanding of the nuclear disaster manuals. They said they had received no explanations of the manuals from ministry officials at an early stage of the accident.

The report says Kan first received explanations of the manuals from officials 4 days after the accident, when a joint task force of the government and Tokyo Electric Power Company was set up.

The panel says that just after the accident occurred, staff members at the prime minister's office were busy looking up in books the basics of legislation on nuclear disasters.

Tetsuro Fukuyama was the deputy chief Cabinet secretary at that time. He reportedly said he received no explanations of disaster-related matters from officials during the six months from assuming the post.

Fukuyama told the panel that he was hardly even aware of the functions of the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency. He said that it was a grave mistake on his part to believe that officials would pass on information soon after they confirmed the situation.

Although receiving little information from the plant operator and the nuclear agency, Kan and other ministers started to be involved in decision-making on the accident. The issues included whether to vent gas from the reactor containment vessels, and to pump sea water to cool the reactors. Manuals say plant operators are responsible for making such decisions.

One of the lawmakers working at the prime minister's office at that time said politicians were only focusing on short-term measures and problems immediately facing them.

The report says Cabinet ministers were busy making off-the-cuff measures without basic awareness of the disaster while receiving poor support from officials.

It recommends that the government review its disaster manuals and the system to seek advice from officials.

well...

February 28, 2012

Edano advised Kan not to visit Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120228_31.html

The morning after last year's March 11th Fukushima nuclear disaster, then Prime Minister Naoto Kan flew to the disaster site by helicopter, although his spokesman advised him not to do so, warning of criticism from the opposition.

A report issued on Tuesday by an investigating panel cites vivid accounts of Kan and others at the prime minister's official residence in the first days of the disaster.

Early on March 12th, Prime Minister Kan took a helicopter ride to personally visit the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. He was frustrated that the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, had not started a venting operation to ease pressure inside the pressure vessel of Reactor Number One.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Edano tried to talk Kan out of the visit. He said that with such a visit the prime minister would be definitely criticized politically. Then, Kan said to Edano, "Which is more important, facing political criticism, or being able to put a reactor under control?" Edano replied, "If you understand, then please go ahead."

The report also cites a conversation between Prime Minister Kan and Nuclear Safety Commission Chairman Haruki Madarame over a hydrogen explosion that occurred at Reactor Number One shortly after 3:30 PM on March 11th.

Kan asked Chairman Madarame to explain why this happened even though he had told Kan that an explosion would never occur. Madarame simply moaned, burying his head in his hands.

The panel's report quotes Madarame as saying that when he saw the image of the explosion on TV, he immediately knew it was a hydrogen explosion. He said he was stunned and speechless because he had told Kan that morning that there would be no hydrogen explosion.

Later at a quarter to 6 that evening, Chief Cabinet Secretary Edano held a news conference and with no sufficient information available about what had happened, only acknowledged that some sort of explosion had occurred. Edano recalled that it was the most difficult news conference he had ever held.

Before dawn on March 15th, nuclear fuel became exposed and the danger of an explosion was pointed out. TEPCO made an inquiry to the prime minister's official residence, which sounded like a wish to withdraw its personnel from the disaster site.

At around 3:30 AM, Prime Minister Kan and key cabinet ministers met to assess the situation. Kan said that if TEPCO abandoned its job of pumping water into the reactor and if radioactive substances kept spreading into the atmosphere, then the whole of eastern Japan could be in serious trouble.

With that remark by the Prime Minister, the cabinet meeting decided to put his advisor, Goshi Hosono, on standby at TEPCO headquarters.

In defense of TEPCO

February 29, 2012

Business Federation chief criticizes gov't over response to nuclear crisis

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120229p2a00m0na009000c.html>

Hiromasa Yonekura, head of the Japan Business Federation (Nippon Keidanren), has criticized the government for its response to the crisis at the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. "The accident was caused not by problems involving the management of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) but by the massive natural disasters. In particular, I think the government's response was very wrong," Yonekura told a news conference on Feb. 27.

"Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) workers stationed near the plant escaped shortly after the accident. However, TEPCO workers did their best to bring the crisis under control without fleeing," he said. "The government should apologize saying, 'We're sorry about NISA workers fleeing the scene.'" Yonekura referred to the fact that NISA inspectors stationed near the power plant evacuated to an off-site center on March 12, immediately after the crisis broke out.

The government's fact-finding panel on the nuclear crisis stated in its interim report in December that questions remain as to whether the inspectors' decision to evacuate at the time was appropriate.

Yonekura also expressed his understanding of TEPCO's plan to raise electricity rates for corporate customers. "TEPCO is required to import extra crude oil because it can't operate its nuclear plants, costing itself trillions of yen. Electric power companies would go bankrupt if they were told not to raise their rates under these circumstances."

His remarks, which can be interpreted as defending TEPCO from criticism, could stir controversy.

No comment

Mayor of nuclear reactor city used taxpayers' money on gifts for nuclear disaster minister

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120229p2a00m0na011000c.html>

TSURUGA, Fukui -- The mayor of this city, home to three nuclear reactors, gave year-end gifts to nuclear disaster minister Goshi Hosono and other legislators using taxpayers' money, it has been learned.

Tsuruga Mayor Kazuharu Kawase, 60, used his mayor's entertainment expenses to purchase and give assortments of Echizen snow crab worth 10,000 yen each to 11 Diet members of both the ruling and opposition parties as year-end gifts between November and December last year. Echizen crabs are a local specialty of Fukui Prefecture.

Kawase is known to have repeatedly advocated the necessity of the prototype fast-breeder reactor Monju in the city and of building additional nuclear power plants. He also chairs the All Japan Council of Local Governments with Atomic Power Stations.

According to the bill of the mayor's entertainment expenses, Mayor Kawase purchased a total of 180,000 yen worth of Echizen crab assortments as gift items for 18 people, including 11 Diet members.

Aside from Hosono, the recipients of the gifts included then Science Minister Masaharu Nakagawa, who was in charge of the Monju reactor at the time; Seiji Maehara, policy chief of the ruling Democratic Party of Japan; and Sadakazu Tanigaki, president of the largest opposition Liberal Democratic Party.

Mayor Kawase reportedly handed the crab assortments to the lawmakers when he visited them at the Diet Members' Office Building and other facilities while he was on an official trip to Tokyo for meetings and to lodge petitions.

According to the bills of the mayor's entertainment expenses over the past five years, Kawase has sent Echizen crabs to several Diet members and the mayor of Mito -- a sister city of Tsuruga -- almost every year since fiscal 2007.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

Can lessons be learned from Fukushima ?

March 1, 2012

Editorial: Independent nuke disaster panel must scrutinize gov't crisis management

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/perspectives/news/20120301p2a00m0na002000c.html>

An independent fact-finding panel on the ongoing Fukushima nuclear crisis, which has published a report on its investigation into the accident, is urged to thoroughly scrutinize the government's crisis-management system.

The independent panel has interviewed those involved from a standpoint different from those of the government's fact-finding panel and the Diet's investigative committee that is also investigating the crisis. What is notable is that the independent panel incorporated its interviews with Cabinet ministers concerned in its report and has concluded that there were serious problems with the crisis-management system of the Prime Minister's Office.

The crisis-management system to respond to not only nuclear accidents but also all kinds of serious disasters is a key issue in Japan's national policy. Nevertheless, an interim report worked out by the government's investigative panel at the end of last year postponed specific scrutiny of the crisis-management system of the Prime Minister's Office even though it briefly touched on the matter.

The government's panel is urged to interview Cabinet ministers concerned and take other steps to thoroughly scrutinize the crisis-management system before it compiles a final report. The Diet's panel on the nuclear accident, which is to be legally given broad power including authority to summon witnesses to testify under oath, should also clarify problems involving the government's crisis management from an independent standpoint.

The independent panel touched on the qualities of Naoto Kan, who was prime minister when the nuclear crisis broke out in March 2011. However, it would be wrong if problems involving the government's response to the crisis were attributed to an individual's character. The government would unlikely have managed the nuclear crisis in an appropriate manner if anybody else had been prime minister. Rather, the government's response to the nuclear crisis should be **thoroughly scrutinized from the aspects of both its system and how it was implemented so that lessons learned from the response can be put to good use for the future.**

For example, the finding that then Prime Minister Kan gave an instruction to procure batteries on his mobile phone came as a surprise, but he was forced to do so because the government's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency and Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan lacked the ability to deal with the situation and were useless. Lessons learned from the finding should be put to good use for a new nuclear energy regulatory body. The new regulatory body will be set up based on reflections on the fact that mutual distrust between the Prime Minister's Office and other administrative bodies adversely affected the government's response to the nuclear crisis.

Mobile phones cannot be used at the crisis-management center on the basement of the Prime Minister's Office for security reasons. However, considering the urgent need to gather information at the time of serious disasters, such technical challenges need to be addressed.

The Prime Minister's Office is not solely responsible for the management of the nuclear crisis. It is necessary to scrutinize whether Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, responded to the crisis in an appropriate manner. Additionally, the

chain of command between the central government's nerve center and officials at disaster scenes needs to be reviewed.

TEPCO headquarters instructed the Fukushima power station to discontinue injecting sea water into the No. 1 reactor in an effort to cool down its core, but the manager of the plant continued to do so in defiance of the order. The independent fact-finding panel underscores the importance of lower-ranking organizations following instructions from higher-ranking bodies. However, it is better to clarify what lower-ranking bodies can do at their own discretion and leave that to them.

What is of urgent necessity now is to speedily create a new crisis-management system based on lessons learned from thoroughly scrutinizing the response to the Fukushima nuclear crisis. It is also indispensable to secure and develop human resources.

Light was shed on problems involving the government's crisis management system when the Great Hanshin Earthquake devastated Kobe and surrounding areas in January 1995. If the government's crisis-management system is left as it is now, we fear we may have to point out the same problems again in five or 10 years' time.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

TEPCO's forecast

March 3, 2012

TEPCO eyes 3-year hike limit / Believes charges could be lowered upon restarting of reactors

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120302004881.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Tokyo Electric Power Co., which has announced it will raise its electricity prices later this year, plans to bring them back to current levels in 2015 and reduce them further in 2018, it has been learned.

The three-year limit on the envisaged price hikes is based on the assumption that TEPCO can improve its earnings by restarting its reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture in 2013.

TEPCO, the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, is set to include this scenario in a comprehensive special business plan it will compile this month with the government's Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund, according to sources.

The utility has said it will raise electricity charges for large-lot users by an average of 17 percent starting in April, and by about 10 percent for households starting in July.

The hikes are meant to cover growing fuel costs resulting from increased thermal power generation because operations at TEPCO nuclear power plants have been suspended.

Prior to drafting the special business plan, TEPCO has compiled its projected cash flow over the next decade, which shows the utility's fuel costs will increase to 2.8 trillion yen in the business year ending in March 2013.

However, the costs would fall to 1.9 trillion yen in the business year ending in March 2017 if the company could steadily resume operations of its nuclear reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant.

Therefore, TEPCO believes it will be possible to gradually lower its fees from three years after the hikes, the sources said.

Meanwhile, the utility will reduce its personnel expenses by about 15 percent to 320 billion yen in the business year ending in March 2022 from the current 380 billion yen in an attempt to gain public understanding for the hikes, according to the sources.

TEPCO is expected to incur an after-tax loss of about 710 billion yen on an unconsolidated basis for the current business year ending March 31.

However, the utility hopes to start repaying public funds it will receive to cover compensation for those affected by the nuclear crisis from the business year up to March 2014, according to the sources. TEPCO expects its balance of payments to improve at that time, mainly due to lower fuel costs after it resumes operations at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, they said.

The utility hopes to repay 75 billion yen to 270 billion yen annually over a nine-year period, the sources added.

Public funds will be injected via the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund in the form of government compensation bonds, which can be cashed like checks when necessary.

The bonds provided to the organization will be worth 5 trillion yen, of which about 1.6 trillion yen in cash will be initially paid to TEPCO, according to the sources.

The utility will squeeze out funds to repay the public money from its profits every year under the name of "special contributions," the sources said.

(Mar. 3, 2012)

Settling scores - again?

March 2, 2012

Defiant Nuclear Safety Commission chief says he will quit post

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120302p2a00m0na002000c.html>

Nuclear Safety Commission (NSC) Chairman Haruki Madarame has said he will definitely step down as NSC chief once a new nuclear regulatory agency is established in April.

Madarame made the comment during testimony before the House of Representatives Budget Committee on March 1 after lower house member Hiroshi Kajiyama of the largest opposition Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) demanded his resignation. Kajiyama had assailed Madarame for suggesting that it is inappropriate for Japan to issue evacuation orders based on System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information (SPEEDI) data. SPEEDI predicts how radioactive substances will spread.

Kajiyama called Madarame "irresponsible" and asked him, "Why don't you resign?"

Madarame responded by saying, "When April comes, there will be a new organization (Nuclear Regulatory Agency) and the NSC itself will be disbanded. I will naturally step down." He went on to say that there is no country in the world that plans evacuations based on systems like SPEEDI.

The NSC gives advice to the government and nuclear power plant operators in case of nuclear accidents, and confirms the adequacy of stress tests before restarts of idled nuclear reactors.

Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda told the parliamentary committee, "We don't know what's going to happen before the formation of the new organization. We want the NSC to remain vigilant and prepare (for any contingency)."

An investigation initiated by the Diet concluded in February that Madarame's actions in the early days of the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant were inadequate, along with the actions of Nobuaki Terasaka, the then director of the government's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

Sounds familiar

March 3, 2012

Ministry leaders decided to hold nuclear data after Fukushima crisis

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120303p2g00m0dm020000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The science minister and other top ministry officials decided to withhold radiation forecast data from the public four days after the March 11 earthquake and tsunami triggered a nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, an internal document made available Friday showed.

Then Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Minister Yoshiaki Takaki, lawmakers serving as top ministry officials and top bureaucrats made the decision on March 15 to withhold data about the predicted spread of radioactivity, which included an assumption that all radioactive material would be discharged from the crippled plant.

Prediction of the spread of radioactive substances, compiled from the System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information, "could be by no means released to the public," the document dated March 19 showed.

On Friday, a ministry official said top ministry officials had made no decision on releasing the data, noting that contents in the document, a memorandum prepared by ministry officials, were inaccurate.

The document stated that radioactive clouds could spread from the crippled nuclear power plant to the Kanto and Tohoku regions, indicating that the ministry had made various estimates about the spread of released radioactive substances, including the worst-case scenario.

The minister and the other top officials concluded that estimated data from SPEEDI should not be released and more general data should be prepared for release.

Kan Suzuki, then vice science minister, told Kyodo News that there had been no assuming the discharge of all radioactive substances, adding release of such an estimate could have panicked the public.

When shareholders sue TEPCO

March 5, 2012

TEPCO managers sued for 5.5 tril. yen

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120305_27.html

A group of shareholders in Tokyo Electric Power Company has sued former and current executives of the utility, seeking 5.5 trillion yen, or nearly 68 billion dollars, in damages over the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The group of 42 individual shareholders filed the lawsuit at the Tokyo District Court on Monday against 27 people who have held senior executive posts at TEPCO since 2002.

That was the year a government panel warned that a major earthquake could strike the area in which the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant is located.

The shareholders argue that the utility failed to heed the warning and took no measures to protect the plant from tsunami and earthquakes.

The shareholders say they calculated the amount of the damages based on a report by a third-party panel that looked into the utility's management since the accident.

They are asking the firm to use the winnings to compensate those affected by the accident.

A lawyer for the group says Japan's corporate culture will not change unless individual senior executives are held accountable for problems.

He also says the shareholders want to correct what they call a system of collective irresponsibility in the nuclear-power industry.

Tokyo Electric has declined to comment. The utility is projected to post a net loss of 8.6 billion dollars for the business year through March.

Connections

March 5, 2012

Over 300 financial firms provide credit to nuclear arms firms: NGO

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120305p2g00m0dm027000c.html>

SYDNEY (Kyodo) -- A total of 322 financial institutions in 30 countries, including Japan, have provided credit to Boeing Co. and 19 other companies in six countries that are involved in the development and manufacturing of nuclear weapons, a nongovernmental organization report showed Monday.

The Australia-based International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons said in the report that those financial institutions provided credit totaling about \$48.7 billion, or about 4 trillion yen, since 2008.

The NGO urged the financial institutions named in the report to stop doing such business because they are aiding the continued existence of nuclear weapons.

"By lending money to nuclear weapons companies and purchasing their shares and bonds, banks and other financial institutions are indirectly facilitating the build-up and modernization of nuclear forces," the report said.

Japanese financial institutions named in the report -- Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group Inc., Mizuho Financial Group Inc. and Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group Inc. -- have provided a total of about \$3.53 billion, or about 289 billion yen, in credit to the so-called nuclear weapons companies, according to the NGO.

Nomura Holdings Inc. and Daiwa Securities Group Inc. have also been involved in bond sales for some of the 20 companies listed in the report as involved in developing and manufacturing nuclear weapons.

"We can't comment on our businesses with specific companies," said an official of Mitsubishi UFJ, which the report accuses of being "among the banks and other financial institutions most heavily involved."

Two Dutch financial institutions, PGGM and Rabobank Group, have an internal policy of not providing finance to armament-related companies, the report says, adding that neither has been involved in financing any of the 20 companies since July 2008.

Mizuho Corporate Bank Ltd., one of Mizuho's main banks, apparently has an internal policy of not providing loans aimed at the manufacturing of nuclear weapons.

An official of Daiwa Securities Group said the company wants to consider how it can incorporate into its business "the viewpoint of eradicating nuclear weapons."

The 20 companies that are named in the report as those involved in the development and manufacturing of nuclear weapons include BAE Systems plc, Rolls-Royce Holdings plc and European Aeronautic Defence and Space Co.

More dubious practices?

March 6, 2012

Shenanigans at TEPCO subsidiary led to higher electricity rates: investigation

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120306p2a00m0na006000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) raised electricity rates after one of its subsidiaries offloaded an assignment from the utility -- and its projected profits -- onto a third-party firm, a Tokyo Metropolitan Government investigation has revealed.

The subsidiary was tasked with operating a high-class restaurant for TEPCO employees, and apparently forked the whole business over to an unrelated company, according to the results of the investigation released on March 5.

"TEPCO has been conducting similar transactions with other subsidiaries systematically and added the extra costs to electricity rates," Tokyo Vice Gov. Naoki Inose stated as the results were unveiled. The

Tokyo government furthermore plans to ask Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano to investigate dubious business practices at TEPCO subsidiaries.

According to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, the TEPCO subsidiary in question is Tokyo Living Service Co., which has been running welfare-related business for TEPCO staff such as dormitories for single employees, travel firms, nursing-care facilities and nursery schools. The company, which has 1,000 employees, posted about 14 billion yen in sales for the 2010 business year.

"It is a source of employment for retired TEPCO employees, and 70 percent of its business comes from TEPCO," said a source close to the utility.

The restaurant TEPCO commissioned Tokyo Living to operate is the "Shibuya Toyu Club" -- a high-class restaurant open exclusively to TEPCO employees. But Tokyo Living is, in fact, believed to have left a third company run the restaurant, only taking a cut of the profits.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government suspects that, as a result of the utility allowing Tokyo Living to make such deals, revenue TEPCO was supposed to get from the restaurant dropped substantially.

TEPCO scrapped the restaurant contract with Tokyo Living in May 2011, and the Shibuya Toyu Club is now operated by a different firm. TEPCO's public relations department has acknowledged such business practices at TEPCO and its subsidiary, adding, "We are planning to sell Tokyo Living. We will continue to review the ways in which transactions are made."

In related news, a government panel investigating management practices at the troubled utility has said in its own report that companies affiliated with TEPCO (including its subsidiaries) are profiting from deals with the firm.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

TEPCO told to streamline March 7, 2012

Industry minister to tell TEPCO to cut 'free' contracts with affiliated firms by 30 percent

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120307p2a00m0na012000c.html>

Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano said on March 6 that he would urge Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) to cut the amount of its "free" contracts with its affiliated firms and subsidiaries by 30 percent within three years.

The same instruction will be given to the government's Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund. Edano made the decision at a time when critics say "free" contracts with its group firms have pushed up TEPCO's costs, resulting in higher electricity rates.

At the meeting on March 6 of the government's "Task Force on the Reform of Electric Power Systems," Tokyo Vice Gov. Naoki Inose said that if TEPCO were to increase public tenders and reduce the unit amount of each contract, "of its annual free contracts totaling 172 billion yen, it will be able to cut 50 billion yen a year and 150 billion yen for three years." He then said, "It should use the reduced amount to curb an attempt to raise electricity rates." In his response, Edano said, "I want to instruct them to further streamline their operations with the target of reducing 30 percent within three years."

A Tokyo Metropolitan Government investigation has revealed that one of TEPCO's subsidiaries, tasked with operating a high-class restaurant for TEPCO employees, forked the whole business over to an unrelated company, resulting in the TEPCO unit making more profits than it should. TEPCO has paid costs higher than necessary to its subsidiaries, and the extra costs have been added to electricity rates.

After the task force meeting, Inose told reporters that a total of 155 retired TEPCO employees are working at 118 TEPCO group firms as board members. If TEPCO employees on loan to those subsidiaries and TEPCO directors-cum non-executive directors at those subsidiaries are included, the number increases to 486. The average annual salary for executive directors, excluding those on loan, is 10.85 million yen each, and there are even TEPCO group firms with most of their board members being retired TEPCO employees.

Inose said, "The structure in which the bills (for overvalued costs) are sent to users is not a problem with TEPCO alone. It is a problem with all utility companies."

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

So they knew...

March 10, 2012

Govt knew N-meltdown was probable / Summaries show concerns arose

Mar. 11

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120309007035.htm>

The government's Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters was aware that the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant would likely suffer a meltdown just hours after the nuclear crisis began, according to internal meeting summaries released Friday.

It is the first time that the summaries of the meetings, chaired by then Prime Minister Naoto Kan and attended by other ministers concerned as members, have been made available.

The summaries suggest how confused the government became due to a lack of information--for example, some members objected to the government's gradual expansion of the evacuation area.

Now that the records have been released, how top government officials reacted to the meltdown may be brought into question, observers said.

The 76 pages of summaries were compiled based on notes left by the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency and other involved parties. They cover the headquarter's 23 meetings held from the night of the disaster to Dec. 26.

At the first meeting, which started after 7 p.m. on March 11, members of the headquarters were briefed that the plant had activated emergency cooling systems--which run mainly on batteries--after losing all of its power, the summaries said.

"After [the batteries run out in] eight hours, temperatures at the reactor cores will increase and the reactors will likely suffer a meltdown," an unknown speaker was quoted as saying in the summaries.

At the headquarters' third meeting starting on the afternoon of March 12, Koichiro Gemba, who served as state minister in charge of national policy at that time, once again referred to the possibility of a meltdown.

"Is it enough to designate a 10-kilometer radius [around the crippled nuclear plant] as the evacuation area? Shouldn't we reconsider?" Gemba was quoted as saying.

At that time, the government had not officially referred to the possibility of a meltdown at the nuclear power plant. The evacuation area was expanded to 10 kilometers that morning from an initial three kilometers.

The area was further widened to 20 kilometers after the plant's No. 1 reactor was hit by a hydrogen explosion that occurred three hours after the third meeting.

At a meeting held after 10 p.m. the same day, Kan referred to the 1986 Chernobyl disaster and the 1979 Three Mile Island crisis in the United States.

"Could a Chernobyl-type [meltdown] occur? Or a meltdown similar to the one at Three Mile Island?" the summaries quote him as saying.

However, no responses were recorded in the summaries.

At a meeting on March 14, Kan described a 20-kilometer radius as being "sufficient" for the evacuation zone, but Gemba questioned this, saying, "Some experts have different opinions," according to the summaries.

The records also show heated discussions were held over releasing steam containing radioactive substances from the plant's reactors into the atmosphere.

They also show there was extreme confusion when the plant's Nos. 3 and 4 reactors were hit by hydrogen explosions.

(Mar. 10, 2012)

Records show Japan gov't knew meltdown risk early

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120310p2g00m0dm103000c.html>

TOKYO (AP) -- Just four hours after a tsunami swept into the Fukushima nuclear power plant, Japan's leaders knew the damage was so severe that the reactors could melt down, but they kept their knowledge secret for months. Five days into the crisis, then-Prime Minister Naoto Kan voiced his fears that it could turn worse than Chernobyl.

The revelations were in documents released Friday, almost a year after the disaster. The minutes of the government's crisis management meetings from March 11 -- the day the earthquake and tsunami struck -- until late December were not recorded and had to be reconstructed retroactively.

They illustrate the confusion, lack of information, delayed response and miscommunication among government, affected towns and plant officials, as some ministers expressed the sense that nobody was in charge when the plant conditions quickly deteriorated.

The minutes quoted an unidentified official explaining that cooling functions of the reactors were kept running only by batteries that would last just eight hours.

"If temperatures in the reactor cores keep rising beyond eight hours, there is a possibility of meltdown," the official said during the first meeting, which started about four hours after the magnitude-9.0 earthquake and ensuing tsunami hit the Fukushima Dai-ichi (No. 1) plant, setting off the crisis.

Apparently the government tried to play down the severity of the damage. A spokesman for the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency was replaced after he slipped out a possibility of meltdown during a news conference March 12.

The plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., acknowledged a partial meltdown much later, in May.

Top government spokesman Yukio Edano, who is now trade minister, urged other ministers to watch what they said to the public.

"We must provide information fast, but it must be accurate," Edano said on March 14. "We must be clear about all our evaluations and judgment, and announce them only after we reach a decision."

While then-trade minister Banri Kaieda suggested on March 11 that residents within a 10-kilometer radius might have to be evacuated, the government ordered 1,800-plus residents within a 2-kilometer zone to leave. Then that expanded to 3 kilometers, then to 10 kilometers within two hours, and finally to 20 kilometers the next day.

Kan said a 20-kilometer zone would suffice. After seeing a series of explosions and fires at reactor buildings, Kan on March 16 cautioned his Cabinet about the possibility that the Fukushima crisis could be worse than the Chernobyl accident in 1986.

Kan was particularly concerned about a spent fuel pool inside the No. 4 reactor building, which had the largest number of fuel rods and rising water temperatures.

"We should worry about the Unit 4 pool, whose temperature has been on the rise," he said, adding that other spent fuel pools at Fukushima Dai-ichi, as well as four others at the neighboring Dai-ni (No. 2) plant, could also deteriorate.

"The amount of radiation that could be released from those reactors could be larger than Chernobyl. We must keep cooling the reactors, whatever it takes. It's going to be a long battle," he said, according to the minutes dated March 16.

It was nearly 10 days before one of his top nuclear advisers produced a worst-case scenario at his request. The March 25 paper, produced by the head of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission, warned that a disaster of that scale would require evacuating 30 million people from the greater Tokyo area. Fearing panic, the government kept the report a secret, but The Associated Press obtained it in January.

The failure to properly record the minutes of the government's crisis management meetings has added to sharp public criticism about how the nuclear crisis was handled, deepening distrust of politicians and bureaucrats.

"Who is the leader of the actual operation? I get too many requests and appeals that are incoherent," Yoshihiro Katayama, internal affairs minister at the time, said at a March 15 meeting. "Nobody seems to be in charge."

The minutes also showed top crisis managers were confused, causing miscommunication that left local officials and residents without crucial information needed for evacuation. The ministers used a list of people who needed assistance for evacuation and their details by quoting Japanese media, not firsthand information from local authorities.

Yukiya Amano, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said it was not just natural disasters that caused the Fukushima crisis. He said accident command lines were unclear and response plans were not sufficiently integrated. Amano also cited the nuclear regulator's weak oversight, insufficient guard against possible risks such as total power loss and inadequate training to respond to serious accidents.

But Fukushima provided a lesson for the rest of the world and nuclear safety is stronger than a year ago, he said in a statement Friday from Vienna.

"Human failings such as these are not unique to Japan," Amano said. "We humans learn from our mistakes."

Not very satisfactory

March 12, 2012

ONE YEAR AFTER THE DISASTER / Summaries prove government's ineptitude / Chaos reigned at nuclear emergency response HQ over decision-making process, evacuation zones

Toshiaki Sato and Koichi Yasuda / Yomiuri Shimbun Staff Writers

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120311003852.htm>

The summaries of meetings held after the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant expose the ineptitude of the government in dealing with the disaster.

The 76 pages of summaries were compiled from notes and other materials following revelations that the government had failed to keep minutes of the meetings. They were released Friday.

Although they cover 23 meetings of the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters, they barely scratch the surface of what was discussed.

The decision-making process on such key policies as responses to a nuclear meltdown is still a matter of conjecture.

The release of such inadequate summaries has once again put the government on the spot for its lackadaisical attitude toward keeping records on important meetings.

"We should've been prepared for an emergency by [setting up a system] to tape-record meetings that take place in confusing situations, so the recordings could be used to produce ex post facto minutes," Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano told reporters Friday following release of the summaries. Edano was chief cabinet secretary when the nuclear crisis erupted.

The first meeting of the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters, which is headed by the prime minister, began after 7 p.m. on March 11, the day when the government declared a state of emergency at the Fukushima plant.

Although the government was supposed to take the lead in swiftly resolving the crisis, the summaries suggest it was completely confused and decided on a mishmash of policies with little transparency. Symbolic of this confusion was the government's assessment of the meltdown.

Members of the headquarters were briefed that the plant had activated emergency cooling systems, run mainly on batteries, after losing its power, the summaries said.

"After [the batteries go dead in about] eight hours, the reactors probably will undergo a meltdown," an unknown speaker was quoted as saying in the summaries.

According to an analysis by Tokyo Electric Power Co. in May, a meltdown is believed to have started at the No. 1 reactor on the night of March 11.

However, members of the headquarters apparently were not aware of the imminent danger.

"No radioactive materials have been detected to have leaked from the plant. There is no need to take special action," another unknown speaker was quoted as saying in the summaries.

In line with this statement, the government issued an evacuation order only to people within a three-kilometer radius of the plant.

However, the government received a report from TEPCO saying it would release steam from the plant's reactor into the atmosphere to reduce pressure inside. As a result, the government expanded the evacuation area to 10 kilometers early in the morning of March 12.

But opinion was divided in the Cabinet on the size of the evacuation zone.

In the third meeting of the headquarters, which started early in the afternoon of March 12, Koichiro Gemba, then state minister in charge of national policy, called on the headquarters to reconsider the evacuation zone.

"There is the possibility of a meltdown. Shouldn't we review the 10-kilometer-radius zone [and expand it further]?" Gemba was quoted as saying.

However, the summaries indicated that discussions on this subject were far from adequate.

Three hours after this meeting, a hydrogen explosion ripped the No. 1 reactor building apart, an incident no one in the government had anticipated. As a result, the evacuation area was expanded to 20 kilometers in the evening, a decision made far too late.

The summaries also show confusion in the government's chain of command was compounded when hydrogen explosions occurred at the plant's Nos. 3 and 4 reactor buildings.

At the eighth meeting held in the early afternoon of March 15, then Internal Affairs and Communications Minister Yoshihiro Katayama made a complaint.

"Who is leading this operation? We've received numerous requests, but many of them seem pointless," he was quoted as saying. "They are piecemeal and childish. There is a lack of command [in the government]."

Katayama apparently was critical that the integrated command had been split up, so operations were being carried out on the basement floor of the Prime Minister Office's crisis management center and on the fifth floor, where Prime Minister Naoto Kan was working.

However, Kan put all the blame on TEPCO, according to the summaries.

"Ninety percent of the raw data comes from TEPCO," Kan said. "Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Banri Kaieda and Goshi Hosono, special adviser to the prime minister, are assigned to deal with TEPCO, but communication is insufficient."

At a meeting on the evening of March 16, at which the overheating of the spent nuclear fuel storage pool of the No. 4 reactor was on the agenda, Kan was quoted as saying testily: "It's out of question [for TEPCO] to withdraw [from the Fukushima plant]. We may end up being exposed to higher levels of [radioactive] materials than those released in the Chernobyl disaster."

At the 10th meeting on March 17, Cabinet members expressed frustration over the situation as comprehensive policies still had not been worked out, even though six days had passed since the disaster.

"We should order local residents [around the nuclear power plant] to evacuate based on the worst-case scenario," Gemba was quoted as saying. "I've already devised an evacuation plan."

It is not known if that plan was approved.

The government was later criticized for failing to come up with an evacuation plan by utilizing data from the System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information (SPEEDI), a system for predicting the spread of radioactive materials.

The summaries show the issue had not been discussed, either at the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters or the government-TEPCO joint headquarters.

The April 4 release into the sea of water contaminated with low-level radiation from the Fukushima plant drew international criticism. The summaries show the headquarters discussed the issue only once at the 13th meeting on April 11, when Kaieda reported that the measure was an "emergency step and unavoidable."

After the summaries were released, one Cabinet member called for further investigation.

"The decision-making process has not yet been fully clarified," he said.

Should this be M.Noda's role?

March 12, 2012

Noda to take lead in gaining local approval to restart nuclear plants

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2012/03/12/20120312p2g00m0dm066000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda pledged Sunday to take a leadership role in gaining local approval to restart nuclear power reactors once the central government decides to do so, to avert potential power shortages around Japan caused by the lost output of atomic plants previously producing a third of the nation's electricity.

At a press conference held on the first anniversary of the devastating March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, Noda also said he will make a formal request for prefectural governments to accept debris generated by the natural disaster that hit northeastern Japan.

The central government "should make every effort" to obtain the support of areas where nuclear plants are located, Noda said.

"I'm aware that I have to take a lead" in asking for cooperation of local governments and residents, he said, while reiterating that "politics will decide" ultimately whether to give the green light to resume the operations of idled reactors nationwide. Of Japan's 54 commercial nuclear reactors, only two are currently online.

The nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, triggered by the magnitude 9.0 earthquake and ensuing tsunami on March 11 last year, has made the public wary about the safety of nuclear plants.

But since he took office in September, Noda has expressed his willingness to restart the reactors, warning power shortages otherwise could drag down the country's economy.

Noda also said he will formally urge municipalities to accept debris from areas devastated by the natural disasters, vowing to speed up the disposal, whose progress has been slow due to fears the debris may contain radioactive substances from the related disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The national government "will move one and two steps forward" to dispose of the debris, Noda said, adding that he will also call for the cooperation of private businesses such as cement companies on the issue.

Some local governments have announced their intention to cooperate, but outside the northeastern region, only the Tokyo metropolitan government has actually begun accepting waste.

Now they tell us (transparency abroad)

March 13, 2012

S.Korean nuclear plant lost power for 12 minutes

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120313_29.html

A South Korean nuclear regulator says a reactor at a nuclear power plant in the country had no electricity for 12 minutes last month.

The Nuclear Safety and Security Commission said on Tuesday that the accident took place at the number one reactor at the Kori plant in Busan.

The institute said electricity was lost for 12 minutes from shortly after eight thirty PM on February 9th when the plant was undergoing a regular inspection.

Inspections and repairs were underway at the reactor for exchanging nuclear fuel when the power went out. An emergency diesel generator also did not work.

The commission said the reactor was halted but that a storage pool for spent fuel and facilities to cool the reactors were operating.

The plant's operator did not file a report about the outage until Monday, more than one month after the incident.

The reactor began operating in 1978 with a time limit of 30 years set for its operation. But the government later extended the limit.

The accident last March at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan worsened because all power at the facility was lost. The commission is taking the latest occurrence seriously and has sent investigators to the plant to look into the cause.

March 13, 2012

US: Nebraska nuclear plant fire was serious threat

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120313_12.html

US nuclear regulators say a fire that knocked out the cooling system for spent fuel at a nuclear plant in Nebraska last year represented a serious safety threat.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission issued a preliminary report on Monday into the fire at the Fort

Calhoun plant last June.

The report says the plant operator could have prevented the fire if it had investigated an unusual smell coming from an electric breaker 3 days earlier.

The fire caused a loss of power that knocked out the system to cool spent nuclear fuel for about 90 minutes.

However, the report says temperatures never exceeded safe levels as the plant had been shut down for refueling maintenance from about 2 months earlier.

US nuclear regulators are keen to avoid any nuclear accident, drawing lessons from the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan.

A matter of trust

Asahi poll: 80% distrust government's nuke safety measures

March 13, 2012 - http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201203130031

A whopping 80 percent of people in Japan do not trust the government's safety measures for nuclear power plants.

The results are from a nationwide random telephone survey of 3,360 people conducted by The Asahi Shimbun on March 10-11. It received 1,892 valid responses.

Fifty-seven percent of the respondents said they are opposed to restarting nuclear reactors currently off line for regular maintenance, compared to the 27 percent in favor.

A gap between genders was conspicuous over whether to restart the reactors. Although men were almost evenly split, with 47 percent against and 41 percent in favor, 67 percent of women are opposed, compared with just 15 percent who support the restarts.

With only two reactors currently online among the 54 in the country, 75 percent of the respondents were "greatly concerned" or "somewhat concerned" about the possibility of economic impacts from the suspension of reactors. But just 31 percent of those respondents supported the restarts, while 54 percent were opposed.

Regarding the government's safety steps for nuclear plants, 52 percent said they "do not trust so much," and 28 percent said they "do not trust at all." Although the government has been proceeding with computer-simulated stress tests on reactors, which are necessary steps to reactivate them, people apparently have a deep distrust of the government's nuclear safety provisions.

Asked about Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s plans to increase electricity rates for households, an overwhelming 79 percent said that is "unacceptable," while 17 percent said it is "acceptable." In TEPCO's service area, an even higher 83 percent said it is "unacceptable."

Meanwhile, the support rate for the Cabinet of Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda was 27 percent, unchanged from the previous poll in February, while 48 percent disapproved.

Should he ?

March 14, 2012

Noda seeks local support for reactor restart

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120314_20.html

Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda has pledged to seek public support for restarting nuclear reactors in the country after the Fukushima nuclear plant accident last March.

Japan's Nuclear Safety Commission will soon announce results of its review of stress tests on the 2 halted reactors at the Ohi nuclear plant in central Japan.

Speaking in the Diet on Wednesday Noda said restarting the Ohi reactors depends on whether the government can convince local residents that it is safe to do so.

All of Japan's 54 nuclear reactors will be in shutdown mode by late April when the last two go offline for regular inspection.

The need for independence

Editorial: Creation of new nuclear regulatory agency no stage for political grandstanding

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/perspectives/news/20120314p2a00m0na001000c.html>

It is now looking much more likely that the establishment of a new nuclear regulatory agency will be delayed. The Democratic Party of Japan-led administration had planned to get the new body off the ground on April 1, but opposition parties have indicated they will fight the passage of bills underpinning the agency when they come up for debate in the Diet.

The new agency's predecessor is the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA), a part of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry -- a ministry directly involved in the promotion of nuclear power. After the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdowns in March last year, the government decided that NISA's position under the industry ministry was a serious flaw in Japan's nuclear safety regime and moved to abolish it in favor of the new regulatory agency.

Surely anyone would admit that splitting NISA from the industry ministry and combining its brief with other regulatory duties is an important step. Not only is the conflict of interest inherent in the current

state of affairs obvious, it also goes without saying that a new regulatory body must be put in place as soon as possible.

The real issue is how that body will be set up. The Cabinet has decided on a bill to establish it as an external bureau of the Ministry of the Environment. Some members of the opposition, however, have argued strongly for the agency to be a separate committee, which would have a great deal of independence under Article 3 of the National Government Organization Law.

The government has made much of the merits of putting the new agency under the environment ministry, saying that crisis management would be much easier than if the body was set up as an independent committee. On the other hand, there are valid worries over whether an agency under the ministry could, when needed, make truly independent, objective judgments contrary to government expectations. The government needs to address this concern in a concrete manner.

There is also a pressing need to focus on how a revamped Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan (NSC) will help guarantee the incipient regulatory agency's independence. It must furthermore be noted that the environment ministry has no crisis management experience, which is a source of some worry.

On the other hand, we must not jump to the conclusion that setting up the new agency, as the opposition suggests, as an Article 3 committee like the Fair Trade Commission would necessarily guarantee absolute independence. Whether an external bureau of the environment ministry or a separate commission, the points truly at issue are how it is built, how it is managed, and how it will retain important staff.

We also call on the opposition not just to try and slow debate on the bills underpinning the new agency, but to initiate substantive discussion on this important issue. Opposition parties must explain how the Article 3 committee they favor would be put together, and how that would safeguard the new body's independence of action. They must also tell us in definite terms what structure they see for the committee that would allow it to overrule government policy in a crisis.

It is also possible that the delay in creating the new regulatory agency will also affect decisions on restarting nuclear reactors idled for regular maintenance. On March 13, the NSC completed approval of the results of stress tests on the No. 3 and 4 reactors at the Oi nuclear plant -- conducted by NISA, which we have already seen has a direct conflict of interest.

Of course, under the stress test process, the decision on restarting reactors can be made at the political level. However, it's just impossible at this point to ask us to trust NISA and the incumbent version of the NSC.

At this moment, faced with the frankly nerve-wracking technology of nuclear power, deliberations and decisions on its future must not be delayed by political gamesmanship. We call on the governing and opposition parties together to move deliberations on this issue forward.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

"Mixed" interests

March 15, 2012

TEPCO under fire for hiring ex-Tokyo gov't bureaucrat to collect energy policy info

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120315p2a00m0na010000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) hired a former Tokyo Metropolitan Government official to collect the capital's energy policy information in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, the Mainichi has learned.

Hisao Ohashi, 65, former chief of the Bureau of Environment at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, was employed by TEPCO as an advisor in September last year, half a year after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis at the utility's Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, sources close to the case told the Mainichi. Ohashi, who had left his metropolitan government post in June 2006, was assigned by TEPCO to collect internal information on the capital's energy policy from metropolitan officials and provide the information to the utility.

While some TEPCO officials were cautious about the idea of hiring the former metropolitan bureaucrat as the utility was to receive massive amounts of public funds from the central government on the heels of the nuclear disaster, the company's general affairs division pressed ahead with the personnel plan, which was ultimately approved by TEPCO President Toshio Nishizawa. The utility's move, which comes against its responsibility to streamline as a precondition for raising electricity bills, looks set to stir up criticism toward its management attitude.

At TEPCO, Ohashi served as an advisor to its Environment Department, which is in charge of taking measures to reduce carbon dioxide emissions at power stations and the disposal of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contained in large electric transformers. However, he quit TEPCO on Feb. 20 this year after learning that the Mainichi Shimbun newspaper had started investigating his re-employment.

According to sources close to TEPCO, the utility's Environment Department had intended since before the March 11 disaster to hire a former metropolitan official because the department was having difficulties in responding to a metropolitan government system that obliges plants and other facilities to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 6 to 8 percent, starting in April 2010.

TEPCO's general affairs division and former TEPCO officials singled out Ohashi, and the utility told him in the summer of 2010 that it wanted to hire him as an advisor the next summer. At the time, Ohashi was positive about the plan, but after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March last year, he declined to take up the post, saying, "The situation has changed."

TEPCO nevertheless sounded out Ohashi once more in May last year, but he refused again. In August, TEPCO asked him one more time, saying, "We are in trouble making post-disaster responses, such as the

disposal of debris (in disaster-stricken regions). Please advise us on how local governments think about debris." Ohashi complied with TEPCO's request, thinking, "I can utilize my experience and will also be of help to others." While Ohashi had initially offered to work for free, the utility's personnel affairs department was reluctant to hire him that way and ended up paying him over 5 million yen a year in salary.

A special measures law enacted after the March 11 quake disaster and nuclear crisis obliges TEPCO to cooperate with the central and local governments over the treatment of debris contaminated with radioactive materials.

Some in the utility's Environment Department had voiced concerns over hiring the former metropolitan official, saying, "If this comes to surface, we would face criticism." However, the utility's general affairs division rammed through the personnel plan. "On top of the treatment of debris, the biggest reason for us to invite Mr. Ohashi was because we wanted to know the capital's policy directions," sources close to the case confided.

Ohashi collected information from metropolitan officials about the Tokyo government's plan to construct a liquefied natural gas (LNG) power plant as part of measures to deal with electricity shortages. He reported the information to TEPCO officials during its meetings. "We had expected that we would also be able to get information on environmental policies (that he was specialized in) thereafter," said concerned sources.

After retiring from the metropolitan government, Ohashi became a board member of a company capitalized by local governments and then served as president of a metropolitan government-affiliated organization for about a year until July last year.

"We hired him because we expected that he would exert a positive impact on our company," said TEPCO President Nishizawa. "If there's any criticism, we will face it."

TEPCO, TEPCO

March 16, 2012

TEPCO admits hiring another former gov't official after Fukushima meltdowns

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120316p2a00m0na009000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) announced on March 15 that it hired another former public servant following the outbreak of the nuclear disaster in March last year.

TEPCO revealed that it hired a retired Japan Coast Guard (JCG) official as a temporary worker in April last year, a month after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, to capitalize on the former official's expertise.

The announcement came only hours after the Mainichi reported earlier the same day that TEPCO had hired a former Tokyo Metropolitan Government official as an advisor in September last year to collect information on the capital's energy policy. The ex-metropolitan official quit the post earlier this year.

The fact that the utility hired at least two former public servants after the nuclear crisis appears likely to draw further criticism of the utility, which has received massive financial assistance from the central government to deal with the nuclear catastrophe.

In defending the utility's employment of the former JCG official, a TEPCO spokesperson said during a press conference, "The former official has skills and techniques that our employees do not."

According to TEPCO, it hired the former JCG official on April 13 last year. The utility, however, withheld the worker's gender, title and duties, only saying that the person was "engaged in port-related work."

Overall, the utility had hired 49 former civil servants as of the end of February this year, including those recruited before the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Among the 49 former officials, seven were from the JCG, two from the Forestry Agency, two from the Meteorological Agency, one from the Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Ministry, one from the Fire and Disaster Management Agency, one from the National Police Agency, 30 from local police departments, and five from local governments.

Click here for the original Japanese story

Let's not upset our people

Nuclear safety agency opposed expansion of safety measures in 2006

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120316p2g00m0dm012000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency proposed freezing studies started by the Nuclear Safety Commission in 2006 to expand the disaster mitigation zone around nuclear power plants in the event of a disaster, to bring Japanese regulations into compliance with international standards, according to emails released Thursday by the commission.

The agency, under the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, argued that expansion of the zones "could cause social unrest and increase popular anxiety," the emails showed.

The commission, an independent body supervising nuclear safety regulation, did not enlarge the zones after considering the matter in 2006. It now appears the outcome was a result of the agency's repeated complaints.

But if the commission had gone through with the expansion, the chaotic developments surrounding the evacuation of people following the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant in March last year might have been mitigated, people familiar with the matter said.

In March 2006, an expert panel at the commission began studying whether to expand the range of the priority disaster mitigation zone from the current radius of between 8 and 10 kilometers from a nuclear power plant, according to the emails.

While the current zone was set based on Japanese standards, new guidelines announced by the International Atomic Energy Agency called for the area within a radius of 5 km as the top priority zone and 30 km as the priority zone.

But the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency began to complain about the move in late April that year. In an email on April 24, for example, the agency asked the commission not to use the expression "immediate evacuation" for the top priority zone, and two days later asked it to freeze the studies.

Although the commission initially turned down the agency's repeated complaints, it eventually decided in November not to expand the zone.

Yoshinori Moriyama, a senior agency official in charge of measures concerning nuclear emergencies, told reporters Thursday the agency asked for the freeze so as to avoid a "hasty decision" which could have thrown local governments into confusion.

Following the Fukushima nuclear crisis, triggered by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami last year, the commission decided to expand the priority disaster mitigation zone to a radius of 30 km from plants and set the area within a radius of 5 km as subject to immediate evacuation, as initially envisioned by the commission in 2006.

TEPCO - it didn't work

March 22, 2012

TEPCO changes rate hike plan / Rates for industrial customers can't be raised before contracts expire

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120321005009.htm>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. said Wednesday that it will postpone utility rate hikes for some of its industrial customers until after it can obtain their approval on its rate increase plans.

Those subject to the postponement are industrial consumers whose current service contracts are effective until after the planned April 1 implementation date for the new rates.

TEPCO's change of stance came after it judged that it failed to sufficiently explain to industrial customers that rate hikes before the expiration of contracts require approval of the customers.

Earlier in the day, Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano said he had directed the utility to take corrective measures to sufficiently explain its utility rate hike plans.

In a news conference held after a Cabinet meeting, Edano said, "Although utility increases before the expiration of contracts require approval of customers, TEPCO failed to thoroughly explain that point."

TEPCO plans to raise the rates for industrial consumers, such as factories and office buildings, by an average of 17 percent from April 1. The rates for these customers have already been deregulated, so the utility is allowed to charge increased rates through negotiations with individual customers without obtaining the approval of the METI minister.

The utility had sent to its industrial customers a document saying that "new utility rates will be applied from April 1 regardless of the expiration dates for the current contracts."

But as for industrial consumers whose contracts will come up for renewal on or after April 1, rates should be maintained at the current levels until the present contracts expire.

TEPCO stopped short of explaining this point and dealt with individual customers separately when it was asked about it.

"It's jaw-dropping," Edano said. "I want TEPCO to rectify its management culture drastically."

About 240,000 industrial customers are subject to the planned hikes, the utility said.

In connection with the rate hike plan, TEPCO President Toshio Nishizawa once said, "Rate increases are a power company's right." This sparked backlash from local governments and industrial sectors.

Regarding the rate hike for households that requires ministry approval, the utility plans to apply for an increase of about 10 percent effective from July. But it will face severe screening by the ministry.

More information disappears

Fukushima Pref. deleted 5 days of radiation dispersion data just after meltdowns

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120322p2a00m0na012000c.html>

The Fukushima Prefectural Government revealed on March 21 that it deleted five days of early radiation dispersion data almost entirely unread in the wake of the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The data from the System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information (SPEEDI) -- intended to predict the spread of radioactive contamination, information vital for issuing evacuation advisories -- was emailed to the prefectural government by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

According to the prefecture's disaster countermeasure office, just after the March 2011 quake and tsunami, its dedicated SPEEDI terminal was unable to receive data due to effects of the disasters. Therefore, prefectural officials asked the Nuclear Safety Technology Center, which operates SPEEDI, to send data via email on March 12, 2011 -- one day into the nuclear crisis. The Nuclear Safety Technology Center then sent the data hourly starting at 11:54 p.m. that day. The Fukushima Prefectural Government, however, deleted all the data it received from March 12 to about 9 a.m. March 16.

The prefectural government's nuclear center in Okuma, one of the towns hosting the Fukushima No. 1 plant, received emailed data once at midnight on March 11, but the disaster countermeasure office in the prefectural capital was not aware of it.

"We failed to share the information amid all the confusion, and the fact that we had asked for the information to be sent by email hadn't been shared within the countermeasure office," said Yoshihiro Koyama, head of the prefecture's nuclear safety measures section. "We have not been able to confirm when the data was deleted and by who."

At around 10:30 a.m. on March 13, 2011, the disaster countermeasure office confirmed for the first time that it had received data from the central government's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency by fax. But the disaster countermeasure office judged that "the data is useless because the predicted amount of released radiation is unrealistic."

The Fukushima Prefectural Government also failed to give the data to the people of the prefecture and local municipalities partly because the central government was supposed to release such data in the first place.

Click here for the original Japanese story

Use of public funds

March 22, 2012

Mayor of town hosting nuke plant under fire for gifts to prefectural governor, exec

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120322p2a00m0na004000c.html>

GENKAI, Saga -- The mayor of this town which is home to Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Genkai nuclear power plant sent beef and other local delicacies to the Saga governor and the utility's executive last year, when the reactivation of the plant's reactors had been debated, it has emerged.

Genkai Mayor Hideo Kishimoto gave the food gifts to Saga Gov. Yasushi Furukawa and a senior official at Kyushu Electric Power Co. between April and May 2011, at a time when the recipients' decisions were at stake over the resumption of the Genkai nuclear plant's No. 2 and No. 3 reactors.

According to the Genkai Municipal Government, the mayor brought to Gov. Furukawa six packs of strawberries under the local brand "Saga Honoka" (4,725 yen in total) as a souvenir on April 20, 2011, and sent to the governor a Saga beef set (8,320 yen) and four packages of raw hamburger (1,680 yen in total) at a postal cost of 950 yen on May 26. The gifts and the mail cost were covered by the mayor's entertainment expenses.

Furthermore, Mayor Kishimoto gave an assortment of Saga beef (25,600 yen) to a senior Kyushu Electric official when he visited the utility on May 30 last year. All the gift items were given on the grounds of "promoting local specialties of Genkai and other areas," according to the city.

When asked about the use of public funds for the gifts to the governor, Mayor Kishimoto said, "I don't remember well, but I probably thought that I needed to have the governor know about local specialties as he was eager to export prefecture-made products overseas. ... I never talked about the reactivation of nuclear reactors."

Gov. Furukawa said, "I don't remember if I received the gifts or not. I believe the mayor brings such items as promotional tools rather than as presents."

Kyushu Electric's press officials commented, "We are confirming the facts at the moment."

A reform task force for TEPCO ?

March 25, 2012

Task force eyed for TEPCO to oversee reform / Outside experts to work with new chairman

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120324003250.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

The government's Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund has begun considering the establishment of a reform task force comprised of outside members for Tokyo Electric Power Co., according to sources.

The fund plans to invite a new chairman of TEPCO's board of directors from outside the utility and set up the task force under the direct command of the new chairman.

The fund aims to proceed with management reforms after it contributes money to TEPCO.

Officials from the fund, including experts in corporate rehabilitation, will join the task force to bolster the authority of the new chairman.

The fund envisions the task force will have sufficient authority to advise the new chairman and supervise TEPCO's management.

TEPCO will include steps to restructure itself into a company with committees when it proposes a comprehensive special business plan at a shareholders meeting in June.

As a result, a majority in TEPCO's board of directors will be from outside the utility. Operating officers promoted from within will oversee practical operations.

However, as many outside board directors would be part-time, it could take a long time for them to understand details of the company's internal affairs.

Some government officials have voiced concern that operating officers promoted from within TEPCO may take over the reins of power and that the reforms would become toothless.

It also is possible that the outside board directors do not have advanced knowledge of electricity supply and other key aspects of the company's operations.

The reform task force operating under the direct command of TEPCO's new chairman is modeled after a system first introduced by the Industrial Revitalization Corporation of Japan (IRCJ), established in 2003 as a joint public-private sector fund, in which it dispatched its officials to companies that it funded. The IRCJ disbanded in 2007.

TEPCO's task force on reform will comprise experts in accounting, corporate rehabilitation and other fields. Task force members will not be transferred to the power company but rather work both for the fund and as TEPCO officials.

The task force will supervise operating officers promoted from within TEPCO, and relay the new chairman's management policy to other executives and working-level employees.

The fund also expects the new chairman will bring staff from his or her company to join the task force. However, TEPCO executives oppose the plan, arguing the establishment of such a task force under the direct command of the new chairman will lead to conflicts with other internal entities in the future.

What "neutrality" ?

March 26, 2012

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120326p2a00m0na005000c.html>

Nuclear industry group paid 7.9 million yen to 4 scholars on Fukui panel

FUKUI -- An Osaka-based nuclear power industry group with strong ties to Kansai Electric Power Co. (KEPCO) paid four members of a 12-member Fukui prefectural nuclear safety advisory panel a total of 7.9 million yen in contributions between fiscal 2006 and 2010, the Mainichi has learned.

The Fukui prefectural panel is tasked with giving Fukui Prefecture, home to over a dozen nuclear reactors, technical advice, including guidance related to decisions on the restart of idled KEPCO nuclear power plants.

According to the Osaka-based Kansai nuclear power council (Kan Gen Kon), it gave the money to the four in the form of research grants. They are Fukui University professor Yoshinobu Izumi, who received 300,000 yen in fiscal 2010, Osaka University professor Kazutoshi Nishimoto, who received 3.6 million yen between fiscal 2006 and 2008, former Kyoto University professor Kaichiro Mishima who received 3 million yen between 2006 and 2007 and Nagoya University professor Akio Yamamoto, who received 1 million yen between fiscal 2009 and 2010.

A KEPCO board member normally chairs the Kan Gen Kon and KEPCO serves as a corporate member. The Kan Gen Kon says it is giving research grants to scholars who have made contributions to the promotion of nuclear power and the use of radiation and are conducting promising research. It added it is operating independently of KEPCO.

The Fukui prefectural panel stipulates only that the governor will request experts to be on the panel without requiring them to report on contributions from the nuclear power industry and other details.

The governmental Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan asks prospective members of the commission to voluntarily report their relations with the electric power industry and other details to ensure neutrality in their screenings of nuclear issues.

[Click here for the original Japanese story](#)

The FEPC against prevention

March 27, 2012

Industry body opposed boosting nuke disaster prevention steps before Fukushima crisis

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120327p2a00m0na015000c.html>

The Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan (FEPC) had told the government's Nuclear Safety Commission (NSC) in writing that it would oppose any plans to step up preventative measures against nuclear accidents shortly before the outbreak on March 11, 2011, of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, according to documents obtained by the Mainichi through information disclosure laws.

The FEPC, which groups 10 power companies in the country, said in written documents addressed to the NSC that it would stand against the government body's move to strengthen the country's preventative measures against nuclear accidents because such plans would give the impression that nuclear power was dangerous and affect the regions hosting nuclear power plants accordingly, as well as push up costs for such measures. The revelation shows that the utility firms in the country downplayed preventative measures against nuclear accidents.

The NSC, tasked with drawing up the country's guidelines on nuclear disaster prevention, started its preparations to introduce new guidelines in March 2006 after the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) defined international standards for preventative measures against major nuclear accidents in 2002. However, the NSC had shelved its plan for tougher preventative measures once because the government's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) repeatedly opposed the move, saying, "It would amplify public fears about nuclear power."

But many foreign countries started to introduce preventative measures against nuclear accidents, and therefore the NSC expressed its intention to consider introducing tougher preventative measures again in its "basic plans for near-term measures" released in December 2010.

Responding to the NSC's move, the FEPC sent the written documents to the NSC on Jan. 13 and Feb. 3, 2011, saying that it had "estimated in its own right" the possible reaction from local governments in the event that the international standards were adopted.

On the impact of the introduction of a Precautionary Action Zone (PAZ) designated within a radius of about five kilometers from a troubled nuclear power plant, the FEPC said, "It could cause land prices to fall and reduce the number of tourists." It also opposed the idea of expanding Emergency Planning Zones (EPZ) within a radius of eight to 10 kilometers from a troubled nuclear power plant to designate an Urgent Protective Action Planning Zone (UPZ) within a radius of about 30 kilometers from the nuclear plant, saying, "Local governments that fall within the zone will demand subsidies."

Shortly after that, the crisis broke out at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. The NSC worked out new guidelines based on international standards on March 22 this year. The government set aside 8.97 billion yen for "subsidies for emergency safety measures" in the state budget for fiscal 2012, three times more than the outlay for the previous year. The NSC said, "Before the accident, the plant operators that were supposed to be regulated were allowed to intervene in policy decision-making."

The FEPC, on the other hand, said, "It was part of our cooperation in introducing standards." It had already been found out that NISA also opposed the introduction of tougher disaster prevention measures in 2006.
Click here for the original Japanese story

How much should be in textbooks?

March 28, 2012

School textbooks diverge on handling of tsunami photos, nuclear disaster

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20120328p2a00m0na010000c.html>

New high-school textbooks whose screening results were announced on March 27 made many references to the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, but diverged on the handling of photos, and descriptions of the ensuing disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

Publisher Tokyo Shoseki Co. carried a section for students to learn about natural disasters in its textbook "Kagagu to Ningen Seikatsu" (Science and human life). A color photo showing a tsunami surging into a residential area on March 11, 2011 took up about half a page in the B5-sized textbook. The photo was taken by Mainichi photographer Koichiro Tezuka, and won a Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association award.

According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, a total of 53 textbooks in eight of the 10 main subjects mentioned the earthquake disaster, while three textbooks used photos of the March 2011 tsunami.

"Photographs firmly convey the unparalleled extent of the disaster. We took the schools hit by the disaster into consideration, and cut photos so that human suffering was not brought to the fore," a Tokyo Shoseki official said.

Many textbooks carried smaller photos of devastated city areas and rubble, and used chronological lists to describe the disaster.

"There are concerns about the psychological impact on people hit by the disaster. We carried photos of the Great Hanshin Earthquake but it's hard to tell if this was the right thing to do," one publishing official commented.

A total of 16 textbooks from six subjects made references to the nuclear disaster triggered by the quake. But only Yamakawa Shuppansha's "Gendai Shakai" (Modern society) published the name of the operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant (Tokyo Electric Power Co.). The Education Ministry's screening guidelines request that publishers refrain from advertising or criticizing specific companies, and many publishers were careful about their descriptions, using only such terms as "the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant." Some publishers added that the nuclear crisis had yet to be conclusively evaluated, so handling the disaster was difficult.

Only one publisher, Kairyudo Publishing Co., touched on the issue of radioactive contamination and food safety in its textbook "Katei Kiso" (Home basics). The deadline for textbook submissions was in late April last year. At the time of the quake, the textbook contained no mention of radiation. However, editorial staff judged that the subject concerned life and people's lifestyles, and before the deadline, which was extended by about one month due to the quake and tsunami, it added a column whose theme was "radiation's pollution of the environment and interim regulatory limits."

An official of another textbook publisher commented, "We were busy responding to the disaster, and unable to include all the references we wanted to."

Publishers are now expected to apply to replace content in their textbooks.

[Click here for the original Japanese stor](#)

Yes, what about the promised regulatory body?

April 9, 2012

Govt. urged to set up new nuclear regulator

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120409_24.html

Japanese municipalities hosting nuclear power stations have urged Nuclear Crisis Minister Goshi Hosono to expedite the planned launch of a new regulating body.

Kazuharu Kawase, the head of an association of such municipalities and the mayor of Tsuruga City, visited Hosono on Monday to make the request.

Kawase told the minister that the government's stress tests, its call for establishing a reactor service life of 40 years, and its new safety standards all lack scientific basis.

He said people living near nuclear power plants are becoming increasingly confused and are losing faith in the government.

He asked Hosono to establish a new and reliable nuclear regulatory body as soon as possible. He also asked the minister to ensure that the new body functions effectively and that it clearly explains how it is going to improve safety.

Hosono replied that the establishment of a new body will help assure residents of nuclear safety. He said he hopes to launch such an agency in the not-too-distant future after getting opposition parties on board.

Kawase also said many people who were evacuated after last year's nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant do not know when they can return to their home towns. He called for the speedy decontamination of affected areas, saying residents' uncertainties about their futures are fueling their distrust of the government.

Livelihoods vs safety

Incumbent in nuclear host city re-elected as voters give priority to livelihoods

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120416p2a00m0na012000c.html>

OMAEZAKI, Shizuoka -- Voters in this city, home to the controversial Hamaoka Nuclear Power Plant, reluctantly helped incumbent Mayor Shigeo Ishihara win re-election in the April 15 mayoral election, **saying their livelihoods will be in trouble without a nuclear power plant.**

Ishihara, 64, the only candidate who did not voiced opposition to the reactivation of the plant, was re-elected to a third four-year term by collecting 12,018 votes, compared with 6,840 for former city assemblyman Katsuhisa Mizuno, 58, and 1,891 for travel agent Haruhisa Muramatsu, 60.

The election came after an expert panel under the Cabinet Office in late March predicted that a tsunami of up to 21 meters -- or far higher than an 18-meter levee under construction -- may strike this Pacific coastal city.

Chubu Electric Power Co.'s Hamaoka plant, southwest of Tokyo, has been suspended since May last year on the orders of then Prime Minister Naoto Kan in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster triggered by the March 11 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

But a number of residents in the city with a population of about 35,000 told the Mainichi that they voted for the incumbent mayor because the regional economy will run into trouble without the Hamaoka plant.

A company employee in his 50s who cast his ballot in the city's Ikeshinden district questioned the credibility of the huge tsunami prediction and said, "I want opponents of nuclear power to know how the lives of nuclear power plant workers will be affected."

Another company employee in his 40s said that the nuclear power plant is necessary for the city, adding that Omaezaki will be in serious trouble economically without it.

But a housewife in her 30s who has two elementary school-age children, said she did not vote for Ishihara. "The local economy is important, but it will be worse if an earthquake hits, making here uninhabitable and causing health hazards."

Ishihara said after his re-election that he takes the opinions of those who voted for his rivals seriously. He pledged to do his best to bring the whole city together.

Asked about the 21-meter-tall tsunami prediction, the mayor said he will ask the central government to back up its claim with evidence. He said it is not fair for the central government to come up with such projections while construction of the levee 18 meters above sea level is under way.

He added that he has no choice but to ask plant operator Chubu Electric Power to take additional safety measures in the course of future negotiations.

The Omaezaki election was the latest in a series of local elections in which incumbent leaders in municipalities hosting nuclear power plants have prevailed over rivals without coming out against nuclear power.

Record low for nukes

Nuclear operating rate hits record low in FY2011

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120416_24.html

Japan's nuclear power plants were operating at a record-low rate during the just-ended fiscal year, due to the effects of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The Federation of Electric Power Companies says that the average operating rate for Japan's 54 nuclear reactors stood at 23.7% for the year that ended in March.

The figure is down 43.6 points from the year before and the lowest since 1966, when commercial nuclear power generation began in Japan.

Before the Fukushima disaster in March of last year, about 37 reactors were in operation. But many have since gone offline for regular inspections, with no clear prospects for reactivation. Only one reactor, in Hokkaido, northern Japan, remains online.

During the past fiscal year, Japan's 10 regional power companies generated or purchased about 937 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity.

The figure was down year-on-year by a record margin of 5%, due partly to nationwide efforts to save power in the wake of the nuclear disaster.

Better the devil you know

April 16, 2012

Hamaoka nuclear host city reacts angrily to anti-nuclear forces

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20120416p2a00m0na001000c.html>

OMAEZAKI, Shizuoka -- Voters in this city, home to the Hamaoka Nuclear Power Plant, favored incumbent Mayor Shigeo Ishihara over two other candidates in the April 15 mayoral election after heeding his election campaign promise that he will listen to local residents and carefully guide the city when it comes to restarting the idled nuclear station.

The city, southwest of Tokyo, has co-existed with the power plant of Chubu Electric Power Co. for more than 35 years, and the latest election focused on the fate of the idled nuclear power plant.

Two rookies -- former city assemblyman Katsuhisa Mizuno and travel agent Haruhisa Muramatsu -- took on the incumbent mayor by vowing not to approve the plant's reactivation and by calling for the decommissioning of the plant, respectively.

But voters opted for Ishihara over the two rookies apparently out of consideration for the city's long association with nuclear power.

Mayor Ishihara has pursued a conciliatory approach toward Chubu Electric Power while cooperating with the central government in going along with a plutothermal or plutonium-thermal program.

But Ishihara said after the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant that the nuclear safety myth was over. But at the same time, he asked Chubu Electric Power to beef up measures against tsunami in an effort to keep the option open for restarting the idled Hamaoka plant.

But the city's fiscal 2011 budget totaling 16.8 billion yen, crafted before the nuclear plant was suspended last May, shows that nuclear-related subsidies and fixed property tax accounted for about 40 percent. **If the power plant goes offline permanently, it will be difficult for the city to maintain public facilities that have been built or are under construction thanks to such subsidies.** City residents know that and made the "realistic choice" to re-elect Ishihara.

But there is no clear-cut indication of how the city is going to implement measures against projections by an expert panel under the Cabinet Office that a tsunami of up to 21 meters may hit the city along the Pacific coast.

Omaezaki and surrounding municipalities will face heated debate, as in the case of the Oi Nuclear Power Plant operated by Kansai Electric Power Co. (By Susumu Funatsu, Kakegawa Bureau)
April 16, 2012(Mainichi Japan)

Reorganisation of TEPCO

April 19, 2012

TEPCO to draw up renewal plan under new chairman

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120419_11.html

The government's search for a new head of an ailing utility has finally come to an end. It is set to name a lawyer as the chairman of the Tokyo Electric Power Company, to which it plans to inject more than 10 billion dollars in public funds.

The government has decided to appoint to the post **Kazuhiko Shimokobe, a former vice president of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations.**

After the Fukushima Daiichi accident, Shimokobe was posted as the chair of the government-backed nuclear compensation fund. He has also headed a third-party panel investigating the utility's management and finances.

Shimokobe will replace Tsunehisa Katsumata, the current chairman of the firm at the company's next shareholders meeting.

Tokyo Electric and the compensation fund is now set to draw up under its new chairman a business turnaround plan, which was to have been submitted by the end of March.

Creation of the plan has been delayed by difficulties in finding a new person to lead the company, given its hard situation.

The turnaround plan calls for the injection of about 12 billion dollars in public funds to boost the firm's capital base. The government will hold a maximum two-thirds of voting rights.

The plan is also expected to call for an electricity rate hike of about 10 percent for households.

What's with the promised nuclear safety agency ?

April 20, 2012

Political tension should not hamper talks on nuclear agency: Hosono

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120420p2g00m0dm063000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Nuclear disaster minister Goshi Hosono on Friday expressed hope that parliamentary deliberations on a government bill to launch Japan's new nuclear safety agency would not be further delayed amid rising political tension over blunders by two other ministers.

"We have been waiting for the discussions with the (main opposition) Liberal Democratic Party since January over the new regulatory body, but deliberations have not yet started," Hosono, who doubles as environment minister, told a press conference.

"I think talks on nuclear regulations and safety should be discussed properly without being influenced by the political situation," he added.

On Friday, the opposition-controlled House of Councillors approved censure motions against Defense Minister Naoki Tanaka, who has been criticized for his handling of a string of security issues, and transport minister Takeshi Maeda, accused of trying to meddle in a recent local election.

The LDP, which submitted the motions on Wednesday along with other opposition parties, says it will continue to boycott all parliamentary deliberations unless the two ministers are replaced immediately. The motions are non-binding.

Amid growing political confrontation, the LDP and its ally, the New Komeito party, submitted a bill on Friday that aims to create an independent nuclear regulatory commission as a counterproposal to the government's bill.

Both entities are the same in that they would be placed under the Environment Ministry, but the opposition parties seek to make the commission sufficiently free from political influence by legally guaranteeing its independence in line with Article 3 of the National Government Organization Act.

Under the counterproposal, the commission will be an umbrella organization of a new nuclear regulatory agency, and would take control of the agency's personnel and budget matters.

The government has decided to review its nuclear regulations after the current setup of the nuclear safety agency under the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry, which has promoted atomic power, came under fire following the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, triggered by the earthquake and tsunami on March 11 last year.

The government hoped to separate the current agency from the industry ministry and create a new nuclear regulatory agency on April 1, but failed to do so amid objections from opposition parties.

"Reform" for TEPCO

April 26, 2012

Reform headquarters under direct control of new chairman to be set up at TEPCO

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120426p2a00m0na016000c.html>

The Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund and Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) have decided to set up a "reform headquarters" at Japan's biggest utility in June that will directly report to Kazuhiko Shimokobe, the utility's next chairman.

The secretariat of the reform headquarters is expected to consist mainly of senior staff from the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund and TEPCO's middle-ranking reform-minded employees. The reform headquarters, tasked with carrying out internal supervision and coordination as Shimokobe's task force, will take the lead in reforming the giant organization that boasts about 50,000 group employees.

The scheme will be included in the "comprehensive special business plan" that the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund and TEPCO plan to jointly submit to Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano on April 27. The business plan outlines measures to restructure the utility and review the composition and nature of the business organization.

The reform headquarters is expected to be staffed by 20 to 30 people. The successor to current TEPCO President Toshio Nishizawa will be named deputy chief of the reform headquarters. Those middle-ranking TEPCO employees whom the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund judged through interviews and other means as having "strong crisis awareness" of the utility's current status will be selected and recruited from all sections across the company including the fuel division. The reform headquarters will also be tasked with conquering the drawbacks from the persistent sectionalism rampant within the company.

Former industry ministry official Takashi Shimada, who had played a key role in compiling the "comprehensive special business plan" as head of the steering committee of the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund will be named a leader of the secretariat of the reform headquarters. Shimada was a key figure within the industry ministry who advocated a reform of the electric power industry. While being respected by industry minister Edano, Shimada had long served as secretary for former state minister for economic and fiscal policy Kaoru Yosano who has appealed for the need of nuclear power. Therefore, TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata has faith in Shimada. While playing a role in bridging between the government and TEPCO, which tend to conflict with each other, Shimada will keep a close eye out for what is going on within and outside the company. Consultants and accountants from outside will also be recruited into the reform headquarters.

The government will inject one trillion yen in public funds into TEPCO after receiving endorsement for the comprehensive business plan in early May following the Golden Week holiday period. The government is expected to secure a majority stake in the utility that carries with it voting rights in such a way to effectively nationalize the company. TEPCO, under Shimokobe as chairman, will move ahead to reform itself as stipulated in the comprehensive business plan, reducing costs by 3.3 trillion yen over 10 years and splitting the company into power transmission and distribution entities.

TEPCO will have a majority of its board members from outside and become a company with committees in June. The utility will facilitate smooth payments of damages for the Fukushima nuclear disaster and ensure stable power supply simultaneously by setting up the task force under the direct control of the chairman to accelerate its reform efforts. The reform headquarters are poised to play a leading role in addressing difficult issues including that of electricity rate hikes.

TEPCO's business plan

April 28, 2012

TEPCO submits 10-year restructuring plan to gov't

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120428p2g00m0dm030000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. and a state-backed bailout fund submitted to the government Friday a restructuring plan to help the company overcome its financial plight following the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster, such as through the injection of 1 trillion yen in public funds and electricity rate hikes.

The so-called comprehensive special business plan will become official once Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano gives his approval, possibly in early May, paving the way for the **de facto nationalization of Japan's largest utility known as TEPCO.**

The content of the document will be announced after gaining approval, TEPCO and the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund said.

In addition to promising to cut more than 3 trillion yen in costs through fiscal 2020 to finance compensation payments related to the nuclear accident, TEPCO will seek to increase profits by raising household electricity rates by about 10 percent for three years from July and restarting its idled nuclear reactors in Niigata Prefecture from fiscal 2013.

The utility is seeking to swing into the black in the business year through March 2014, but it is uncertain whether controversial measures such as rate hikes and restarting reactors can be carried out as planned.

TEPCO President Toshio Nishizawa, speaking to reporters after holding talks with the fund to finalize the plan, said, "I'm aware that the hurdle (we have to overcome) is extremely high...and the company will work as one toward that end."

In a symbolic move to mark a fresh start for the company, TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and Nishizawa are likely to step down at the company's annual shareholders' meeting in late June. More than half of the board of directors will be invited from outside the company to enhance management oversight.

The government has already decided to appoint Kazuhiko Shimokobe, a lawyer and head of the bailout fund's decision-making board, as the next TEPCO chairman, and the focus of attention is now shifting to who will be promoted from inside the company to succeed Nishizawa.

The new management lineup will be unveiled when the company announces its financial results for fiscal 2011 likely in May, according to Nishizawa.

Shimokobe separately told reporters he plans to set up a management reform task force that he and the new president will directly take control of. He wants it to be joined by reform-minded mid-level and younger employees and, if necessary, seek cooperation from experts outside.

"This is effectively the last chance to renew TEPCO. We're going to do this work with speed," Shimokobe said.

TEPCO and the fund had initially expected to finalize the restructuring plan by the end of March, but the move was delayed because the government had difficulty in choosing the next chairman to lead the company's reform process.

In addition to trillions of yen in compensation payments, the once blue-chip company faces a heavy financial burden amid increasing fuel costs for thermal power generation to make up for halted nuclear power generation following the Fukushima accident.

It is also looking at massive costs for the decades-long process of scrapping the Fukushima Daiichi plant's four reactors, three of which suffered meltdowns following the huge earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

In late March, TEPCO made a request for the capital injection to the fund, saying the company might fall into negative net worth without the 1 trillion yen of taxpayers' money.

In return for the aid, the government is expected to acquire a majority stake in the company, which would enable the state to choose board members, and make sure it can boost the stake to more than two-thirds for stronger control if necessary, according to sources close to the matter.

TEPCO has so far won approval to get 1.58 trillion yen of financial assistance from the fund, but the aid is limited to the use of paying ballooning compensation, and TEPCO remains in a tough business situation due to such challenges as growing fuel costs.

Bribes

May 3, 2012

Consumers ultimately paid up for nuclear bribery in japan

<http://nuclear-news.net/2012/05/03/consumers-ultimately-paid-up-for-nuclear-bribery-in-japan/>



Consumers ultimately footed bill, Utilities gave nuclear plant hosts

billions <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120502x1.html>

Kyodo Electric utilities, their subsidiaries and related organizations provided at least ¥28.7 billion to local governments, mostly as donations, during the five years through to March 31, local government sources and data obtained by Kyodo News revealed.

The electric power companies incorporated most of the expenses into their electricity charges for consumers and business clients as necessary costs for power generation. Such donations are not required to be made public and may amount to more than the latest finding revealed Tuesday, experts said.

The central government has recently hammered out a plan to ban power utilities from incorporating their donations in electricity charges.

The donations were given to prefectural governments, prefectural capitals and 60 governments of municipalities that host nuclear power plants or are located near such plants.

Among the around 650 cases of donations uncovered, more than ¥100 million was provided to local governments in 35 cases, 30 of which involved municipalities that host nuclear plants or are located near them. Besides locations with power plants, Kansai Electric Power Co. donated ¥250 million to the Osaka Municipal Government to help finance a face-lift for a municipal science museum.

The biggest single amount given was about **¥5 billion** that Tokyo Electric Power Co., which operates the troubled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, provided in 2007 to the city of **Kashiwazaki** in Niigata Prefecture to help build and maintain Yume no Mori Park, facing the Sea of Japan.

Kashiwazaki and the neighboring village of Kariwa in the same prefecture are home to Tepco's seven-reactor Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant, the world's largest atomic plant, with a combined output capacity of 8.2 million kw.

Tepco also gave about ¥4 billion worth of cash and land lots to Kariwa.

The Fukui Prefectural Government accepted ¥1.33 billion in funds to build a railway directly linking Tsuruga Station in the prefecture with the cities of Osaka, Kyoto and Kobe.

Fukui Prefecture hosts the largest number of nuclear reactors in Japan. The donations are believed to have been provided by Kansai Electric and Japan Atomic Power Co. The Fukui Prefectural Government has refused to identify the donors, noting they do not wish to be identified.

Kepeco operates three nuclear power plants and Japan Atomic Power one in Fukui Prefecture.

The Gifu Prefectural Government accepted about ¥1.89 billion in 2008 from Chubu Electric Power Co. under an agreement with the Nagoya-based utility to finance a road construction project near a hydroelectric power plant.

The agreement was made after the utility withdrew from the power plant's construction.

The Shizuoka Prefectural Government accepted around ¥1.63 billion from Chubu Electric in the three years through March after the local government could not receive state subsidies for two of five reactors at the Hamaoka nuclear plant in the city of Omaezaki, Shizuoka Prefecture. The two reactors ceased operation in 2009.

All about transparency and independence

New nuclear regulatory agency still up in air

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120506p2g00m0dm062000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Japan entered a rare period on Sunday of having no nuclear power supply following last year's Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster, without seeing much progress on shaping a new nuclear regulatory agency that could play a key role in addressing public concerns over the safety of atomic power.

The government plans to establish a new agency under the Environment Ministry amid criticism that the existing Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency lacks teeth because it is under the umbrella of the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry, a promoter of nuclear power.

But parliamentary deliberations on a bill submitted by the government to launch the new agency on April 1 have not yet started and the main opposition Liberal Democratic Party has complained that the organization's independence would not be sufficiently secure under the government plan.

"What the government is trying to do is just create a second NISA under the Environment Ministry," LDP lawmaker and former Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhisa Shiozaki said after the submission of the government bill in January.

To challenge the government, the LDP, along with its ally, the New Komeito party, submitted a bill in April that proposes putting a new agency under the control of what they call a "nuclear regulatory commission" with a legally guaranteed independence.

The appointment of the five commission members would require Diet approval and the commission would have the right to decide on the agency's personnel and budget matters.

The organizational structure reflects Shiozaki's view that one of the important lessons Japan must learn from the Fukushima crisis is to reduce the risks created by political interference.

Former Prime Minister Naoto Kan, who had to deal with the crisis when it first erupted, has come in for criticism from some quarters, with a private-sector nuclear accident investigation panel saying in a report it issued in late February that "unnecessary confusion" may have occurred because people at the prime minister's office who lacked sufficient expertise got involved in detailed technical issues in trying to contain the crisis.

In the United States, with regard to events that would be occurring inside the plant, responsibility would lie with the plant operator and the regulator, Richard Meserve, former chairman of U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, said during a hearing in Tokyo by a Diet-appointed accident investigation panel in February.

In the counterproposal, the opposition parties made clear that the envisioned commission would wield authority over technical matters inside nuclear power plants even in the event of an accident.

But the government believes that political decisions could increase in importance during emergencies, such as when mobilizing the Self-Defense Forces, and doubts whether the opposition-proposed collegiate panel would be capable of swift decision-making.

The delay in the launch of the new agency has also complicated the issue of whether to restart two reactors in Fukui Prefecture to address power shortages in the summer, with some ruling Democratic Party of Japan lawmakers calling for the government to wait until the agency is created before making a final decision.

Satoshi Arai, chair of a DPJ taskforce on nuclear accident-related issues, has warned that it would lead to problems in the future if the government rushes to restart them without changing the current framework, in which the nuclear regulator is under the auspices of its promoter, the industry ministry.

"Industry minister Yukio Edano is in charge of NISA and at the same time of energy policy ... These two functions were what the International Atomic Energy Agency advised Japan in 2007 to separate, but what was not implemented," he told a meeting of party members in mid-April.

Now that the opposition parties have compiled a counterproposal on a new regulatory body, a government official involved in preparing for the launch of a new agency expects that things will start to progress.

"In the not-so-distant future, I believe arrangements will be made to reach a conclusion on the issue because we all understand that we cannot take so much time," he said.

Muneo Morokuzu, a professor at the University of Tokyo, expressed hope that the ruling and opposition parties would engage in talks not only on the form of the organization, but also on more substantial issues related to the new agency.

"Regardless of the legal status of the regulatory body, what is important is to create a new agency with greater independence and a high degree of professionalism," said the professor specializing in nuclear regulations.

M.Hirose

May 8, 2012

TEPCO new president vows to promote reform

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120508_35.html

The incoming president of Tokyo Electric Power Company says he will do his best to quickly pay damages to those affected by the Fukushima nuclear accident, while promoting the reform of the company.

Managing Director Naomi Hirose was speaking to reporters on Tuesday after he was named the new president at a board meeting earlier in the day.

Hirose said one of his main tasks will be to ensure that people affected by the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant will be compensated.

He said he will work toward the decommissioning of the crippled plant while stabilizing it. He said that providing electricity in a stable way while streamlining the company will also be an important task.

Hirose said the firm, together with a government-backed nuclear disaster fund, has already drawn up a plan listing what the company has to do. He said what matters is to implement those measures.

He said he will take the lead in reforming the company to show people a new TEPCO as soon as possible.

Restructuring TEPCO

May 9, 2012

Government approves TEPCO's restructuring plan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120509_36.html

The Japanese government has approved a restructuring plan for the Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, to cover the huge expenses from the Fukushima nuclear plant accident.

Industry minister Yukio Edano conveyed the decision on Wednesday to TEPCO's outgoing President Toshio Nishizawa and Kazuhiko Shimokobe, who was recently chosen to be the next Chairman of the utility. Shimokobe currently chairs the steering committee of a state-backed nuclear compensation fund.

The plan, submitted by TEPCO and the state-backed fund on April 27th, is to put the company effectively under state control after its general shareholders' meeting in June.

The plan calls for the government to inject about 12.5 billion dollars in taxpayer's money for it to hold a majority stake.

The government will also extend about 10.7 billion dollars more to help TEPCO pay compensation to those affected by the accident.

To rebuild its finances, TEPCO says it will ask the government to approve a 10.28-percent increase in household electricity fees.

The utility has also proposed a new rate plan geared to encourage energy-saving by raising part of summer daytime rates while lowering them for night use.

The plan is expected to help TEPCO avoid liabilities exceeding assets from the costs of compensation and the decommissioning of the Fukushima reactors.

Government to reform TEPCO?

May 10, 2012

Editorial: Gov't should fulfill responsibility for rehabilitation of TEPCO

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20120510p2a00m0na017000c.html>

The Japanese government is urged to fulfill its responsibility for the rehabilitation of the troubled Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), which it has placed under its control.

Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano on May 9 approved a rehabilitation plan worked out by TEPCO, the operator of the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Under the proposal, the government will provide TEPCO with an infusion of approximately 1 trillion yen in public funds through its purchase of TEPCO shares.

The infusion will bring the total amount of public funds provided to TEPCO to some 3.5 trillion yen, which includes those for the payment of compensation to victims of the nuclear disaster.

Such a huge amount of financial assistance from the government is aimed at helping TEPCO fulfill its responsibility for paying compensation to victims, ending the nuclear disaster and ensuring a stable supply of electric power. If the assistance fails to achieve a turnaround, the government will be forced to extend additional financial assistance to the firm. TEPCO is now under pressure to quickly rehabilitate itself.

The rehabilitation plan aims to turn TEPCO into the black in the business year ending March 31, 2014. **However, the implementation of the plan will likely face setbacks because it is based on the principle that TEPCO will raise electricity fares for households and reactivate its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant.**

TEPCO needs to thoroughly streamline its management by drastically reorganizing its affiliated firms and slashing retirees' corporate pension benefits. Reforming its dogmatic corporate culture is also an urgent task for TEPCO, which has clung to its regional monopoly and insists that it has the right to raise electricity charges.

Under the plan, TEPCO will appoint a majority of its board members from outside the firm and set up a management reform task force comprised of younger and mid-ranking employees as well as those of the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund.

Managing director Naomi Hirose, who is set to assume the presidency of TEPCO, said he will play a leading role in reforming the utility. "I'll take the lead in our efforts to convince the public as soon as possible that TEPCO has changed."

TEPCO also faces hurdles in reactivating its nuclear power plants that have been suspended for regular inspections.

The general public is filled with a sense of distrust in not only TEPCO that has caused the nuclear disaster but also the government's nuclear power policy and standards for the safety of nuclear plants. While the government is authorized to decide whether to permit power suppliers to resume operations at their nuclear power stations, it also will be in a position to apply for such permission as the largest shareholder in TEPCO. Therefore, the government is required to provide a more convincing explanation if it grants TEPCO permission to reactivate its nuclear power stations.

First of all, the government should set up a planned new nuclear power regulatory agency as soon as possible and work out new safety standards for nuclear power stations based on the results of its investigation into the Fukushima disaster. Unless it explains the need for the resumption of operations at nuclear plants and the safety of such power stations based on such efforts, the government is highly unlikely to win the public's understanding.

Furthermore, the government needs to clarify its policy goal of getting rid of all nuclear plants in the future and show specific measures to achieve this in efforts to convince the general public.

The costs of decommissioning the crippled nuclear plant and decontaminating areas tainted with radioactive substances from the power station still cannot be estimated. In this sense, the latest TEPCO rehabilitation plan is merely a provisional one. The plan points to the possibility of the government extending additional assistance to the utility, showing that no optimism is warranted about the prospects of TEPCO's rehabilitation.

Unless the rehabilitation of the utility progresses steadily, it will only increase the financial burden on taxpayers. Both TEPCO and the government, which has injected a massive amount of taxpayers' money into TEPCO to place the utility under its control, must be aware of the weight of their responsibility for the rehabilitation of the power supplier.

Toward a "new" TEPCO?

May 10, 2012

'New' TEPCO faces rocky road / Restoring public image, reducing power costs among top priorities

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/business/T120509005171.htm>

Chiaki Toyoda and Tadaaki Inoue / Yomiuri Shimbun Staff Writers

With the new management lineup set for Tokyo Electric Power Co., incoming **President Naomi Hirose will face the challenge of reforming the company's tarnished reputation while maintaining a stable electricity supply to consumers.**

The new president already has a bulging in-box, including the difficult tasks of resuming operations at plants idled for routine maintenance and decommissioning damaged reactors.

The latest appointments were carried out at the initiative of the government's Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund, which backs TEPCO's compensation payments over damages due to the crisis at the utility's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The selection of Hirose, who was in charge of TEPCO's compensation negotiation headquarters for people affected by the crisis, was apparently aimed at creating the image of a "new TEPCO."

Kazuhiko Shimokobe, a lawyer who heads the nuclear damage fund's management committee, will replace Tsunehisa Katsumata as chairman.

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TEPCO to reflect govt's will

Asked how he will steer the virtually nationalized company, Hirose, who is currently managing director, said at a press conference Tuesday, "This will be my first experience [as president], so I don't have any outlook."

The comment reflects the fact that the firm will follow the government's will and instructions in shaping its business operations.

Katsumata initially demanded that President Toshio Nishizawa keeps his post. However, past comments made by Nishizawa, such as "Rate increases are a power company's right," sparked a backlash, which led the government to flatly refuse Katsumata's request.

With the injection of public funds, the government will gain a majority equity stake in the power company on a voting rights basis. On the government's side, incoming Chairman Shimokobe led the selection process for the latest appointments of the new management executives.

Meetings between the government and all of TEPCO's corporate officers, including Hirose, continued into Golden Week in late April and early May. At the meetings, Katsumata and others voiced their ideas on appointing new corporate officers, but their suggestions were reportedly rejected by the government.

Shimokobe picked Hirose as the new president, saying Hirose, 59, has the zeal to reform the power company.

Many of TEPCO's former presidents have backgrounds in planning or general affairs.

The appointment of Hirose, whose experience is mainly in sales, is a rare case. Initially there was a proposal to select a new president from outside the board of directors. However, a decision was made to appoint someone from within the board out of consideration for the company's internal harmony.

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Hikes envisioned

Under the new leadership, TEPCO will set up a management reform headquarters, which will be directly under the command of Hirose and Shimokobe.

The new office, which will tackle various business challenges, will have 20 to 30 staffers, including those from the fund as well as the power utility's young and midcareer employees.

TEPCO aims to raise household electricity rates by about 10.3 percent from July.

The company raised prices for large-lot consumers in April, but did not provide sufficient explanation, creating resentment among consumers, and leading some firms to refuse the hikes.

At the Tuesday press conference, Hirose said, "Taking the lesson from last time into consideration, we will thoroughly streamline the company, and then carefully explain the necessity of the hikes to consumers."

At the same press conference, the incoming president emphasized he would work on restarting reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture. Without resuming operations at nuclear plants, which produce power more cheaply than other facilities, TEPCO's financial situation will not improve, forcing it to raise fees drastically.

However, in Niigata Prefecture strong distrust remains toward the company. Niigata Gov. Hirohiko Izumida maintains a cautious approach on the issue, casting a shadow over the prospect of restarting the reactors.

Government control or independence ?

May 11, 2012

Gov't eyes compromise with opposition over new nuclear safety agency

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120511p2g00m0dm125000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The government is considering striking a compromise with the opposition camp to expedite the creation of Japan's new nuclear safety agency, which has been delayed amid objections from the opposition, government sources said Friday.

The administration of Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, which attempted unsuccessfully to establish the new body on April 1, now hopes to speed up the process, as it is trying to deal with an expected rise in electricity use this summer with all of the nation's reactors having been suspended for checkups and unable to restart.

Both the government and two major opposition parties envision placing a nuclear power regulatory agency under the Environment Ministry, and separating the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which has promoted nuclear power.

But a bill the government has submitted to parliament seeks to have the environment minister decide personnel and budgetary affairs of the envisaged agency, citing the need for the government to be involved in crisis management.

In contrast, a bill presented last month by the main opposition Liberal Democratic Party and its ally the New Komeito party calls for creating a highly independent nuclear regulatory commission as an umbrella organization taking control of the new agency's personnel and budget matters.

The proposed commission would have its independence guaranteed under Article 3 of the National Government Organization Act, as is the case for the Japan Fair Trade Commission, the country's antimonopoly watchdog, and other entities.

The LDP and New Komeito want the commission to be sufficiently free from political influence, saying political intervention will only bring confusion in dealing with a nuclear accident.

The government has decided to review its nuclear regulations after the current setup of the nuclear safety agency under the industry ministry came under fire in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear crisis following the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

But it is uncertain whether the ruling and opposition camps would come to full agreement given major pending issues such as the extent of the authority to be given to the new commission.

An average increase of over 10 percent for 3 years

TEPCO's business plan approved; utility effectively state controlled

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120510006596.htm>

The government has approved a special business plan for Tokyo Electric Power Co. that includes an injection of 1 trillion yen in public funds, effectively putting the utility under state control.

With the approval Wednesday, the utility, which runs the crisis-hit Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, **will apply to raise electricity rates for households and small-lot users, such as convenience stores, later this week.**

Under the current rate, a household that uses 290 kilowatt-hours a month would be charged 6,973 yen. After the hike, that household would see its bill increase by 480 yen, or 6.9 percent.

The utility included the rate hike, together with cost-cutting measures, in its new comprehensive special business plan.

The average rate increase for households is 10.28 percent. Although the basic charge will remain the same, rates will rise incrementally in line with the amount of electricity used. Electricity use up to 120 kwh a month will see a hike of 0.74 yen per kwh. Use between 120 kwh and 300 kwh will see an increase of 2.3 yen per kwh, while that over 300 kwh will increase by 4.89 yen per kwh.

For large-lot users such as factories and offices, whose electricity charges have already increased by an average of 16.7 percent since April, the new plan will see their rate trimmed by 0.31 percentage point to 16.39 percent.

The new business plan, which features a corporate restructuring program, is based on the assumption that TEPCO's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture will resume operations from fiscal 2013.

The rate hike is supposed to be for three years. With the restart of the plant, the rates would be returned to current levels from fiscal 2015.

However, as the Niigata prefectural government remains wary about giving the restart the go-ahead, there is no clear timeline for the plant to resume operations.

At a press conference after his ministry approved the plan, Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano said: "We can't say anything definite now about whether we can restart the plant. As a matter of course, we may review [TEPCO's plan] later." With regards to the rate hike, Edano said the government will make efforts to trim the increase.

Under the plan, the government will provide public funds of 1 trillion yen through the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund to keep TEPCO's finances from deteriorating further. The utility is facing massive compensation payments due to the crisis.

With the latest funds, the total amount of public money provided to TEPCO will total about 3.5 trillion yen.

By providing the funds, the government will gain a majority equity stake and voting rights in TEPCO. Should corporate restructuring efforts not go as well as expected, the government will raise its voting rights to more than two-thirds, gaining the right to decide key corporate policies.

Most of the current board, including Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and President Toshio Nishizawa, will step down to take responsibility for the crisis at a shareholders meeting slated for late June.

Kazuhiko Shimokobe, head of the fund's steering committee, will become the new chairman, while Managing Director Naomi Hirose will take over as president.

Also included in the latest business plan are measures to slash costs--through such steps as staff reduction--by more than 3.3 trillion yen over a 10-year-period, and adopting a company-with-committees system to increase transparency.

With the adoption of the system, TEPCO will establish a nominating committee to select directors, an audit committee to monitor directors, and a compensation committee to decide directors' remuneration. These committees will be composed mostly of outside directors.

For an independent nuke commission

May 12, 2012

Editorial: Gov't should ensure independent nuclear power panel will function properly

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20120512p2a00m0na007000c.html>

The government is required to ensure **an independent nuclear regulatory commission**, which it is set to launch under Article 3 of the National Government Organization Act, will effectively function and fulfill its responsibilities.

It is important to secure human resources and build a framework that can ensure the safety of nuclear power stations and promptly respond to any accidents in an appropriate manner. Both the ruling and opposition blocs are urged to hold consultations to add the finishing touches to the plan.

The crisis at the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant has highlighted structural problems involving government organizations that regulate nuclear power stations. Specifically, it is inappropriate that the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA), which supervises the safety of nuclear plants, is under the umbrella of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), which promotes nuclear power.

Nevertheless, new nuclear regulatory organizations have not yet been launched even though one year has passed since the outbreak of the crisis. Both ruling and opposition parties should be blamed for their negligence.

The government has submitted a bill to the Diet aimed at setting up a nuclear regulatory agency as an extra-ministerial organization of the Environment Ministry. At the same time, the largest opposition Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its ally, the New Komeito party, have made their proposal on the framework of regulatory bodies.

Both the government's plan and one proposed by the LDP-Komeito alliance are the same in that both call for separation of NISA from METI, but are different in how far new nuclear power regulatory bodies should be independent of the administrative body.

The government's plan would require the Environment Ministry to control the personnel management and budget of the regulatory agency. Under the LDP-Komeito plan, however, the regulatory commission would place the regulatory agency under its supervision and control the agency's personnel management and budget. Moreover, the appointment of members of the commission would have to be approved by the Diet.

The government is willing to basically accept the LDP-Komeito proposal, but it is still naive to believe that the regulatory commission will secure enough independence from the administrative body even if it is set up under Article 3 of the National Government Organization Act as proposed by the LDP and Komeito.

The question is who will be appointed as members of the commission. The panel will not win the public's understanding unless its members are selected from among those critical of government officials, researchers and industry insiders, who have promoted nuclear power and created the myth of nuclear plants' infallible safety, and are dedicated to the safety of the public.

The regulatory agency would handle practical regulatory work and support the commission. However, most of the agency's officials will likely be transferred from NISA and the Cabinet Office's Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan. The officials should not allow bureaucratic red tape to linger. Rules should be established to ban officials of the new regulatory agency from returning to the ministries and agencies where they once belonged.

A private fact-finding panel on the Fukushima nuclear crisis uncovered in February this year that the Japan Nuclear Energy Safety Organization, which is under the umbrella of NISA, had inspected nuclear power stations based on instruction manuals that were exact copies of documents produced by the plants' operators. The restructuring of the government's nuclear power regulatory organizations will be meaningless unless the implementation of safety regulations is improved.

The government had insisted that it would be easier for the new regulatory agency to respond to the emergency situation if it was placed under the Environment Ministry. Ruling and opposition parties are urged to thoroughly deliberate on how the regulatory commission would manage a crisis as an independent body to be established under Article 3 of the National Government Organization Act.

Since May 5, none of Japan's nuclear plants has been in operation. The government has released its estimate that if the No. 3 and 4 reactors at the Oi Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture are reactivated, its operator Kansai Electric Power Co. will manage to secure enough electric power for consumption in the Kansai region this coming summer. However, reactivation of these reactors will hardly convince the public unless the new nuclear power regulatory bodies are launched or new safety standards are established based on the results of the investigation into the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

May 13, 2012

Opposition's N-safety plan to be OK'd by govt, DPJ

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120512002930.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Resolution is on the horizon for the Diet impasse over a bill to create a nuclear regulatory agency, as the government and the ruling Democratic Party of Japan have decided to accept a counterproposal from the Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito that calls for drastic revisions to the government-sponsored bill, government sources have revealed.

The ruling bloc is determined to make the concessions necessary to enact legislation to launch the government-envisioned nuclear regulatory body during the current legislative session, several government and DPJ sources said Friday.

The proposal put forth by the two major opposition parties says the government-envisioned nuclear regulatory agency, under the Environment Ministry, should be subordinate to what the LDP and Komeito have tentatively called a "nuclear regulatory commission."

This regulatory commission would have a highly independent status, much like the Fair Trade Commission under Article 3 of the National Government Organization Law.

Under the LDP-Komeito proposal, the government-planned agency would have about 500 employees and act as the secretariat of a five-member regulatory commission. Appointments to the independent commission would require Diet approval, sources said.

The capitulation of the ruling camp to opposition parties is expected to lead to an early start of Diet deliberations on the government-sponsored bill, according to the sources.

In exchange for the concession to incorporate the opposition-proposed commission into the government bill, the ruling bloc has called for the opposition to start Diet debates on the bill from Friday, they said.

The government hopes to establish the nuclear regulatory agency as early as June 1, the sources noted.

The opposition-envisioned nuclear regulatory commission would have the right to decide on a wide range of personnel and budgetary matters, as is the case with the FTC.

The government's bill would have empowered the environment minister to appoint the chief of the agency to ensure a swift political decision could be made in the event of a nuclear emergency.

The LDP-Komeito plans are designed to grant major decision-making authority to the nuclear commission, leading Environment Minister Goshi Hosono to express his concern that the commission, a collegial panel, could have difficulty handling a potential nuclear crisis.

The warning was ignored

May 15, 2012

TEPCO was warned of possible power loss from tsunami at nuclear plants in 2006

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120515p2a00m0na007000c.html>

The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) warned the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) in 2006 of the possibility of losing all power at nuclear power plants in the event of a tsunami, **but this warning was ignored**, it has been learned.

The warning came after the 2004 earthquake off of Sumatra and ensuing tsunami, but NISA did not press power companies to put in place tsunami countermeasures. A NISA official says, **"If measures had been taken then, the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster might have been prevented."**

The issuance of the warning was revealed by Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano at a press conference on May 15 after a Cabinet meeting.

NISA had been holding information sessions since January 2006 along with the Japan Nuclear Energy Safety Organization, TEPCO and other utilities. Because the tsunami from the Sumatra quake had forced a reactor-cooling seawater pump at a nuclear plant in India to go offline, effects and countermeasures for Japan's nuclear plants were discussed at the sessions. In August 2006, it was pointed out that a tsunami larger than expected could cause the seawater pump at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant to go offline.

However, on May 14 at a meeting of a Diet committee investigating the Fukushima disaster, TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata said, "The warning was not transmitted to me, and the executives did not consider countermeasures."

Tsugara should be decommissioned straight away

May 15, 2012

Warnings over fault below nuke reactors in Fukui were ignored

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120515p2a00m0na010000c.html>

The possibility that a fault right below the nuclear reactor buildings at the Tsuruga Power Station in Fukui Prefecture may move in conjunction with nearby active faults has been repeatedly pointed out since 2008, but the government regulator and the plant's operator failed until recently to take any measures.

The Japan Atomic Power Co. (JAPC), the operator of the Tsuruga nuclear power plant, only released its plan on May 14 this year to survey the area to examine the possibility that the fracture zones -- a type of fault -- right below the plant's nuclear reactor buildings could in fact be active faults. The planned survey -- scheduled to be completed by November -- was approved by the government's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) later the same day.

If the fracture zones are recognized as active faults that had moved sometime after around 120,000 to 130,000 years ago, the Tsuruga nuclear plant is likely to be decommissioned. It has been confirmed that there are 150 to 160 fracture zones on the premises of the plant in Tsuruga. On April 24, NISA surveyed three fracture zones, including two running below the building housing the plant's No. 2 reactor, raising the possibility that they could move in tandem with an active fault called the Urasoko Fault, located some 150 meters northeast of the No. 2 reactor.

On May 14, NISA held a meeting of experts to discuss the issue and approved JAPC's plan to report the survey results by November. While JAPC is poised to underscore its claim that the fracture zones are "not active faults" by conducting boring surveys at five locations at the nuclear plant, the plant cannot be reactivated unless the operator can provide evidence supporting these assertions.

Yuichi Sugiyama, the head of a research team at the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology (AIST), which surveyed fault lines at the Tsuruga nuclear plant, said at the NISA meeting on May 14, "The possibility that the fracture zones are active faults cannot be ruled out at the moment. We should obtain reliable survey results, even if it takes time."

The presence of the fracture zones below the Tsuruga nuclear plant was mentioned in the application for permission to construct the No. 1 reactor, which was approved in 1966. However, it was determined at the time that the fracture zones were small-scale "dormant faults" from extremely old times, and they were not taken into consideration for the plant's seismic-resistant design. The presence of the Urasoko active fault -- located some 250 meters away from the No. 1 reactor -- had not been known by that time.

It was in 1991 that the presence of the Urasoko Fault came to surface. While it had initially been thought that the fault was about 3 kilometers long, several faults were later discovered to exist along its extension. Experts pointed out the risk of the faults moving together, but JAPC only acknowledged in March 2008 that they were active faults about 25 kilometers long.

Several experts had also earlier pointed out the possibility that the fracture zones at the Tsuruga nuclear complex could move in conjunction with the Urasoko Fault and could have a critical impact on the nuclear reactors. However, JAPC submitted a report to NISA in 2008, insisting that the fracture zones' activity period dates back to earlier times and that they would not move in tandem with the Urasoko Fault.

Mitsuhsa Watanabe, professor at Toyo University and a specialist in active faults, was skeptical about the JAPC report at the time. "Old fracture zones are consolidated and become stiff, but the report does not use such expressions as 'stiff' at all." The distribution of the fracture zones at the Tsuruga plant also convinced him that they were apparently linked to the Urasoko Fault. **Watanabe has thus repeatedly pointed out the possibility of the faults moving together** during academic meetings and other occasions since 2008.

However, JAPC and NISA failed to take immediate action. Even after an opinion was voiced demanding an in-depth examination of the issue during a council meeting at NISA in September 2010, the agency did not conduct an on-the-spot survey at the Tsuruga power station. **It was only after the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in March last year that NISA finally moved ahead to conduct a field survey at the Tsuruga plant, in April this year.**

During the survey, the fracture zones at the Tsuruga plant were found to be soft when scraped with sickles and extend linearly on the land surface. All four experts who took part in the survey agreed that the fracture zones "cannot be determined to be old faults." Masaru Kobayashi, director at NISA's seismic safety office, said remorsefully, "I should've ordered a survey much earlier."

Says professor Watanabe, **"Why did they fail to conduct the survey for such a long time on something that can be so easily understood by visiting the spot? It's not academic research but an argument for safety. The plant should be decommissioned right away."**

What happened at the top on 3-11

May 19, 2012

Convincing Kan to declare N-crisis 'took time'

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120518005327.htm>

The government's initial response to the Fukushima nuclear crisis was held up because it took more than one hour to persuade then Prime Minister Naoto Kan to declare a nuclear emergency, the industry minister at the time has revealed.

Banri Kaieda made the disclosure when he attended a session of the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Committee as an unsworn witness Thursday.

It was the first time the committee conducted an open hearing investigation of a Diet member. Kaieda is a House of Representatives member from the ruling Democratic Party of Japan.

On the evening of March 11, 2011, Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, informed Kaieda of a critical situation at the plant. Kaieda, who was the economy, trade and industry minister at the time, hurried to the Prime Minister's Office and asked Kan to declare a nuclear emergency, he told the panel.

However, it took more than one hour until Kan issued the declaration because "it took time to get the understanding of the prime minister," Kaieda said.

Kaieda asked Kan to issue the declaration and establish the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters to be headed by the prime minister.

However, Kan responded, "On what grounds?"

Yukio Edano, who was chief cabinet secretary at the time, special advisers to the prime minister and other staffers then scrambled to confirm relevant laws--such as the Law on Special Measures Concerning Nuclear Emergency Preparedness--that would justify the issuance of the declaration and establishment of the headquarters, Kaieda told the panel.

While they were desperately trying to confirm the legal basis for these actions, Kan attended a meeting of ruling and opposition party leaders and engaged in other business.

Holding back the issuance of the emergency declaration resulted in delays in the efforts by authorities to inform residents near the nuclear station about the accident.

Some members of the Liberal Democratic Party and other opposition parties have ripped into the initial response of the DPJ-led administration. "The delay reduced the time residents had to decide whether they should evacuate," an opposition lawmaker said.

Kaieda admitted that communications between the Prime Minister's Office, TEPCO's head office and the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant were poor and chaotic.

"It was like we were playing Chinese whispers. I thought, 'This situation has to change,'" Kaieda told the independent panel during the hearing, which lasted about 2-1/2 hours.

There have been conflicting reports over whether then TEPCO President Masataka Shimizu told the government he intended to withdraw all workers from the crippled plant on March 15, 2011. Kaieda said he remembered Shimizu telling him about "an evacuation from the No. 1 plant to the Fukushima No. 2 power plant."

"I clearly recall three words President Shimizu said when he telephoned me. 'No. 1 power plant,' 'No. 2 power plant' and 'evacuation,'" Kaieda said. "There was never any mention of leaving some workers at the plant" to try to stop the crisis from spiraling out of control.

TEPCO insists it never intended to evacuate its workers from the complex after it was battered by the March 11 earthquake and ensuing tsunami.

Current TEPCO President Tsunehisa Katsumata told a hearing investigation by the committee Monday that "there is no truth" in the claim that the utility asked the government for permission to pull all its workers from the nuclear plant.

1 trillion yen for TEPCO on July 25

May 22,2012

TEPCO to be nationalized July 25, gov't to acquire up to 75% stake

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120522p2g00m0dm011000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The government will effectively nationalize Tokyo Electric Power Co. on July 25 by injecting 1 trillion yen in public money into the nation's biggest utility facing huge costs stemming from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster, Tokyo Electric said Monday.

The government will initially acquire 50.11 percent of the company's voting rights, enabling the state to choose the board members, and will be able boost the government ownership stake to up to 75.84 percent for even stronger control in pushing for reforms.

To effect the changes, TEPCO plans to change its articles of incorporation at its annual shareholders' meeting on June 27 to allow it to increase its authorized shares from 1.8 billion now.

TEPCO will then issue two new types of preferred shares -- one carrying voting rights, and another with no such rights but convertible to common shares with voting rights.

The state-backed Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund will pay the 1 trillion yen to TEPCO on July 25, and in return acquire 1.6 billion preferred shares with voting rights for 200 yen each and 340 million convertible shares for 2,000 yen each.

TEPCO also intends to cut more than 3.37 trillion yen in costs over 10 years to March 2022, and carry out various reforms in line with a restructuring plan approved by the government earlier this month.

The government will start recouping the 1 trillion yen in taxpayer money once the fund sees progress in reforming the company, or judges the company capable of raising funds through the corporate bond market.

Because of the changes, the Tokyo metropolitan government, the current largest shareholder, will see its stake halved to 1.34 percent, from 2.68 percent at the end of March. The stake could fall to 0.65 percent in the future.

JAEC pro-nuke secret meeting

May 24, 2012

JAEC had secret 'study meeting' of nuclear advocates to draft reprocessing policy report

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120524p2a00m0na014000c.html>

The Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) invited only pro-nuclear people from government and power industry bodies to have a secret "study meeting" on April 24 to draft a report on the country's policy of reprocessing spent nuclear fuel, it has been learned.

At the study meeting, a draft report with a cover sheet which read "Handle with care" was handed out to about 30 participants. The "Overall Evaluation" in the draft report -- the conclusion of the report -- was then rewritten in such a way as to make it in favor of reprocessing spent nuclear fuel in accordance with the wishes of power companies before it was submitted to a JAEC subcommittee. While the government has been emphasizing its plan to review the country's nuclear policy from scratch, the revelation highlights the fact that the policy-making process has been distorted.

The JAEC subcommittee incorporated the amended version of the overall evaluation into its report and presented it to the "council of new national energy policy" chaired by JAEC Chairman Shunsuke Kondo on May 23. The report is to be presented to the government's Energy and Environment Council soon.

The Mainichi obtained 79 pages of A-4 size documents. "For use for 4/24 Study Meeting" is written on the upper right of the cover of the documents, with the title: "The Technical Subcommittee on Nuclear Power, Nuclear Fuel Cycle, etc. (the 13th round)." The documents were the draft version of the report that was scheduled to be discussed on April 27.

The secret study meeting was held for about two hours from shortly after 5 p.m. on April 24 at the Central Government Building No.4 in Tokyo's Kasumigaseki district where JAEC is located. The participants in the meeting included JAEC Vice Chairman Tatsujiro Suzuki; Cabinet Office officials in charge of nuclear policy; Hideo Morimoto, director of the Nuclear Facilities Development and Nuclear Fuel Cycle Industry Division at the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy; Hideki Oda, director of the nuclear energy division at the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan; Harukuni Tanaka, managing director at Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd.; a top official of the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, which operates the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor; and employees of power firms including Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Japan Atomic Power Co. Tatsujiro Suzuki was the only official representing JAEC.

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Because the direct disposal of all spent nuclear fuel is more economically feasible even if the prices of uranium rise 30 fold, the overall evaluation in the original draft report said, "The direct disposal is

superior to reprocessing or the concurrent approach in terms of total costs." But while the amended draft report said "it was highly possible that direct disposal would be superior to reprocessing or the concurrent approach if the price of uranium remains at the current level," it emphasized the merits of the concurrent approach in many parts of the report saying in part, "the concurrent approach is slightly superior economically to reprocessing all spent nuclear fuel." The draft report was not discussed on April 27 due to a lack of time but it was discussed on May 8.

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'Secret meeting' on fuel cycle was like gathering of 'nuclear villagers'

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120524p2a00m0na015000c.html>

A preposterous scene was recently played out behind closed doors in central Tokyo. A secret meeting on Japan's policy for its nuclear fuel cycle, dubbed a "study meeting," was held in the Kasumigaseki district on April 24. Government officials and businessmen from the power industry, who are supposed to draw a sharp line between the two sides, enjoyed chatting and laughing with one another. It was something like a gathering of "nuclear villagers."

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Shortly after 5 p.m. on April 24 -- at conference room 743 on the seventh floor of the Central Government Building No. 4 -- a reporter witnessed men in business suits filing into the conference room one after another through doors that were kept open. **They were all pro-nuclear people** from JAEC, the Cabinet Office, the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy in the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan, Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd., Tokyo Electric Power Co., etc. There was no one there who was opposed to or cautious about the use of nuclear power.

Holding a pile of documents under his arm, a man in a blue shirt entered the room and put the documents on a desk somewhat roughly. He divided the documents into two piles because if he put them in one stack, it could crumble. One of the piles was about 20 centimeters high and the other about 10 centimeters. It was later found out that the documents were the original draft report for the "Technical Subcommittee on Nuclear Power, Nuclear Fuel Cycle, etc." The draft report was actually discussed at a subcommittee meeting 14 days later.

Two officials from the Cabinet Office distributed one set of the documents to each participant sitting at desks arranged in a square shape. Sitting near the doors, a top official of the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA), which operates the prototype fast-breeder reactor Monju, was poring over the documents. Soon afterwards, the participants started chatting with one another. When one of the members criticized Tetsunari Iida, a staunch opponent of nuclear power and head of the Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies (ISEP), by name, the participants burst into laughter.

At 5:10 p.m., the doors to the conference room were closed quietly and the secret meeting kicked off. According to sources concerned, a top official of Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd., which operates the reprocessing plant in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, asked other participants to accept the concurrent approach of "reprocessing and directly disposing of spent nuclear fuel," which could help the firm survive. According to the sources, he stressed that "if the Rokkasho facility were to be abandoned and spent nuclear fuel were to be disposed of directly, problems would occur here and there." If the reprocessing business at Rokkasho fell apart, it is said that about **2.9 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel** will have to be hauled out of the storage facility in Rokkasho.

The subcommittee presented its report containing the "Overall Evaluation" full of expressions in favor of the concurrent approach to the "council of new national energy policy" on May 23. An industry ministry official condemned the report, saying, "Even if spent nuclear fuel is reprocessed, waste must eventually be disposed of. At a time when the government and bureaucrats need to come together and toil to create permanent disposal facilities, they are pushing for a policy that will only delay the inevitable."

When the Mainichi reported in its morning edition on May 8 that an agenda item for the "council of new national energy policy" headed by JAEC Chairman Shunsuke Kondo had been covered up because it stood in the way of reactivating idled nuclear reactors, Kondo said "there was no problem." But in light of what happened at the secret meeting, the same excuse will never be acceptable.

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meeting. When the cover-up issue was pointed out earlier this month, Goshi Hosono, the state minister in charge of nuclear accidents, stood behind Kondo. We will see how Hosono will respond to this latest scandal.

JAEC pro-nuke secret meeting

May 24, 2012

JAEC had secret 'study meeting' of nuclear advocates to draft reprocessing policy report

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120524p2a00m0na014000c.html>

The Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) invited only pro-nuclear people from government and power industry bodies to have a secret "study meeting" on April 24 to draft a report on the country's policy of reprocessing spent nuclear fuel, it has been learned.

At the study meeting, a draft report with a cover sheet which read "Handle with care" was handed out to about 30 participants. The "Overall Evaluation" in the draft report -- the conclusion of the report -- was then rewritten in such a way as to make it in favor of reprocessing spent nuclear fuel in accordance with the wishes of power companies before it was submitted to a JAEC subcommittee. While the government has been emphasizing its plan to review the country's nuclear policy from scratch, the revelation highlights the fact that the policy-making process has been distorted.

The JAEC subcommittee incorporated the amended version of the overall evaluation into its report and presented it to the "council of new national energy policy" chaired by JAEC Chairman Shunsuke Kondo on May 23. The report is to be presented to the government's Energy and Environment Council soon.

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The subcommittee discussed policies of reprocessing all spent nuclear fuel, direct disposal of spent nuclear fuel and a "concurrent" approach of reprocessing some spent fuel and directly disposing of other spent fuel. According to sources concerned, a top official of the Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd. asked at the secret meeting for maintaining the reprocessing plant in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture. JAEC's Suzuki, who chaired the meeting, was quoted as saying in his reply, "The concurrent approach is the best because it does not affect the project (at the reprocessing plant)." While it is difficult to secure consent on the idea of reprocessing all spent nuclear fuel because of the reprocessing plant being hit by a string of trouble in the past, they apparently feared that the direct disposal of all spent nuclear fuel could lead to the shutdown of the reprocessing plant.

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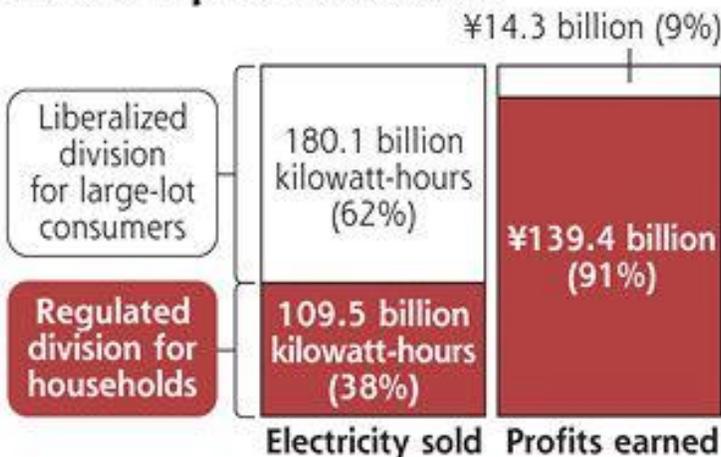
40% of power sold bring 90% profits to TEPCO

90% of TEPCO's annual average profits come from households

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120523005516.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

TEPCO's profit structure



Figures are the annual average between fiscal 2006 and 2010. Percentage figures are proportional to the total.

About 90 percent of Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s annual average profits came from sales to households from fiscal 2006 to 2010, even though the amount of power sold to such users accounts for only about 40 percent of the total for the period, according to a recent report.

Given this latest revelation, the power company will likely again face demands for a review of its rate calculation method.

TEPCO recently submitted a summary report outlining its earnings structure to the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry.

According to the report, presented Wednesday at the second meeting of an expert panel to examine electricity rates, TEPCO sold an annual average of 289.6 billion kilowatt-hours to consumers from fiscal 2006 to 2010. Of this, electricity for households accounted for 38 percent, while that for large-lot consumers accounted for 62 percent.

In terms of sales during the same period, of 4.96 trillion yen generated, the proportions of power sales to households and large-lot consumers were almost the same, with 49 percent and 51 percent, respectively.

However, of the company's 153.7 billion yen profit, 91 percent was generated from electricity sales to households, while only 9 percent came from sales to large-lot users.

Within TEPCO's jurisdiction, gas companies and oil distributors among others are registered as power producers and suppliers (PPS) that can sell electricity to large-lot users.

As a result, a relatively competitive electricity market exists for large-lot consumers, forcing sellers to reduce rates for such users.

Therefore, it is believed TEPCO was trying to ensure its profits from the electricity it sold to households.

Household electricity rates are regulated, with the overall price including costs for power distribution and transmission.

The current system allows a business reward whereby TEPCO can add a fixed portion of its assets related to the electricity business, such as maintaining its power transmission grid, to the rates it charges.

Therefore, the more TEPCO spends on facility investment to increase its power output, the greater its business reward, which can be added on to the regulated household rates.

Experts have pointed out that such a structure makes reduction of household electricity prices difficult.

The expert panel aims to reduce the average 10.28 percent price hike for household electricity rates recently sought by TEPCO.

"Black box" scandal(s)

May 25, 2012

Yoroku: Dismantling the 'black boxes' of Japanese nuclear power

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20120525p2a00m0na007000c.html>

A device that spat out chocolate if someone deposited 100 yen into a coin slot could fit the definition of what is known in science and engineering as a "black box" -- **a system whose inputs and outputs are visible, but not its inner workings**. Inside the facade may be your standard vending machine, a magical contraption that transforms metals into chocolate, or even a human being.

A couple of months ago, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), operator of the stricken Fukushima nuclear power station, announced that the water level in the No. 2 reactor containment vessel was only 60 centimeters deep. **What's going on inside the crippled reactors remains unknown for the most part**. In other words, **the nuclear disaster has created its own "black boxes" whose input is cooling water and whose output is highly radioactive water**.

Japan's nuclear safety administration, which downplayed the risks of a serious nuclear disaster and failed to take measures against a massive tsunami and loss of power, is responsible for bringing these troublesome black boxes into existence. It's only natural that the nuclear policymaking process dominated by the "nuclear village" -- the name given to the nation's pro-nuclear collection of politicians, bureaucrats, academics, and utilities -- has come to be looked upon with great suspicion.

Now, another black-box scandal in nuclear policymaking has emerged.

It was recently reported that the Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) held a secret meeting on April 24, before a JAEC subcommittee compiled and submitted a report on the country's policy of reprocessing spent nuclear fuel to the "council of new national energy policy" on May 23. The discussion, dubbed a "study meeting," took place behind closed doors, with only pro-nuclear parties from government and power industry bodies invited to attend. The chief of the JAEC subcommittee was also in attendance.

If the JAEC merely needed to hear the opinions of power companies, they could have held a public hearing. News of what could be seen as further collusive activity by the "nuclear village" -- and what could be interpreted as the "village" flaunting its indifference to the fact that it is already the target of widespread distrust -- is maddening the public.

It is said that the black boxes at the Fukushima plant will take decades to decommission. **But the black box that spawned the nation's nuclear policy can be dismantled today.** ("Yoroku," a front-page column in the Mainichi Shimbun)

Hosono criticises JAEC (but not too severely)

Hosono raps panel for seemingly acting in favor of nuclear industry

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120525p2g00m0dm102000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Nuclear disaster minister Goshi Hosono on Friday criticized a government panel on nuclear fuel cycle policy for acting in a way that could be construed as favoring the nuclear industry.

He was referring to a study meeting convened by the Japan Atomic Energy Commission, during which the panel showed a draft report on its assessment of nuclear fuel cycle policy options only to nuclear power promoters, such as utilities, before disclosing it to the public.

"It is a problem that documents were distributed to (electricity) companies in advance. Such a practice must be changed," Hosono told a press conference.

But he said that the commission needs to hear the opinions of companies and other entities involved in nuclear fuel cycle matters to compile the policy, adding that contact between the panel members and the utilities was not in itself a problem.

Noting that the draft report was scrutinized in a public setting, Hosono also denied that the panel's decision was influenced by the industry.

The study meeting was attended only by promoters of nuclear power, including the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry, the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan and Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd., which operates a spent fuel reprocessing plant in the village of Rokkasho in Aomori Prefecture.

Some of the wording of the draft report was revised in favor of nuclear power promoters after the meeting.

Hosono told the press conference that he also wants to review the organization of the commission's secretariat, which includes people dispatched from utilities.

"It is not desirable to arouse the public's suspicions. I am considering having them return to their companies when the timing is right," he said.

Secret meetings with pro-nukes produced no minutes

May 25, 2012

Atomic commission chief admits attendance at secret session on nuclear fuel cycle

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120525p2a00m0na020000c.html>

Shunshuke Kondo, chairman of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC), attended a closed-door meeting on a review of the nation's nuclear fuel cycle policy on Dec. 8 last year, according to memos obtained by the Mainichi Shimbun.

The revelation comes after the JAEC was found to have held closed-door "study" sessions with only pro-nuclear members in attendance. **The JAEC held such secret sessions over more than 20 occasions**, and an official of the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry, which is in charge of research and development of fast-breeder reactors, also participated.

The commission, which is overseen by the Cabinet Office, did not produce minutes of those secret meetings, and after each session, Cabinet Office officials in charge of nuclear policy were tasked with retrieving the many materials that had been distributed.

Following the finding by the Mainichi, Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura told a news conference on May 25 that the JAEC held 23 closed-door meetings from last November to April this year and that Chairman Kondo attended the first four sessions.

According to memos written by participants in the Dec. 8 meeting that Chairman Kondo attended, the gathering was held from 4 to 6 p.m. in a conference room of the Cabinet Office. The JAEC held the meeting ahead of full-scale discussions from January by its subpanel on Japan's nuclear fuel cycle policy regarding how to dispose of spent nuclear fuel.

Besides Kondo, participants included JAEC Vice Chairman Tatsujiro Suzuki; Commissioner Etsuko Akiba; an assistant division chief of the science ministry; Hirobumi Kayama, director of the Office for International Nuclear Energy Cooperation at the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy; Kimihide Namura, director of the Radioactive Waste Management Policy Office at the agency; Harukuni Tanaka, managing director at Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd., which operates an atomic fuel cycle facility in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture; and senior officials of the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan -- made up of the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, which manages the prototype fast-breeder reactor Monju, and other electric power firms.

All participants were proponents of nuclear power and there were no opponents or skeptics present at the meeting.

Interviews with people familiar with the meeting and a subsequent probe found that the JAEC held more than 20 secret meetings, including one on April 24 this year in which copies of a draft report on the assessment for options on how to dispose of spent nuclear fuel were distributed ahead of the subpanel's meeting and representatives of the electric power industry sought revisions in their favor.

Under an unwritten rule, distributed documents were collected after each session and minutes of those meetings were not prepared. Some participants scribbled memos on the content of the secret meetings and the names of participants and e-mailed them to selected parties.

The JAEC organization has a chairman and four other members, and the JAEC law stipulates that the commission can convene meetings attended by the chairman and two other members and exercise voting rights.

Kondo has said his commission has refrained from holding debate on nuclear policy among three or more commission members to ensure transparency, but acknowledged that he attended the Dec. 8 secret meeting with two other commission members. However, he maintains he did not do anything wrong because it was a study meeting to provide data and seek explanations from participants.

Flawed arguments

Jun. 12, 2012

Editorial: PM's flawed arguments for Oi reactor restarts play on fear, hobble reform

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20120612p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda's June 8 news conference on the restart of reactors at the Oi nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture appealed neither to our reason nor our hearts. The message he was trying to convey -- that the Oi plant reactors are safe and need to be brought back online -- was plainly aimed not at the Japanese people, but at Fukui Gov. Issei Nishikawa, whose okay is needed to flip the switch.

This approach cannot possibly win the support of the public, and there are a number of serious flaws with it. First of all, Noda stated that "accidents can be prevented even if the Oi plant is hit with an earthquake or tsunami on the scale of the one that struck Fukushima," and "even if the plant lost power, this would not result in damage to the reactor cores."

To begin with, the greatest lesson we've learned from the Fukushima nuclear disaster is that no matter how thorough preparations may be, accidents can still happen. Nevertheless, Noda has gone back to the now broken premise that "accidents can't happen" as a way to push forward with the Oi reactor restarts. In other words, the government has returned to the "safety myth" that underpinned nuclear power in Japan before the Fukushima disaster.

We must also take issue with using "Fukushima-like" as a parameter for defining "guaranteed safety." Whatever shape the next accident takes, it certainly won't be exactly the same as the March 2011 meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Internationally, the safety of nuclear power is generally based on five "layers" of protection. The first three layers are preventative, while the fourth and fifth assume the occurrence of a major disaster, and call for protecting people and the environment from emissions of radioactive materials.

Some portion of recommended anti-quake work, such as base-isolation to insulate buildings against seismic vibrations, has not been carried out at the Oi plant, operated by Kansai Electric Power Co. This begs the question of how the fourth and fifth layers of protection are to be implemented in case of an accident. The prime minister has a duty to explain this thoroughly to the Japanese people.

Furthermore, Noda's statement that "if all of Japan's nuclear reactors remain idle, Japanese society will not function" is also flawed. The government has already said it is planning to break the country's

dependence on nuclear power, and is putting a great deal of time and effort into deliberations on what sort of energy mix Japan should be aiming for.

Even though these discussions have yet to reach a conclusion, Noda went on to say that "the livelihoods and daily lives of the Japanese people cannot be sustained if reactors are only restarted for the summer," and "from the energy security point of view, nuclear power is very important." These statements, we believe, leave true national debate on this issue behind in the dust.

Of course lives could be at stake if Japan is hit with sudden blackouts from a lack of electricity. Industry will also be affected if planned blackouts continue this year. This is a weighty problem indeed.

However, we've all known for more than a year that the country needs measures to deal with summer power shortfalls, and both the government and Kansai Electric have been negligent in developing those measures. And though these parties ought to be reflecting on and apologizing for their negligence, all we see them doing is fanning the flames of anxiety.

There is a major push on now to save electricity, cut down on peak usage, and create flexibility in the power system. To force the restart of the Oi plant reactors even amid all these efforts would be to crush the fragile bud of energy reform now growing in society.

Prime Minister Noda derided anti-restart arguments as "emotional." Anti-nuclear accident measures, however, are hardly a sentimental project. Is it not those pressing for reactor restarts even as the Fukushima disaster rages on that are the "emotional" ones?

More secret and dissimulation

June 19, 2012

Experts at secret meeting decided to cover up scenario for dealing with spent nuclear fuel

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120619p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Pro-nuclear power experts who gathered at secret meetings in March organized by the Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) decided to **conceal a scenario for dealing with spent nuclear fuel which would be unfavorable to the promotion of fast-breeder reactors**, from a subcommittee, it has been learned.

JAEC, under the umbrella of the Cabinet Office, has submitted three other scenarios to the subcommittee after deleting the scenario in question, clarifying that the secret meetings influenced the core of Japan's so-called nuclear fuel cycle policy.

The subcommittee of JAEC reviewing the nuclear cycle policy discussed the three scenarios and is set to submit them to the government's Energy and Environment Council.

Four members of a JAEC experts' panel on new nuclear energy policy have urged JAEC not to submit the scenarios to the government. "The proposals are unjustifiable because they were adopted in ignorance of a democratic process," read an opinion submitted to JAEC Chairman Shunsuke Kondo.

The Cabinet Office's atomic power policy division, five of whose members attended the March 8 secret meeting, refused to comment on the revelations. "We can't answer any question that could actually be a bluff."

In the nuclear fuel cycle project, spent nuclear fuel would be reprocessed and reused as fuel for nuclear reactors. Reactors in which the fission of a chain reaction is sustained by fast neutrons in the process of reusing spent fuel are called fast reactors (FRs). Among these, reactors that produce more fuel than original fuel, such as the Monju prototype reactor in Fukui Prefecture, are called fast-breeder reactors (FBRs).

The Mainichi Shimbun has recently obtained a document detailing four scenarios on whether to go ahead with the nuclear fuel cycle project, including one that attendees of the secret meeting agreed to cover up.

Scenario 1 calls for the reprocessing of all spent nuclear fuel and its use in commercial FRs. Under scenario 2, part of spent nuclear fuel would be reprocessed and the remainder would be stored while research and development would be conducted to determine whether FRs can be put into commercial use.

Under scenario 3, part of the spent fuel would be reprocessed, the remainder would be disposed of and the project of putting FRs into commercial use would be discontinued. Scenario 4 calls for disposal of all spent nuclear fuel and the discontinuation of the project of putting FRs into practical use.

If scenarios 1 and 2 were adopted, the Monju-related research and development project would be continued, but scenarios 3 and 4 would mean that the project must be called off.

When the four scenarios were submitted to one of the secret meetings, held on March 8, for deliberations, attendees insisted that scenario 3 should be excluded.

"The subcommittee's discussions would certainly focus on the middle (scenarios 2 or 3) rather than scenario 1 that calls for reprocessing of all spent fuel or scenario 4 that envisages the disposal of all spent fuel. If scenario 3 were included, there would certainly be some subcommittee members who would choose it," one of them was quoted as telling the secret meeting.

"We've come to a crucial stage now. Scenario 2 is desirable and scenario 3 should be deleted," another reportedly said.

A document detailing the four scenarios was also distributed at another secret meeting on March 22. At the time, the moderator of the meeting said, "There was a plan to recommend four scenarios but we reduced them to three." However, attendees did not discuss the matter.

Scientists and public trust

June 20, 2012

Public trust in scientists, engineers dropped after Fukushima nuke disaster: gov't report

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120620p2g00m0dm088000c.html>

Public confidence in Japanese scientists and engineers declined after the outbreak in March 2011 of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, the government said in its 2012 white paper on science and technology.

The white paper endorsed by the Cabinet on June 19 said, "Public confidence in scientists and engineers dropped" due to the accident at the crippled Fukushima nuclear power station.

Citing as an example the fact that robots made in Japan were almost useless to deal with the nuclear crisis, the annual government report pointed out that Japanese technological developments were not prepared for actual operations to respond to such disasters. On the fact that the government failed to provide sufficient information to the public, the report said, "It is important to prepare" a mechanism similar to those adopted by Britain and the United States to facilitate the provision of information from scientists to the government.

Asked whether it is good for experts to decide on the direction of research, only 19 percent of ordinary people polled in the questionnaire survey for the white paper said they thought so, down sharply from the pre-disaster level of 59 percent.

Meanwhile, in a survey on experts, 43 percent of the respondents said they were trusted, while 39 percent said they were not trusted. The white paper, therefore, lashed out at experts for their low sense of responsibility, saying that they did not take the declining public confidence in them seriously. The report, however, stopped short of making in-depth analysis and proposals as to why the gap in perception between the public and experts was created and what experts should correct or improve.

While stressing the need to recognize higher risks accompanied by developments of science and technology, the report said transmission of information in emergency situations should be discussed on a routine basis. It then said, "Japan must become a country capable of minimizing damage and recovering quickly."

Bad start for transparency

June 20, 2012

Delayed disclosure at Ohi plant

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120620_15.html

The operator of the Ohi nuclear power plant says an alarm went off on Tuesday on a water level detector at its No.3 reactor.

The plant in Fukui Prefecture, central Japan will become the first to go back online in Japan since last year's disaster.

Kansai Electric Power Company said on Wednesday that the alarm suggested the water level had fallen in a tank used to cool an electric power generator at its No.3 reactor.

The firm says workers who examined the tank found no leaks but that the water level was about 5 centimeters lower than usual. The company says it's investigating the cause of the alarm.

The No.3 reactor is one of 2 being readied for a restart in line with a central government decision on Saturday.

The government has set up a special monitoring system with resident inspectors at the plant to deal promptly with possible accidents and problems.

But **the disclosure of Tuesday's incident came about 13 hours after the alarm went off.**

Kansai Electric says it did not make the information public on Tuesday because the incident did not match levels requiring disclosure by law and in-house rules.

Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency official Yasushi Morishita apologized at a news conference, saying his lapse in judgment caused the delayed disclosure.

Water-level alarm goes off at Oi Nuclear Power Plant; no abnormalities detected

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120620p2a00m0na010000c.html>

A water-level alarm went off at the Oi Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture on June 19, plant operator Kansai Electric Power Co. (KEPCO) said, as preparations for the controversial restart of two reactors at the plant continue.

KEPCO announced June 20 that an alarm indicating a decreased water level in a generator cooling tank of the plant's No. 3 reactor was activated at 9:51 p.m. on June 19. Work at the plant is being monitored on a 24-hour basis.

In a news conference starting at 11 a.m. on June 20, the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency apologized for the half-day delay between the incident and its announcement.

KEPCO said the alarm stopped after four minutes. Officials said there were no abnormalities with the water level in the tank, and it was thought that the water level had changed temporarily when a pump started operating.

It was the first alarm at the plant since work began on June 16 in preparation for the restart of the No. 3 and 4 reactors.

The new regulatory panel by September?

June 21, 2012

Bill to create new nuclear regulatory body passes Diet

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120621p2g00m0dm007000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The House of Councillors on Wednesday passed a bill to create a new nuclear regulatory body that will play a key role in enhancing Japan's nuclear regulations in the wake of last year's Fukushima Daiichi atomic power plant disaster.

Following the passage of the bill, resulting in its enactment, the government is expected to step up its efforts to launch a "nuclear regulatory commission" with a high degree of independence by September, consisting of five members with expertise on such issues as nuclear reactors and earthquakes.

The new regulatory framework is different from what the government had initially expected to create because the ruling and opposition parties engaged in negotiations and crafted a new bill largely based on a proposal from the opposition bloc.

While the commission will be placed under the Environment Ministry, its independence will be guaranteed legally by giving it status akin to the country's antimonopoly watchdog the Japan Fair Trade Commission.

Ensuring the independence of the new body has been an important point amid criticism that the existing nuclear safety agency may have lacked teeth as it is under the umbrella of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, a promoter of nuclear power.

The launch of the commission is likely to affect the issue of whether to restart other reactors in addition to the Nos. 3 and 4 units at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi plant, which the government has decided to put back online to cope with power shortage concerns in the summer.

TEPCO justifies the way they dealt with the disaster

June 21, 2012

TEPCO justifies in nuclear accident report failure to predict huge tsunami

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120621p2g00m0dm016000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. on Wednesday, in its final report on the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster, admitted it was not sufficiently prepared to deal with tsunami-triggered nuclear accidents, but the utility justified its failure to predict the huge tsunami that hit the complex last year.

The over 10-meter-high tsunami that followed a huge earthquake on March 11, 2011, was "beyond expectations," the report said, reiterating the company's earlier view that the larger-than-expected

tsunami was the direct cause of the nuclear crisis, while criticizing the government for interfering in its efforts to bring the nuclear complex under control.

The report is a result of a year-long in-house investigation into the world's worst nuclear accident since the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. But it stopped short of digging deeper into the background of why Tokyo Electric could only make insufficient accident assumptions and left unanswered questions about the accident.

As in the interim report issued in December, the utility known as TEPCO maintained the view that key facilities at the plant withstood the impact of the magnitude 9.0 earthquake, but ensuing tsunami waves flooded electrical equipment and resulted in a loss of power, leading to the failure of reactor cooling systems.

Executive Vice President Masao Yamazaki told a press conference that TEPCO had taken measures to secure safety "to the extent possible," but the tsunami was on "a scale rare in all history." "Looking back, precautions were not sufficient," he said.

The report also said that not only the utility, but "people concerned in nuclear issues as a whole" were not able to predict that an event largely exceeding their expectations could occur, apparently referring to government bodies and experts involved in issuing assessments on the height of tsunami that could hit the plant.

Responding to criticism that staffers may have not had sufficient understanding of an emergency cooling system at the No. 1 unit called an isolation condenser, TEPCO insisted that they had been receiving training and had sufficient knowledge.

TEPCO, meanwhile, turned its fire on the government's response in the early stage of the nuclear crisis, saying that "unnecessary confusion" was caused for those on the front line by the interference of then Prime Minister Naoto Kan and other people at his office.

Such government behavior "only put the nuclear power plant chief in a dilemma and did not contribute to improve" the situation, it said.

The company's communications activities related to the crisis were also restricted because it had to seek approval from the prime minister's office and the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency before making announcements to the public, the report added.

TEPCO said it interviewed around 600 people who were involved in dealing with the crisis, which resulted in the meltdowns of the Nos.1 to 3 reactors at the plant.

The No. 2 reactor is believed to have leaked massive radioactive substances that seriously contaminated areas northwest of the Fukushima plant, although a hydrogen explosion did not take place inside the reactor building. But the report did not specify areas that were damaged.

Fukushima people don't agree with TEPCO' report

Fukushima residents call TEPCO nuke disaster report 'sloppy' and 'false'

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120621p2a00m0na017000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)'s final report on the Fukushima nuclear disaster has triggered a major backlash from prefectural residents and authorities who call it weak and even laced with falsehoods, it has been learned.

In the 352-page report, released on June 20 after a year-long internal investigation, TEPCO admits that the firm's tsunami policy had been insufficient. However, the utility justifies its unpreparedness by saying that the March 11, 2011 quake-triggered tsunami was "beyond expectations," and that the central government's "interference" obstructed its subsequent nuclear disaster management.

"TEPCO should have asked itself why it didn't have a sufficient tsunami policy and whether they had an opportunity to set one up," said Yoshihiro Koyama, head of Fukushima Prefecture's nuclear safety measures division. "We still don't know what happened in the cores of the No. 1, 2 and 3 reactors, among other unclear information. TEPCO should continue to try and explain all facts related to the crisis, and the government's disaster committee should do a deep investigation of the accident."

Meanwhile, Mayor Tamotsu Baba of the village of Namie points out a significant fabrication of data in TEPCO's report. While the document states that "TEPCO employees visited the village of Namie from March 13, 2011" to inform city authorities of details regarding the crisis, Baba says that they heard from TEPCO officials for the first time only in late March.

"This report is not just sloppy in content -- it includes falsified information," said Baba, who is expected to seek charges against the former TEPCO president and other officials for violating a liaison pact by not reporting to the Namie Municipal Government immediately after the outbreak of the disaster.

A 71-year-old resident who evacuated from Tomioka -- inside the evacuation zone around the plant -- and now lives at a temporary housing complex in the prefectural city of Koriyama, also criticized the report, saying that it is likely TEPCO may still be hiding information from residents.

"Despite being a final report, I feel somewhat that TEPCO is still hiding many things. It's crystal clear that the company tries to play innocent and escape responsibility," the man said.

All the government's fault

June 22, 2012

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120621005349.htm>

TEPCO report blames govt / Points finger at PM, admits it was unprepared for large tsunami

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Tokyo Electric Power Co. has defended its actions following the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami, claiming that interference by the Prime Minister's Office confused workers at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant during the initial period of the crisis there, according to a final report by TEPCO.

The report, released Wednesday, was compiled by an in-house panel convened in June last year. The report was based on about 600 hearings with employees and others, as well as computer analysis on why meltdowns occurred in the plant's reactors.

The 1,200-page report, however, left many issues unclear, such as why the No. 2 reactor released massive amounts of radiation into the air. Also, it made almost no references to the responsibilities of TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and other executives.

The release of the report wraps up TEPCO's investigation of the crisis before a shareholder meeting next Wednesday.

"We've made the best possible efforts in conducting our investigation," said Executive Vice President Masao Yamazaki, head of the in-house panel, during a press conference Wednesday at the utility's headquarters in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo.

The report emphasized that intervention by then Prime Minister Naoto Kan and other top government officials in the Prime Minister's Office "caused unnecessary confusion by making unrealistic demands."

Kan phoned Masao Yoshida, then head of the plant, the day after the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Kan and one of his aides spoke with Yoshida, proposing that the plant's reactors could be cooled down by referring to the 1979 nuclear crisis at Three Mile Island in the United States, the report said.

It described the instructions as "unrealistic given the actual state" of the reactors.

Regarding information released to residents near the crippled plant, which was criticized as being insufficient, the report again blamed the Prime Minister's Office.

TEPCO found it difficult to release information without approval from the office after it expressed dissatisfaction over TEPCO's release of a photo of the No. 1 reactor, which was hit by a hydrogen explosion the day after the disaster, the report said.

As a result, the utility could not promptly announce that pressure inside the No. 3 reactor's containment vessel was increasing March 14 until it obtained government approval, the report added.

Regarding safety measures against tsunamis, the report repeated that TEPCO had been "unprepared" for a tsunami of the size triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake because it was beyond the scope of its estimates.

TEPCO estimated in the spring of 2008 that the plant could be hit by a tsunami as high as 15.7 meters. However, the report justified the utility's failure to take any countermeasures at that time because it was "just a provisional estimate."

"We're sorry we failed to prevent the reactor cores from being damaged," the report said.

However, the report repeated excuses regarding the tsunami by describing it as "one of the most powerful tsunamis ever seen" and "a giant tsunami beyond our imagination."

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Denies withdrawal plan

Regarding whether TEPCO considered withdrawing all workers from the crippled Fukushima plant, the report insisted the utility did not have such a plan. It cited an internal document stipulating that all employees "except for emergency workers" should be evacuated quickly in the event of an accident.

The report said the utility "found it odd" when Kan shouted that withdrawing all workers from the plant would be unacceptable during his visit to TEPCO's headquarters.

When the Diet-appointed Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission conducted a hearing last month with then Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Banri Kaieda, he mentioned a telephone call he received from then TEPCO President Masataka Shimizu.

"They used the word 'withdrawal,' and never mentioned that some [of the plant's workers] would remain there," he told the panel.

However, the panel announced June 9 that it "cannot confirm that TEPCO made a decision to withdraw all workers" from the plant, based on Yoshida's testimony.

A similar investigation by the government also supported this when it released an interim report in December.

On the other hand, the Independent Investigation Commission on the Fukushima Nuclear Accident, set up as a private-sector panel by the Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation, said, "There is not enough evidence to support TEPCO's claims" that all top government officials at the Prime Minister's Office believed the utility would withdraw all workers from the crippled plant.

June 21, 2012

TEPCO report on Fukushima nuke disaster dodges blame, points finger at gov't

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120621p2a00m0na013000c.html>

An internal Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) report on the Fukushima nuclear meltdowns released on June 20 heaps blame on the government for worsening the situation, while absolving the firm of nearly all responsibility for the disaster.

Speaking at a news conference on the release of the report, TEPCO Vice President and internal investigative committee chair Masao Yamazaki admitted that there were "some problems" with how the utility responded to the March 2011 meltdowns. Furthermore, the report states that "all parties connected to the disaster, including this company, should reflect deeply on what happened."

However, Yamazaki maintained that TEPCO had "successfully carried out all prescribed procedures" and "employees did everything they could under difficult circumstances.

"There was trouble with several reactors simultaneously, and it was a very severe situation. Despite a total power failure, aftershocks and multiple tsunami warnings, (TEPCO staff) managed to cope," he added. The document itself traces the release of radioactive materials from the plant -- estimated at the equivalent of roughly 900,000 terabecquerels of radioiodine -- but does not address whether TEPCO could have done anything to lessen the severity of the disaster.

The report reserved particularly scathing criticism for former Prime Minister Naoto Kan, who visited the stricken plant just a day after the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami triggered the nuclear disaster. Specifically, the report blamed Kan's visit and subsequent contacts with then Fukushima No. 1 plant manager Masao Yoshida for "promoting useless confusion" in the opening days of the crisis.

Yoshida was quoted in the report as saying an "oppressive" Kan was "in a fit of rage and screamed at me" during a March 15 video conference. "He demanded to know if anyone had run away, and if anyone had, who they were," Yoshida's statement read. Kan has repeatedly insisted that TEPCO had hinted it wanted to abandon the plant soon after the crisis began, but the report includes internal documents calling for evacuation of "all but essential emergency personnel," and concludes the staff was well aware of the need to deal with the meltdowns.

The committee also turned criticism of its "slow" public release of "meager" information on the developing crisis back on the government, concluding that Tokyo had "restricted both the content and the timing of information releases."

One example quoted was photos of the March 12 hydrogen explosion that blew apart the No. 1 reactor building. The photos were released before reaching the Prime Minister's Office, which allegedly viewed this as a problem. Then TEPCO President Masataka Shimizu subsequently told TEPCO staff, "From now on, all information goes to the PM's Office first, and nothing is to be released until we get permission from them."

The report states that as a result, information on rising pressure in the No. 3 reactor containment vessel on March 14 was released late as TEPCO tried to coordinate with the government.

The pattern of laying blame at the government's feet repeated itself throughout the TEPCO committee's findings. For instance, the committee claimed that responsibility for the No. 1 plant's failed tsunami

defenses lay not with the utility, but with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency for "not instructing (TEPCO) to implement anti-tsunami measures immediately" -- despite a 2008 government report warning of massive waves.

TEPCO tries again to "duck responsibility"

June 22, 2012

Editorial: TEPCO internal report on Fukushima nuclear disaster nothing but self-justification

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20120622p2a00m0na007000c.html>

The final report issued by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)'s in-house investigative panel on the Fukushima nuclear crisis looks like it was written up to counter the growing swarm of lawsuits that have been and could yet be filed against the utility and its board members.

The report attributes the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in March 2011 to "higher tsunami than predicted."

The panel reportedly interviewed a total of 600 people involved for the report, whose main body alone is 352 pages long. However, it failed to "clarify the cause of the nuclear crisis and propose measures needed to contribute to the safety of nuclear power stations," as it was required to. The panel was supposed to dig up the facts behind the disaster, get to the bottom of what happened and clarify where responsibility lies. This it fails to do. Rather, it makes excuses for what critics have called TEPCO's inappropriate response to the crisis. It's questionable whether such a company can continue to be allowed to operate nuclear plants.

For example, the government's investigative panel pointed out in its interim report in December last year that workers' skills were not up to operating cooling systems in the plant's No. 1 and 3 reactors. In response, the TEPCO final report argues that workers' lack of skill did not adversely affect the subsequent response to the accident. However, it fails to discuss how the situation would have developed if the workers had responded to the accident in a different way.

Moreover, the TEPCO report shifts the responsibility for predicting the tsunami risk to the nuclear plant to others, stating that "it is desirable for a specialized research organization, which is a government body, to show a coordinated view on the matter."

The report also concludes that then Prime Minister Naoto Kan and his staff's intervention in TEPCO's response to the crisis "promoted useless confusion." If a third-party body said so, it would have some power to persuade, but such an argument by the entity responsible for the disaster sounds like an attempt to duck responsibility.

Numerous questions remain regarding the crisis. The report concludes that the primary source of radioactive substances that spread to Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture and other areas northwest of the plant was its No. 2 reactor. However, no hydrogen explosion occurred in that particular unit, and which part of the reactor was damaged and the route of radioactive substances leaking into the air remain unclear. The report also states that primary devices in the reactor were not damaged by the earthquake, based on such data as the pressure and temperature in the reactor. TEPCO, however, has not yet confirmed the actual condition of the No. 2 reactor assembly, as persistently high radiation inside the reactor building have ruled out on-the-spot inspections.

The way that TEPCO discloses information has also been called into question. TEPCO headquarters and the Fukushima No. 1 plant are connected by a direct communications line, and video conferences between workers at these two locations have been filmed. The footage is crucial material for the effort to get to the bottom of TEPCO's response to the crisis, but the utility has refused to disclose it, citing concern for the privacy of those involved in the conferences. It would be a serious problem if the company were reluctant to disclose information because shareholders have filed damages suits personally against former and current board members. Accident victims have also sued the company.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safety regulations stipulate that utilities are primarily responsible for the safety of nuclear plants they operate. Therefore, TEPCO has absolutely no way to evade its responsibility for the Fukushima nuclear crisis, and it is TEPCO's minimum responsibility to fully disclose information on the crisis.

The Fukushima nuclear disaster investigative panels of the executive and legislative branches of the government -- set to compile their own final reports shortly -- should release the results of their investigations in a way that can convince the public.

Transparency, please

Sunday, June 24, 2012

Utilities paid local governments ¥73 billion in dividends: sources

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120624a2.html#.T-bXgpFIwpU>

Power companies paid out about ¥72.7 billion in dividends to municipalities nationwide in the last five years, sources said Saturday.

Local governments that received the funds, especially those that are leading shareholders in their regional utilities, will likely come under pressure to more actively convey residents' views on key issues, including nuclear safety and electricity charges, according to experts.

The city of Osaka, which is the top shareholder in Kansai Electric Power Co. with a stake of around 8.9 percent, received more than ¥5 billion in annual dividends since fiscal 2007, while Yamaguchi Prefecture, whose 13.3 percent stake in Chugoku Electric Power Co. makes it the utility's largest shareholder, netted about ¥2.4 billion in dividends each year.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government, the leading shareholder in Tokyo Electric Power Co. with a roughly 2.6 percent stake, was paid around ¥10.8 billion in dividends annually.

The metropolitan government was using the funds to cover the cost of running the capital's public bus service, but that source of income has dried up since the nuclear crisis at Tepco's Fukushima No. 1 power plant started in March 2011.

Meanwhile, both Miyagi and Aomori prefectures own shares in Tohoku Electric Power Co.

Many local governments operated their own power generation facilities before the war but in 1941 were ordered by the government to hand them over to regional power companies. In exchange, they received shares in the utilities.

Gov't protecting nuke industry

June 23, 2012

Nuclear power plant collusion

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/print/ed20120623a1.html>

As the March 2011 reactor meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 power plant demonstrated, loss of power sources for an extended period of time at a nuclear power plant — known as a "station blackout" (SBO) — can lead to catastrophic results. It was recently reported that the Nuclear Safety Commission colluded with Tepco over the nation's SBO-related safety standard about two decades ago.

This revelation and the recent government decision to restart the Nos. 3 and 4 reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture only serve to reinforce the **widespread belief that the government is continuing to protect the interests of the nuclear power industry even in the wake of the Fukushima disaster.**

In 1990, the government issued a safety standard stating that there is no need to take into account SBOs lasting 30 minutes or longer in designing a nuclear power plant. Because preparations for long SBOs had become obligatory overseas, in 1991 the NSC established a working group to consider a revision of the safety standard. The group consisted of five experts and officials from Tepco, Kepco and the then Japan Atomic Energy Research Institute, which had a cooperative relationship with the power companies.

Because Tepco and Kepco opposed incorporating preparations for long SBOs into the design standard, the then Science and Technology Agency, which was serving as NSC's secretariat, asked the two power companies to "compose sentences" stating why there is no need to consider preparations for SBOs lasting more than 30 minutes and to submit them.

The working group subsequently adopted Tepco's explanation that nuclear power plant design in Japan has an adequate margin of safety, and that if a nuclear power plant is operated properly, the level of safety will be sufficient.

In June 1993, the working group issued a report saying that even if an SBO occurs, it would not lead to a severe accident. As a result, the government safety standard was not revised.

It is clear that what the NSC basically did was let a power company write the draft of its report.

Given that the meltdown at Fukushima No. 1 might have been prevented had the safety standard been revised, those involved in the process should be deeply ashamed of their actions.

In October 2011, the NSC purportedly made public "all" the documents it had related to the process. Only after the Diet committee investigating the Fukushima nuclear accident demanded further disclosure did the NSC release additional documents in early June revealing that the working group had asked Tepco and Kepco to "compose sentences."

The NSC must make public all its documents before it is abolished to make way for the establishment of a new nuclear regulatory authority around September

APEC draft

June 24, 2012

APEC ministers to agree on importance of nuclear energy use: draft

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120624p2g00m0dm009000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Energy ministers of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum will agree at their two-day meeting from Sunday in St. Petersburg, Russia, on the importance of using nuclear energy to reduce carbon dioxide emission and to meet the growing demand for energy, a draft of the joint declaration obtained by Kyodo News showed Saturday.

"The APEC region recognizes the importance of the **safe and secure uses** of peaceful nuclear energy, and its potential in diversifying our energy mix, meeting the growing energy demand, and in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the region despite the tragic accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station" triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, the draft of the "St. Petersburg Declaration" said.

The draft showed that the declaration, to be adopted Monday, will largely reflect the views of countries promoting nuclear power plants, led by Russia and the United States, while urging Japan to share the lessons it has learnt from the Fukushima crisis.

While the member countries and relevant international organizations coordinate efforts to ensure nuclear safety and dealing with possible problems, "We expect that Japan should contribute to the international approach by sharing its knowledge and experience, including information on the Fukushima Daiichi accident," the draft said, adding they "recognize the progress made by the Japanese government to bring the station to a stable condition."

Particular attention should be paid to strengthening cooperation by interested member economies of APEC and the relevant international organizations, notably the International Atomic Energy Agency, including "sharing knowledge and experience on nuclear technologies and safety at nuclear power stations and related facilities to improve nuclear safety standards, and coordinate emergency response and preparedness mechanisms," the draft said.

Noting that natural gas emits relatively small amounts of carbon dioxide, the APEC economies recognize it is important "to evaluate the production, trade potential and environmental impact of shale gas and other unconventional gas resources," according to the draft.

They will also promote steady investment in natural gas infrastructure, including liquefaction facilities, the draft said.

Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano will attend the meeting from Japan and is expected to hold bilateral talks with the representatives from Russia, the United States and Australia.

Saturday, June 23, 2012

APEC meet to uphold nuke power

Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nb20120623a5.html#.T-bfApFIwpU>

Energy ministers of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum members are expected to issue a joint statement after their meeting next week that will confirm the importance of nuclear energy, Jiji Press learned Thursday.

The ministers are expected to highlight the role of nuclear power in securing energy security by reducing dependence on fossil fuels and combating climate change by reducing carbon dioxide emissions, sources said.

Russia, the chair of the Sunday-Monday meeting in St. Petersburg, maintains its policy to promote nuclear power despite the triple-meltdown crisis that started in March 2011 at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No.1 nuclear plant.

As an important means of acquiring foreign currency, Russia intends to expand nuclear power plant exports. The joint statement will reflect Russia's stance, the sources said.

At the meeting, Japan, which plans to reduce its dependence on nuclear energy, will explain its responses to the nuclear accident and steps it has taken to restart idled reactors at a Kansai Electric Power Co. plant. It will urge other APEC members to share technical knowledge on nuclear safety measures.

The joint statement will underline the need for efforts to boost nuclear safety, in addition to underscoring the importance of atomic power, the sources said.

At the meeting, the ministers will discuss various issues, such as energy conservation, ways to promote smart communities utilizing renewable energy, emergency responses to geopolitical risks in the Middle East, and promotion of natural gas use.

Board of Audit to check on TEPCO

June 25, 2012

Government watchdog to audit TEPCO

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120625_25.html

Japan's Board of Audit is to evaluate the activity of Tokyo Electric Power Company, operator of the disaster-hit Fukushima nuclear plant, as the company receives a massive injection of public funds.

This is a rare move for the watchdog, which normally only audits government and semi-public entities. However, TEPCO will be temporarily placed under state control following the capital injection, with the government taking more than 50 percent of the company's voting rights.

The government has set aside 30 billion dollars in financial assistance to help TEPCO pay compensation to victims of last year's nuclear accident.

The government will also provide some 12.5 billion dollars in public funds to aid the power company in balancing its books.

Last month, TEPCO announced it will cut more than 41 billion dollars in costs by the end of fiscal 2021, in line with government-approved measures.

The Board of Audit will evaluate as early as this summer whether TEPCO is fulfilling its obligations under the plan.

Revision of Atomic Energy Law (part 3)

June 26, 2012

Atomic energy law's sly alteration is abuse of legislative process

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20120626p2a00m0na004000c.html>

In addition to "decisive" politics and "indecisive" politics, there is such a thing as "overlooked" politics.

The Atomic Energy Basic Law was amended in the shadows of the hoopla surrounding the three-party agreement on a tax hike. The new clause allows the possibility of nuclear armament open to interpretation. It was an underhanded deal, in which an amendment to the Atomic Basic Law was merely incorporated into the appendix of a law on the establishment of a nuclear regulatory panel.

It's not just anti-nuclear activists and those in support of abandoning nuclear power generation who have been shocked by the stunt. Those in the pro-nuclear power camp who are searching for a way to rebuild a united front have also expressed criticism.

This is no way to win back the public's confidence.

The law on the establishment of a nuclear regulatory commission was hastily passed. A revised bill that the ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), and opposition parties the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the New Komeito modified and agreed to was submitted to the Diet on June 15, and passed on June 20. The process of establishing the commission had been sped up in light of the reactivation of Kansai Electric Power Company's Oi Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture.

Only at a meeting of an upper house environmental committee on June 20, when a DPJ lawmaker questioned whether nuclear arms development was the purpose of passing the bill, did it become public that a clause in the Basic Law had been revised.

The legislator lamented that the bill had been submitted just a few days earlier, and that they had not been given resources to compare the old and new versions of the modified clause. Also, while the revision had been initiated by the LDP, the clause in question was not mentioned in a bill outline that had been distributed at an LDP meeting on the evening of June 14, immediately after the three-party tax agreement. One policy expert in the LDP was even unclear on how and why things unfolded the way they did.

So what exactly does the clause that has fueled suspicions about its intentions say? The Atomic Energy Basic Law stipulates in Article 2 that research into and use of atomic power are restricted to peaceful purposes, championing democratic, independent and public disclosure principles. The appendix in question adds a sentence stating Japan's atomic energy policy should contribute to national security.

What constitutes "national security?" Asked by the aforementioned DPJ member whether nuclear arms development was the new regulatory body bill's true aim, the House of Representatives member of the

LDP who submitted the bill denied that was the case, saying, "The purpose is to centralize the safety of nuclear power, safeguards by the International Atomic Energy Agency to prevent the military use of nuclear materials, and nuclear security to prevent terrorism into one commission."

Since June 20, various media have reported on the furtive move, with one paper carrying the front-page headline, "Nuclear power constitution changed surreptitiously, concerns toward military use." A deputy press secretary of South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade has also said that the ministry is "watching the situation closely."

It's not surprising that the bill came from the LDP. In post-war Japan, countless politicians and bureaucrats have revealed their off-the-record hopes for the country's nuclear armament. Japan's latent nuclear capability was what lent moral support to the leaders of this economic giant, who ostensibly were against nuclear weapons.

What then, is the reason for Japanese politicians to reveal their once masked pride in latent nuclear capability now?

"It probably comes down to the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant," said a bureaucrat with whom I've been acquainted for years. "If the country moves toward the abandonment of nuclear power, that facility will lose meaning. If it is legally granted legitimacy as a facility for the military use of nuclear materials, then it can continue to exist. I believe that there were LDP lawmakers who thought of that, and bureaucrats who supported them.

"The revision of relevant laws through their incorporation in appendices should only take place when a change in one law necessarily involves a change in another. The latest case has been an abuse of that process. It stands legally, but I think it's wholly inappropriate as legislation."

The Atomic Energy Basic Law went into effect in 1955, the same year that the LDP was founded. Fifty-seven years have since passed, and we are moving further and further away from democratic, independent and public disclosure principles. (By Takao Yamada, Expert Senior Writer)

TEPCO bitterly criticized by shareholders

June 27, 2012

TEPCO shareholders' meeting marked by calls to break away from nuclear power

<http://mainichi.jp/graph/2012/06/27/20120627p2a00m0na020000c/001.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) came under bitter criticism over its corporate management and handling of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant at a general shareholders meeting in Tokyo on June 27, the utility's second since the outbreak of the crisis.

At 10 a.m., 3,112 shareholders filed into Yoyogi National Gymnasium in Tokyo's Shibuya Ward for the meeting -- highlighting the high interest in a horde of issues including huge compensation payments over the nuclear disaster triggered by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. The shareholders' meeting kicked off in a highly tumultuous atmosphere, with civic groups and ordinary citizens also gathering outside the venue, calling for a nuclear-free energy policy.

Individual shareholders and other interested parties started turning up shortly after 8 a.m., about two hours before the start of the meeting. Among them was a 45-year-old company employee from Tokyo's Edogawa Ward, who held a fan reading "No nuclear power."

"The people of Fukushima had to leave their homes. The top executives who promoted nuclear power should do their utmost to fully compensate them," he said.

The 45-year-old said he had become a shareholder of TEPCO after the Fukushima nuclear disaster in a bid to convey his thoughts to TEPCO executives. He added that he planned to support a proposal to be made during the meeting by a civic group of 402 shareholders that TEPCO's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant in Niigata Prefecture be decommissioned and a thermal power plant be built there.

Among the other shareholders attending the meeting were two members of German environmental group Ethecon Foundation Ethics & Economics, including its chairman Axel Koehler-Schnura. They, as TEPCO shareholders, planned to present a "Black Planet Award" trophy, a black filthy globe, to TEPCO management. The award is given each year to the company that has produced the worst effects on the global environment.

"TEPCO caused unrecoverable damage to the global environment and the human rights of people throughout the world," the chairman said.

Meanwhile, several shareholders voiced support for the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's proposal to ensure transparency of TEPCO's management and introduce competition in the power industry.

Tomoyuki Tsukuda, a 37-year-old resident of Ichikawa, Chiba Prefecture, who attended TEPCO's shareholders' meeting for the first time this year, said, "TEPCO plans to give bonuses to its employees, but I wonder if money has been paid to those workers who have been dealing with the disaster (at the nuclear plant). Bonuses should be given to such people."

Fumiko Murakami, a 63-year-old housewife from Kisarazu, Chiba Prefecture, commented, "I have a feeling that the top management has released only self-serving information. I want them to promise to disclose information honestly."

Masanori Tagawa, 63, from Nara, called for the company to gradually break away from nuclear power. He said he would support the proposal to abandon nuclear power.

"It is unavoidable to operate nuclear reactors during the transition to clean energy, but I don't think the current measures can ensure safety," he explained.

Also among the shareholders were former TEPCO workers. Mikio Nakayama, 72, who served as a member of the Nerima Ward Assembly and the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly, said, "Ideally, we should reduce nuclear power in stages, but when I think of people's livelihood in the immediate future, I would support the reactivation of nuclear reactors." He added: "TEPCO's responsibility is heavy, but nuclear power has been promoted as national policy. More national debate is needed."

Journalists were allowed to observe the shareholders' meeting live on a monitor. Last year the screen image was so blurred that the faces of the board members on the stage could barely be identified. There was some improvement this year, with close-ups of the board members who were speaking, but filming and broadcasting of the question-and-answer session were forbidden.

"We have not obtained approval from shareholders," a TEPCO spokesperson said.

TEPCO shareholders' meeting starts off tumultuously

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120627p2g00m0dm061000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s meeting of shareholders started off tumultuously Wednesday morning, with individual shareholders interrupting proceedings and its largest stockholder coming to the fore to press the utility to reform itself following the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster.

The company known as TEPCO is seeking approval for changes in its articles of incorporation necessary to receive a planned 1 trillion yen injection of public funds, which would effectively put the country's largest utility under state control.

At the outset of the annual meeting, outgoing Tokyo Electric Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata apologized over the nuclear crisis and vowed to "start afresh from zero" to restore public confidence.

The proceedings were interrupted a few times as shareholders proposed motions such as to seek the dismissal of the moderator, served by Katsumata.

Also on the agenda are votes on shareholder proposals, including those from the Tokyo metropolitan government, the largest shareholder with about a 2.7 percent stake.

It is the first time that TEPCO has faced a proposal from a municipal shareholder, suggesting a change in the behavior of local governments, often seen as "silent shareholders," amid growing public criticism of the utility's move to raise electricity rates for households.

The Tokyo metropolitan government proposed that TEPCO stipulate in its corporate rules that it will "put customer service first" as its management philosophy and ensure transparency in management by disclosing information over electricity retail prices.

Tokyo Vice Gov. Naoki Inose appeared at the meeting to explain the proposals, saying, "What is needed for TEPCO, which has to restart from zero, is this kind of change in its way of thinking."

A group of individual shareholders, meanwhile, proposed the utility's withdrawal from nuclear power generation, an attempt it has been making repeatedly.

The company's board of directors has made clear its oppositions to such shareholder proposals, and they are likely to be voted down as it appears difficult to muster enough support from other shareholders.

The company also sought for approval to select 11 board members including Kazuhiko Shimokobe, a lawyer who is set to become next chairman.

TEPCO has decided to revamp its management as it will receive taxpayers' money as part of a 10-year business plan aimed at helping the company overcome its financial plight following the world's worst nuclear accident since the 1986 Chernobyl disaster.

Based on the restructuring plan, TEPCO will avoid insolvency and continue to deal with three key tasks -- paying trillions of yen in compensation related to the disaster, scrapping the Fukushima plant's crippled reactors and providing stable electricity supply to areas including Tokyo.

Shareholders' antinuke position no much use

June 27, 2012

Utilities defy shareholders' antinuke calls

Investors OK nationalization of Tepco; Kepco foils Hashimoto

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120627x1.html#.T-spm5FlwpU>

By KAZUAKI NAGATA and ERIC JOHNSTON
Staff writers

Nine electric utilities held annual shareholders' meetings Wednesday, with antinuclear investors causing a ruckus by pushing them to shut down their atomic plants and increase the use of renewable energy.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Kansai Electric Power Co. also faced rare criticism from local governments, which own a considerable stake in the regional power companies and have started scrutinizing their financial structures after the catastrophe at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"Public confidence in Tepco has been damaged," and the company has to seriously try to change itself, Tokyo Vice Gov. Naoki Inose told the meeting. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government is Tepco's largest stakeholder.

Shareholders voted in favor of the plan to nationalize the utility.

Not a single proposal by shareholders was approved.

Kepeco shareholders said no to all 28 motions made Wednesday to shift from nuclear power and fossil fuels to renewable energy, including one backed by the mayors of Osaka, Kobe and Kyoto that would have obliged the utility to eventually abolish its 11 reactors.

The rejections were not unexpected after Kepeco's management announced earlier this month it opposed all attempts to reduce reliance on nuclear power and it was clear the majority of shareholders would vote against the motions.

But the defeat is likely to deal a blow to Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto's reputation as an effective antinuclear mayor, as he turned down a plebiscite drive by Osaka residents back in February to get the city out of nuclear power by saying it was better to oppose Kepeco at the shareholders' meeting.

The city of Osaka, which owns about 9 percent of Kepeco's stock, was represented by Hashimoto, who warned that the world is changing and Kepeco needs to embrace renewable energy or risk going out of business.

"At this rate, Kepeco is going to end up bankrupt. Explanations about the future risk (of continuing with nuclear power) are insufficient," Hashimoto said during the meeting.

He then posed detailed questions about the problem of spent nuclear fuel, including how Kepeco is going to store its fuel in the mid- and long term. He also asked what would happen to Kepeco's costs if its 11 reactors were halted permanently.

Kepeco officials sidestepped most of his questions about spent fuel storage plans, but they said abolishing the reactors would mean spending ¥900 billion on replacement fuel sources.

Meanwhile, Tokyo Vice Gov. Inose slammed Tepco for planning to pay employee bonuses this winter. He pointed out that Resona Bank and Japan Airlines Corp., which both received public funds for rehabilitation, did not pay bonuses for several seasons during their rehabilitation.

Tepco will be selling ¥1 trillion worth of shares to the government-backed Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund, which will have a stake exceeding 50 percent.

A shareholder proposed unsuccessfully that Tepco move its headquarters to Fukushima Prefecture. "That way you can give more sincere support" to the disaster victims, he said.

Some shareholders defended the utility, urging it to insist more loudly that the crisis is not just Tepco's fault, because the government failed to regulate it to prepare for the huge tsunami.

TEPCO after public trust

June 28, 2012

TEPCO's new chairman promises reform

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120628_26.html

The new Chairman of Tokyo Electric Power Company says he will push to reform management to regain public trust following last year's Fukushima nuclear accident.

Kazuhiko Shimokobe spoke at a news conference on Thursday, one day after his appointment as TEPCO chairman at a shareholders meeting.

Shimokobe said TEPCO is a huge monopoly and has failed to pay much attention to customers' needs.

He said he will make sure TEPCO listens carefully to outside criticism of its corporate culture and that every TEPCO employee takes customers' needs into account.

TEPCO has been criticized not just for its handling of last year's accident but also for unilaterally imposing price increases.

Shimokobe is a 64-year-old lawyer. He served as chairman of the government-backed Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund that helped TEPCO compensate victims of the disaster.

Shimokobe said it would be very hard for TEPCO to restart idled reactors at its nuclear plant in Kashiwazaki-Kariwa in Niigata without consent from the local community.

But he said he is keenly aware of the harsh reality that a significant delay in the planned resumption early next year would adversely affect electricity supply. He added that at the moment, he is not considering asking for higher electricity rates if the reactors are not restarted as planned.

Utilities should put customers first

June 28, 2012

Editorials: Major power companies must put the customer first

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20120628p2a00m0na002000c.html>

Nine electric power companies came under mounting pressure at their respective shareholders meetings on June 27 to initiate reforms to better serve their customers.

Tokyo Vice Gov. Naoki Inose attended the shareholders meeting of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) as the representative of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, the top shareholder in the utility. He criticized a plan by the company, which owns the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, to raise electricity charges, and demanded that the firm further streamline its operations. The metropolitan government submitted proposals on measures to ensure transparency of TEPCO's management and on the introduction of market mechanisms pertaining to investment in plants and equipment.

TEPCO has come under fire for being **bureaucratic and dogmatic in its response to demands for compensation** over the nuclear crisis and its plan to increase its electric power charges. The metropolitan government's proposals reflect the public's opinion of the company. The proposals were not approved, however, because financial institutions and many other major shareholders sided with TEPCO management.

Nevertheless, the company's plans to accept an infusion of 1 trillion yen in public funds and replace most of its board members were endorsed. Since the company is set to rehabilitate itself by using such a massive amount of taxpayers' money, it must not take advantage of its regional monopoly to continue its arrogant management practices.

It is TEPCO's responsibility to speedily release accurate information to boost managerial transparency and promote competition as part of an effort to reduce customers' electricity bills. **The utility should respect the spirit of the metropolitan government's proposals and aid consumers to the maximum possible extent, even though the metropolitan government's proposals were voted down.**

In Osaka, Mayor Toru Hashimoto attended the shareholders meeting of Kansai Electric Power Co. (KEPCO) as a representative of the Osaka Municipal Government, the utility's top stockholder. The municipal government submitted a proposal to quickly decommission all of KEPCO's nuclear power plants, but the measure was voted down. Still, as shareholders asked questions about the company's plan to resume operations at the idled No. 3 and 4 reactors of the Oi Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture, the meeting lasted for a record 5 1/2 hours.

Proposals that nuclear power stations be decreased or completely shut down were submitted at the shareholders meetings of other utilities, reflecting the **public's growing concern about the safety of**

nuclear plants since the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis and increasing distrust in utilities that operate such power stations.

The national government's failure to work out a clear-cut atomic power policy appears to be fueling such concern and distrust. All power suppliers that operate nuclear plants must remember it is impermissible for them to reactivate these plants without ensuring safety.

The central government is considering reforming the electric power supply system in a bid to put an end to major electric power companies' regional monopolies. We urge all of these companies to take advantage of proposals made by shareholders at their June 27 meetings to transform their management in a way that will benefit consumers.

Leakage of secret documents

June 30, 2012

Govt: 6 classified documents leaked

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120629006730.htm>

A farm ministry internal investigation team on Friday confirmed six classified government documents have been leaked and indicated a former senior vice minister was "highly likely" to have been involved in the leakage.

Li Chunguang, a 45-year-old first secretary at the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo, is suspected of having obtained the classified documents about a program to export agricultural products to China.

Regarding how the documents were leaked, the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry's investigation team said former Senior Vice Minister Nobutaka Tsutsui is suspected of being involved.

However, the team said it has not been able to confirm his involvement.

Tsukasa Iwamoto, a senior vice minister who heads the investigation team, said leakage of four documents classified as "Level 3," the highest confidentiality level, and two official telegrams were confirmed.

After the media reported the leaks, the investigation team questioned the head of the Promotion Association of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries & Foods Exporting to China, who used to be a state-funded secretary to a House of Representatives member. He admitted to having obtained the documents in question.

The association runs a program to export agricultural products to China.

Of the documents, one Level 3 document described the future prospects of domestic rice supply and demand that was deeply affected by the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Copies of the document, which was drawn up for Tsutsui, were distributed to just seven people, including Tsutsui and senior officials of the ministry's Management Improvement Bureau, Iwamoto said.

However, five of the officials, excluding Tsutsui and his then private secretary, had no contact with the head of the association.

According to Iwamoto, Tsutsui is the only person who has received all four Level 3 documents, but he was quoted as saying that he never showed the documents to any outsider.

Meanwhile, right after the farm ministry received two official telegrams from the Foreign Ministry on March 15, Tsutsui's secretary sent them by fax from Tsutsui's office at the ministry to his office in the Diet members' office building under instructions from Tsutsui, Iwamoto said.

However, Tsutsui was quoted as saying he did not remember giving them to the association's head.

The head also said he did not remember from whom he received the documents, Iwamoto said.

As the head shredded the ministry's documents including the six classified ones before questioning, the investigation team was not able to say Tsutsui was involved in the leakage, he said.

Iwamoto also said the team also failed to confirm whether Li gained knowledge of the contents of the documents.

Police have sent papers on Li to the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office on suspicion of violating the Alien Registration Law.

Atomic Energy Basic Law (Part 4)

July 2, 2012

Business-as-usual alteration of nuclear law unsettling

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20120702p2a00m0na005000c.html>

The long dominant and now largest opposition Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) insists that an amendment to the Atomic Energy Basic Act is not a ploy to pave the way toward Japan's acquisition of nuclear arms. Moreover, the House of Representatives Legislation Bureau says the steps taken to institute the legal amendment have not violated any bylaws or regulations.

But there's something unsettling about the whole thing. First, there's the question of what a "basic act" is supposed to be. One can't help but feel that a foundational legal framework for atomic energy policy is being altered as if it were a routine process.

As mentioned in last week's installment of this column, Article 2 of the Atomic Energy Basic Law stipulates that research into and use of atomic power are restricted to peaceful purposes, championing democratic, independent and public disclosure principles. In the latest amendment, the clause that Japan's atomic energy policy should contribute to national security -- with the wording as it was originally suggested by the LDP -- was added. Suspicions have subsequently emerged that the revision is either an attempt to tie the conservative ideology of self sufficiency and self defense to nuclear arms development, or to allow for the continued operation and possible military use of the Rokkasho Nuclear Reprocessing Plant.

The national security clause was included as an appendix to a bill for the establishment of a new nuclear regulatory body in late June, and initially went unnoticed even by newspaper reporters.

Soon after the bill's passage, newspapers carried headlines decrying the "surreptitious alterations," and voicing worries concerning the military use of nuclear power. Former Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhisa Shiozaki, who heads an LDP project team on the establishment of the new panel, objected. He said that there were absolutely no military implications or alterations to the three non-nuclear principles in the use of the expression "national security" in the bill's appendix, and that the use of an appendix itself is standard procedure, and hardly counts as act of stealth.

Meanwhile, Masayoshi Yoshino, who, along with Shiozaki, was instrumental in bringing together the LDP proposal, also denied any ulterior motives for the amendment.

"The issue always came up during intra-party discussions, but there is no truth to the allegations" that the basic law was revised based on policy interests, he said. "In the bill establishing the new nuclear regulatory body, we included a clause saying that 'Japan's atomic energy policy should contribute to national security.' But that means we will work toward nuclear non-proliferation and take anti-terrorism measures. It was merely the result of our consultation with the legislation bureau to insure consistency with other laws."

Yoshino, whose constituency is based in central southern Fukushima Prefecture, hit hardest by the ongoing nuclear crisis, is distressed by how some have responded to the latest move.

"Under the law as it was, if a nuclear armament advocate were to become prime minister, the government could have refused international agencies from inspecting our nuclear facilities. The intention of the new law was to prevent such a thing from happening," he said. "I didn't think we'd be accused of moving toward nuclear arms development."

Bureau officials say there were no procedural violations, a statement backed up by "Workbook Hosei Shitsumu," a legislative manual that bureau staff have with them at all times. "For the purpose of establishing a new law, existing laws shall be amended through appendices," it reads on page 343.

The Atomic Energy Basic Act went into effect in 1955, 10 years after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and a year after the Japanese fishing boat Daigo Fukuryu Maru was hit by fallout from a U.S. nuclear test in the Pacific. It gave rise to heated debate on the interchangeability of nuclear technology used for peaceful and military purposes, as well as on mutual dependence.

The three principles of democracy, independence and openness in nuclear science emerged on the initiative of renowned physicists such as Hideki Yukawa, Shinichiro Tomonaga, Mitsuo Taketani and Shoichi Sakata, and were incorporated into the Science Council of Japan's statement on nuclear power. Article 2 of the Atomic Energy Basic Law is a reflection of that.

Fundamental questions about nuclear power have emerged once again, and yet among the politicians, bureaucrats and academics of today, the passion and sense of crisis that existed 57 years ago is gravely lacking. The standard procedures for handling the minute details of establishing a new regulatory body is one thing. But the utterly business-like manner in which the basic principles behind a basic law have been altered is unnerving. (By Takao Yamada, Senior Expert Writer)

A thousand times more expensive than regular nuclear power

July 4, 2012

Monju costs far surpass usual nukes

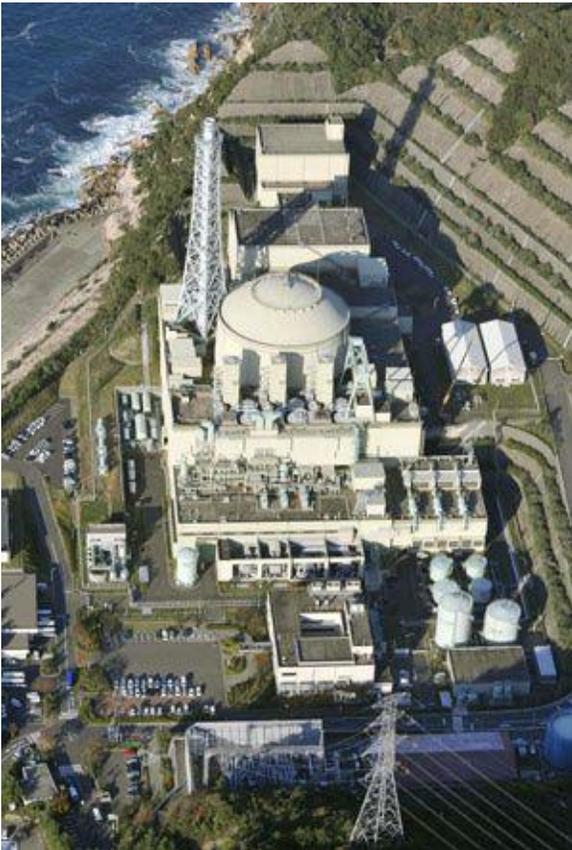
Trouble-prone reactor has rung up far higher tab than initially planned

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120704f1.html#.T_RyCpFIwpU

Kyodo

If the troubled Monju prototype fast breeder reactor project continues, its costs will swell to more than ¥1.4 trillion and its power generation costs will be ¥10,000 per kwh, roughly 1,000 times greater than a regular reactor, according to data compiled by Kyodo News.

Does it have the future?: The prototype fast breeder reactor Monju sits idle in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, last November. KYODO



Construction of the reactor in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, started in 1985 as part of the government's goal to establish a nuclear fuel cycle to make use of spent nuclear fuel at conventional atomic plants that run on uranium. Monju uses a uranium and plutonium mix known as **MOX** as fuel.

The facility operated by the government-affiliated Power Reactor and Nuclear Fuel Development Corp. first reached criticality — where a chain reaction of nuclear fission is sustained — in 1994.

But sodium, used as a coolant, leaked during its test run in December 1995. Around 640 kg of leaked sodium reacted with air and sparked a fire, forcing a prolonged suspension.

The operator was also caught trying to cover the incident up. Workers made a false report about and truncated video footage of the accident.

The operator was revamped into the Japan Nuclear Cycle Development Institute, which was subsequently merged with the Japan Atomic Energy Research Institute in 2005 to create the Japan Atomic Energy Agency.

The prototype reactor, designed to produce more fuel than it consumes, also faced other problems, prompting further delays in its restart initially set for March 2008.

In an application for a permit to build the reactor filed in 1980, the government estimated ¥322 billion in construction costs.

A probe by the Board of Audit found that total costs spent through fiscal 2010 came to around ¥1.08 trillion.

On June 12, the science and technology ministry announced Monju would require an additional ¥160 billion to ¥170 billion over 10 years if it is reactivated.

The Japan Nuclear Cycle Development Institute calculated in 2002 that decommissioning Monju and disposing of the radioactive materials would cost ¥174 billion.

Adding these figures up, the sum will top ¥1.4 trillion.

The reactor, meanwhile, generated a total of 102.3 million kwh between August 1995 and the sodium leak. The unit cost will thus be ¥10,000 per kwh, around 1,000 times greater than the current power generation cost of nuclear power stations, estimated at ¥9 per kwh, and around 300 times greater than solar power's roughly ¥30.

The colossal development cost of the Monju project was a hot topic at a meeting of the Lower House Committee on Audit and Oversight of Administration as well as the government's council on administrative reforms last year.

The science and technology ministry has appropriated ¥17.5 billion in what it said was the minimum needed for maintenance, saying it will not seek to restart the reactor this fiscal year.

The government has repeatedly been putting off the target date to commercialize a fast breeder reactor. Under a long-term plan formulated in 1967, the target was around 1985. Under the current nuclear framework worked out in 2005, it is set at around 2050.

The Japan Atomic Energy Commission is apologetic and suggests no checks were imposed on Monju's costs.

"Over the years, a substantial amount of funds has been poured (into the project), but it has not yet been put to practical use," says a nuclear fuel cycle report adopted June 21 by the commission.

The government has said it will seek to rely less on nuclear power in light of the Fukushima crisis. The costly Monju will likely be a test case to see if it is serious about such a position.

Promise of neutrality

July 4, 2012

Nuclear watchdog to bar industry insiders

Kyodo

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120704a4.html#.T_RxyZF1wpU

The government said Tuesday **it will not allow people who have worked for nuclear power plant operators or related organizations over the past three years to join the new atomic regulatory commission.**

People who have received around ¥500,000 annually in remuneration from the same nuclear plant operator over the past three years will also not be selected, nuclear disaster minister Goshi Hosono said in announcing the qualifications for commission members to ensure the entity's neutrality.

The two requirements are not stipulated in the recently enacted law that authorizes the creation of the new nuclear regulatory body, but the government added the "strict criteria" because its handling of regulations has come under scrutiny since the Fukushima nuclear crisis, Hosono said.

"Based on the qualifications, we will narrow the number of appropriate people," he added.

Related organizations could include nuclear reactor makers, the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan and the Central Research Institute of the Electric Power Industry. Lecture fees and payments for writing are considered remuneration.

To ensure transparency, people chosen as commissioners will be asked to disclose the amount of donations they have received in the past three years and the source of the money.

They will also be required to report the number of their students who have found jobs with nuclear plant operators.

The government plans to launch the regulatory authority by September, replacing the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, which is part of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, a promoter of nuclear power.

The appointments of chairman and four commissioners of the new regulatory body will need Diet approval.

Looking for more money

Government spending on reconstruction work related to the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami over the next five years will likely exceed the ¥19 trillion originally planned, Finance Minister Jun Azumi said Tuesday, indicating the need for a supplementary budget.

The spending plan, officials said, can be raised to more than ¥20 trillion to offer more grants to affected local governments and help handle the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

"In a period between the second half of this year and next year, we are likely to face a situation in which we cannot avoid spending beyond the ¥19 trillion framework," Azumi said. "We must consider measures to deal with this development."

He said the government can use ¥1.98 trillion in surplus funds carried over from fiscal 2011 budgets. "We will discuss (whether to formulate) a supplementary budget," he added.

A year ago, the government said it would spend around ¥19 trillion on the five-year reconstruction program and an additional ¥4 trillion over the following five years, with the framework subject to revision.

"Network problems"?

July 5, 2012

Website of panel investigating Fukushima accident becomes inaccessible

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120705p2g00m0dm037000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The website of a parliament-appointed panel investigating the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant became inaccessible on Wednesday night, panel officials said, blaming **network problems experienced by a company that maintains computer servers for it.**

Multiple websites hosted by the company are experiencing similar trouble, they said, with the company saying it has come under cyberattacks from overseas.

The investigation commission, led by Kiyoshi Kurokawa, a professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo, has been **proactively disclosing information by streaming panel deliberations live on the Internet,** for instance.

The commission is set to issue on Thursday a report on the causes and developments of the nuclear accident, while streaming live a news conference held by Kurokawa and other panel members.

TEPCO's reaction

July 5, 2012

TEPCO, government, react to panel report

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120705_35.html

The operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant has come out against a Diet-appointed panel's view that last year's earthquake, and not just the tsunami, may have damaged the plant.

Tokyo Electric Power Company spokesman Junichi Matsumoto told reporters on Thursday that operation records and other data do not suggest any damage came from the jolt.

Matsumoto was commenting on the expert panel's report released earlier in the day, which said it cannot be ruled out that damage to key safety systems came from the jolt.

But he added that the company will carefully study the report before deciding what to do.

Meanwhile, the government's top spokesman said he wants to express respect for the panel's efforts in issuing the report based on intensive hearings.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura told reporters that the government will take necessary steps by taking the panel's views seriously, along with a government panel's report expected later in July.

Industry minister Yukio Edano, who was chief Cabinet secretary at the time of the accident, also said he will take Thursday's report seriously.

Edano said the government will act with a serious awareness that the accident still leaves Fukushima prefectural residents and others facing a lot of difficulties.

Manipulation, manipulation

July 9, 2012

Atomic Energy Commission held undocumented, closed-door meetings for more than a decade

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120709a3.html#.T_rLpZF1wpU

Kyodo

The Japan Atomic Energy Commission has held closed preparatory sessions for more than 10 years prior to its open meetings every week, sometimes deliberating important matters of nuclear energy policy without keeping minutes, former commissioners and government sources said Saturday.

Prior to the regular meetings every Tuesday, the five-member commission tasked with deciding basic nuclear energy policies has held unofficial meetings every Thursday attended by officials of relevant ministries and sometimes private business operators.

The revelation, which critics say signifies that the regular meetings were meaningless, comes after the commission was found to have held so-called study meetings with promoters of nuclear power and presented them with its conference materials in advance.

It also comes after the government pledged to keep proper minutes of meetings after it faced criticism in January for not keeping minutes of 10 government meetings regarding the 2011 earthquake and tsunami and nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

According to the former commissioners, the closed-door meetings were held even before the 2001 government reorganization when Japan Atomic Energy Commission was placed under the Cabinet Office, and discussed the agenda for coming regular meetings.

Current commission chairman Shunsuke Kondo said, "Preliminary meetings are where members share their understanding and do not fall into the category of decision-making." He said no minutes are kept of what is discussed, but said the commission started keeping records of participants and meeting agendas from this spring.

However, several former commissioners said the framework of nuclear policy and nuclear fuel cycle policy were deliberated at the Thursday meetings. And an official at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry said the meetings "played a role in framing ideas within the nuclear power village (the nuclear power industry) and to fill voids that opponents (of nuclear power) could take advantage of."

Yukiko Miki, administrative director of nonprofit organization Information Clearinghouse Japan, called the preparatory meetings disturbing, saying if things are prepared beforehand, "regular meetings will not be substantial."

Meanwhile, a parliamentary investigation panel into the Fukushima Daiichi plant disaster has found that Tokyo Electric Power Co. had urged its employees and those of subcontractors to attend a 2003 meeting in Fukushima Prefecture to explain nuclear safety to local residents, and how to fill in questionnaires afterward about the meeting.

"It has been common to conceal and manipulate information on risks that could be obstacles to promoting nuclear power," the panel said. TEPCO, the operator of the Fukushima plant, has so far denied any manipulation but said it will look into the matter.

Bloomberg on the panel's nuclear report

July 9, 2012

Japan's Unsatisfying Nuclear Report

By the Editors *Jul 9, 2012 12:30 AM GMT+0200*

http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-07-08/japan-s-nuke-report-undercuts-itself-with-cultural-copout.html#disqus_thread

By Japanese standards, the report released Thursday by the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission could be considered remarkable.

Its 641 pages, drawing on town-hall meetings, household surveys, more than 900 hours of hearings and interviews with 1,167 people are the product of an unprecedented six-month inquiry -- the first independent investigation in Japan to have subpoena power.

Its account of the March 11, 2011, earthquake, tsunami and ensuing nuclear meltdown, which displaced about 160,000 people and left parts of Japan unlivable, differs in crucial ways from those of Japan's nuclear regulatory agencies, the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (9501) that operated the plants and then-Prime Minister Naoto Kan. Most important, the report squarely blames the catastrophe on a pattern of human failure, not a freakish act of nature.

Yet for all its detail and willingness to label the Fukushima disaster as "profoundly manmade," the report does not identify which men (and this being Japan, there probably weren't many women) failed. Instead, it sweepingly indicts "the ingrained conventions of Japanese culture," effectively letting individual culprits off the hook. Its conclusions and recommendations avoid any discussion of prosecution or punishment.

Still, the report helps guide the way forward. A crucial finding is that the earthquake prior to the tsunami may have incapacitated one of the reactors and its safety equipment -- a possibility that Tepco had resolutely denied. Moreover, the commission found that Tepco had not upgraded that reactor's seismic defenses as required by Japan's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, that the agency failed to enforce that upgrade and that the recorded seismic motion at Fukushima actually exceeded even the level that the standards were meant to protect against.

These findings suggest that Japan's decision to restart some of its reactors -- the first, in Ohi on Japan's west coast, resumed operation a week ago -- is premature. The Ohi reactor passed the stress test required in the aftermath of Fukushima, but that is no guarantee it could withstand an earthquake of the same 9.0 magnitude. One of the country's most vocal seismic whistle-blowers, Katsuhiko Ishibashi, who foretold the potential for the disastrous 1995 Kobe earthquake as well as a Fukushima-like event, has warned that the government is underestimating the restarted plant's vulnerability.

Given the risks involved, the prevalence of seismic activity in Japan and the diminishing enthusiasm of the Japanese public for nuclear energy, it would be sensible for Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda to err on the side of caution and set as a temporary benchmark the ability to withstand a 9.0 earthquake before a reactor can go back online.

Temporary is the key here, because rigorous new standards will take time to refine and should be the purview of the new independent regulatory body that the commission calls for, and that the government is moving too slowly to establish. The long history of collusion between companies such as Tepco and the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency -- housed in the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which also promotes Japan's nuclear industry -- has contributed to numerous deadly incidents and near-misses. The commission also rightly calls for Japan's Diet to more closely supervise this new regulatory body. NISA resisted the commission's inquiry, and Tepco still refuses to turn over video footage of conference calls held during the crisis that might shed still more light on it. More political heat might make it easier to overcome such recalcitrance in the future.

Where the report falls seriously short, however, is the aspect that has drawn the most approving attention: its conclusion that the near-cataclysm at Fukushima was, at bottom, a cultural mishap. It is both a copout and a cliché to fall back on Japan's "groupism" and say that "had other Japanese been in the shoes of those who bear responsibility for this accident, the result may well have been the same." Japan is hardly the only country where safety regulations are poorly enforced and old-boy networks protect industry interests. Witness the 2006 Sago mine explosion in the U.S., where hundreds of earlier safety violations brought only low fines, and the revolving door between the coal mining industry and the U.S. Department of Interior was in full swing.

Moreover, notwithstanding the commission's lament about the Japanese "reluctance to question authority," many citizens did repeatedly express their concerns about the safety of Tepco's Fukushima reactors, including legislators from Japan's Communist Party. Their warnings were brushed aside by those in power. Let's hope that the otherwise instructive findings and recommendations of this commission are not.

To contact the Bloomberg View editorial board: view@bloomberg.net.

Gov't radiation cover-up

July 11, 2012

Futaba mayor lashes gov't over radiation cover-up after nuke disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120711p2a00m0na007000c.html>

Katsutaka Idogawa, mayor of Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, condemned the central government on July 10 for failing to disclose radiation data provided by the United States immediately after the outbreak of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"(Futaba residents) were exposed to radiation that they didn't have to be exposed to," an emotional Idogawa testified during a meeting of the House of Councillors' Budget Committee. "What can we do to make people who haven't been exposed to radiation understand this feeling?"

"If the information had been disclosed efficiently, I would have changed (residents') evacuation routes. Above all, I am in a position of protecting residents," said Idogawa, who spoke as an unsworn witness at the upper house meeting.

At times Idogawa was teary and choked with emotion.

"Being told things like that it's all right because radiation doses are at such and such a level of millisieverts makes me really furious," he said.

Following the mayor's concluding remarks, in which he said that he "cannot accept this cover-up," a hush enveloped the usually lively committee room.

Also present at the meeting was the speaker of the town council of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture. Futaba and Namie are among the areas most severely affected by the nuclear disaster. The two officials were invited to the meeting as unsworn witnesses by the opposition Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

During the meeting, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda apologized over the government's failure to disclose the radiation data, saying, "As a result of insufficient cooperation and information sharing between related organizations, preparedness to disclose information relevant for the protection of residents' lives was weakened. I apologize, too."

TEPCO's analysis of disaster lacks credibility

July 13, 2012

TEPCO's nuclear disaster analysis unreliable: panel

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120713p2a00m0na011000c.html>

A government panel investigating the ongoing nuclear crisis at a Fukushima nuclear power plant has concluded in its final report, slated for release later this month, that plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)'s analysis of the disaster lacks credibility, the Mainichi Shimbun has learned.

The Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations of Tokyo Electric Power Company reconstructed what was happening at the stricken reactors at Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami that set off the disaster there, and found that its analysis results differed from those released by the utility, sources close to the case said.

TEPCO released computer analyses on the progression of the disaster in May and November of last year. That June, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) also released analyses run by the Japan Nuclear Energy Safety Organization (JNES).

According to TEPCO's November results, the core of the No. 1 reactor became exposed at around 6:10 p.m., approximately two-and-a-half hours after tsunami struck the plant on March 11, 2011. The analysis concluded that molten nuclear fuel melted through the reactor's pressure vessel at around 1:50 a.m. on March 12.

The government panel independently reconstructed what happened at the No. 1, 2 and 3 reactors following the onset of the crisis using available data such as reactor temperatures, reactor pressure and water levels, and radiation concentration in the containment vessels.

The committee's results showed that the pressure vessel of the No. 1 reactor suffered damage at around 11 p.m. on March 11, 2011, some two to three hours earlier than TEPCO's estimate. A similar difference was found between the panel's results and TEPCO's results for the No. 3 reactor. A lack of data prevented a comparison of the No. 2 reactor figures.

The difference may have been due to the utility and the government overestimating the amount of water pumped into the reactors -- information used in the analyses -- reflecting in the figures the mistaken understanding that the reactors were cooled more quickly than they were.

The investigation committee pointed out that TEPCO had not been thorough in confirming preconditions that would greatly affect the final results of its analyses.

One insider criticized the utility, saying, "That it didn't more closely scrutinize the data in its November analysis last year (by which information had become available) is an act of negligence."

Sources say the panel's final report, set to be released on July 23, will criticize analyses by both TEPCO and the national government as lacking in credibility.

Video of Kan's "rage" to be made public

July 13, 2012-07-13

Tepco told to air footage of Kan's nuke crisis rage

Kyodo, Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120713a3.html#.UAASIJFIwpU>

Tepco said Thursday it will disclose in-house video footage captured during the start of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, including then Prime Minister Naoto Kan ripping into the utility's officials at its headquarters.

The footage was recorded through Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s teleconference system, which connected its head office in Tokyo and the shattered Fukushima No. 1 nuclear complex, the utility said.

Some of the footage shows an enraged Kan lashing out at Tepco officials over what he believed was a request by the utility to pull out all personnel from the stricken plant in March last year, a senior Tepco official said.

Tepco has been reluctant to make the footage public, citing privacy concerns, but has apparently bowed to pressure from Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano, who has repeatedly called for the videos to be disclosed.

"We have no alternative but to make the footage public," the Tepco official said.

Tepco's top executives were to visit Niigata Prefecture on Friday in order to discuss safety measures at its now-idle Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant.

July 12, 2012

TEPCO to disclose footage of Kan scolding officials in nuclear crisis

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120712p2g00m0dm038000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. plans to disclose in-house video footage recorded during the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster, including footage of then Prime Minister Naoto Kan fiercely scolding utility officials at its head office in Tokyo, a senior utility official said Wednesday.

The footage was recorded through the company's teleconference system that connected the head office and the nuclear complex in Fukushima Prefecture. The scene with Kan shows exchanges over what he believed was a request by the utility to withdraw all its workers from the plant at the height of the crisis.

The utility known as TEPCO has been reluctant to make the footage public, citing privacy concerns. But it has apparently now bowed to pressure from Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano, who has repeatedly called for the video footage to be disclosed.

"We have no way but to make it public," the senior TEPCO official said.

Mamoru Ito on media coverage of Fukushima disaster

Sunday, July 8, 2012

Keeping an eye on TV news coverage of the nuke crisis

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/fd20120708a1.html#.UALuC5FIwpU>

By ERIKO ARITA

Staff writer

In the week immediately after March 11, 2011 — when a magnitude 9.0 earthquake and tsunami hit Tohoku and crippled the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant — most Japanese were closely watching TV news programs — amazed that a nuclear crisis was now threatening their lives.

It didn't take long for people to start feeling unsure about whether they could trust what the government, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (the operator of the plant), and the scientists appearing on TV were saying — because they kept on stressing that the radiation released from the reactors did not pose an immediate threat to the public's health.

After a few weeks, it turned out that radiation contamination had actually been spreading through Fukushima and even to the Kanto region, and those who were potentially facing a risk to their health from this invisible menace lost confidence in what was being said in TV news reports.

Mamoru Ito, author of "Terebi wa Genpatsu Jiko wo Do Tsutaetanoka" ("How TV Reported the Nuclear Accident") and Professor of Media & Cultural Studies at Waseda University in Tokyo, suggests that though TV stations had sent hundreds of reporters to disaster-hit areas, including Fukushima, and had TV crews covering the government and Tepco 24-hours a day, their news almost always repeated the official line, of which the public were growing suspicious.

"The most serious issue (which caused insufficient reporting of the disaster) was TV stations' keen lack of awareness of the danger of possible accidents at nuclear plants," Ito said in a recent interview with The Japan Times. "Of course, it was not only TV news programs. Other media had the same problem."

Between March 11 and March 17, 2011, Ito recorded most Japanese TV news reports on the Fukushima nuclear crisis. With cooperation from a researcher at another university, Ito compared all the news programs on the disaster from key the TV stations — NHK, Fuji TV, TBS, TV Asahi and Nippon Television — and published a book on his findings.

In the book — which was published in March this year and has so far sold 15,000 copies — Ito pointed out that among the TV stations he looked at, only NHK has a science section. But still, the public broadcaster did not report the crisis thoroughly, Ito said, as reporters and producers at NHK news only covered what the government and Tepco were saying, and they, in turn, had failed to discover the meltdown of the reactor cores that led to the release of a tremendous amount of radioactive material into the air.

"Despite such an enormously dangerous situation, NHK consistently failed in reporting the real crisis," Ito said.

In his book, Ito wrote that at around 7:40 p.m. on March 11, the TV stations live-broadcasted the news conference given by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano, who explained that the reactors at the Fukushima plant had to be cooled and that the government had declared a state of atomic power emergency.

Immediately after the conference, NHK broadcasted the dialogue between newscaster Shinichi Taketa and a reporter from NHK's science section named Toshiyuki Yamazaki. According to Ito's book, this is what was said:

"What do you think of this situation?" Taketa asked Yamazaki.

"The six reactors at the plant have stopped. They are hot and need to be cooled down and some of the reactors' cooling pumps are not functioning well, according to the authorities," Yamazaki said. "But they say monitoring posts in the area surrounding the plant are not detecting radiation. It means residents don't need to evacuate right now. I think the government declared a state of the emergency so that it can make doubly sure of the security of the residents."

On the other hand, Fuji TV broadcasted its news program on the accident at 8:07 p.m. and aired a comment on the possibility of a meltdown of the reactor cores by physicist Yuko Fujita, former associate professor at Keio University.

"Because nuclear reactors operate at a very high temperature, they must be kept cooled. Even though they have been stopped by the emergency, they will go into meltdown unless they are cooled. If the reactor core melts down and touches water, it will cause a vapor explosion, which means disaster ... I am very concerned that the reactors are in a state of meltdown."

Ito said that **Fujita was the only expert who forecast the meltdown on TV on March 11. But after that, Fujita was no longer invited to discuss the issue on Fuji TV.**

"I speculate that it was because the station management thought Fujita spoke too much on the danger of the nuclear accident," Ito said.

On March 12, an explosion did occur at 3:36 p.m. at the No.1 reactor, which destroyed the walls and roof of the reactor housing. By the morning of March 13, the amount of radiation had reached around 1,000 times normal inside the control room at the plant. On the day, Chief Cabinet Secretary Edano said another reactor, No. 3, might also have overheated but denied it was in a state of meltdown. Tepco began injecting fresh water into the No.3 reactor, and then cooperated with Self Defense Forces, pouring seawater into the reactor.

According to Ito's book, an announcer at TBS news asked Muneo Morokuzu, professor of the University of Tokyo, to comment on this situation:

"Although some people were injured and the reactor building was destroyed, the containment vessel is keeping radioactive materials inside. While (Tepco) cannot use the reactor anymore, I think it is wonderful that (Tepco and SDF) could maintain a safe level (of radiation)," Morokuzu said.

Yet, Ito said that Morokuzu's comment was irrelevant.

"Tepco could not, in fact, maintain the minimum level. Because the radioactive vapor was being released from the reactor that had exploded, the containment vessel was broken," Ito said. "But because the professor apparently wanted to emphasize 'it is safe,' he made such a comment."

Ito maintains that experts on TV should have had the responsibility of forecasting the worst-case scenario and commenting on how to cope with it.

In terms of the opinions of people at the TV stations, Ito said that there were reporters and producers who opposed the broadcasting of the official line, according to his research.

"However, the power of (TV station) staff who emphasized the safety of nuclear power was overwhelming," he said.

While TV stations were unable to inform the seriousness of the disaster, Ito argues that **alternative media on the Internet succeeded, to some extent, in reporting useful information related to the accident.**

For example, the Independent Web Journal, a video streaming site established by freelance journalist Yasumi Iwakami, broadcasted the news conference at the **Citizens' Nuclear Information Center** on March 12. CNIC is the only citizen's organization specializing in nuclear safety issues.

At the conference, Chihiro Kamisawa, a CNIC expert, referred to the government's radiation data and the evacuation order, explaining that he assumed it was based on the forecast that people in the 10-km-radius

would be exposed to 20 to 50 times the radiation limit for normal people in one year, which is 1 millisievert (on top of the 2.4 mSv annually the average person receives from natural sources).

Following Kamisawa, Masayoshi Goto, a former engineer at Toshiba and designer of the containment vessels at the Fukushima plant, said that the reactors' cores were apparently melting and the temperature of the suppression pool in the containment vessels were probably reaching 100 C, which meant the possible breakdown of the pool.

The suppression pool did actually break at 1:50 a.m. on March 12, though it was not made public until one year later.

Another fact that increased distrust of the government and TV news programs was the unreleased System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information (SPEEDI) data. According to Ito, only TV Asahi briefly referred to the computerized system for projecting how radioactive materials disperse in March. Ito interviewed NHK staff about SPEEDI and found out that NHK had known about the simulation system since March 12 but it never mentioned it on air in March.

"The NHK staffer said that the TV station knew SPEEDI and questioned the Education Ministry on the system. But the ministry officials said that they could not release the data because it was not accurate. Then NHK didn't report what the ministry said," Ito said. "NHK should have reported that the ministry said such a thing."

In order not to repeat such failure, Ito urges TV stations to investigate their own reporting of the Fukushima disaster.

"They should inspect when and where their reporters received information on every aspect of the crisis. What were the things reporters never covered? The TV stations must check the whole process and the facts of their reporting," Ito said. "They should also reflect whether their judgment on news' values were appropriate."

To improve TV coverage on the ongoing crisis, Ito said that **TV stations, the central and local governments and scientists should create a networked system in which they can share information and data on radiation immediately.**

TV stations must also cooperate with citizens' groups and alternative media on the Internet as well as broadcast videos taken by freelance journalists and citizens, he said.

While public access to TV broadcasting is limited in Japan, an increasing number of people have learned how to take videos and upload them on the Internet, and those videos should then be broadcast on TV, Ito

said, adding that people's participation in news coverage on mass media is called "public access" (broadcasting).

"The power of TV is enormous, which is why public access to TV broadcasting needs to be considered by society."

SPEEDI should have been used to plan evacuations

July 16, 2012

Govt. panel: SPEEDI use may have avoided exposure

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120716_02.html

A government panel investigating the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident will issue its final report next week.

It will say residents could have avoided unnecessary exposure to radiation if the government's system for predicting the spread of radioactive substances had been used to plan their evacuations.

The government activated the SPEEDI system using unconfirmed data from the day the accident occurred because it failed to obtain information on where radioactive materials originated. But officials did not publicize the results.

The panel is studying the Science Ministry's SPEEDI results and the evacuations of residents. It plans to issue its final report on July 23rd.

The report will say SPEEDI predicted in the afternoon of March 15th last year that radioactive elements would spread inland toward the west and northwest. Residents were fleeing in those directions on that day.

SPEEDI also forecast that from the dawn of March 16th a change in wind directions would send radioactive substances out over the Pacific Ocean.

The report will say people could have avoided unnecessary exposure to radiation if the government had used SPEEDI predictions in planning evacuations and if residents had been ordered to stay inside on March 15th and seek refuge on the following day.

Discussions will be held to determine how SPEEDI forecasts can be used in planning future evacuations.

Earlier this month, another panel of experts commissioned by the Diet issued its report which included a different conclusion on SPEEDI from that of the government committee.

It said SPEEDI forecasts cannot be used as a basis to craft initial evacuation plans due to the limited accuracy of weather information to be used in predictions.

Make sure the voices of Fukushima people are heard

July 16, 2012

Nuclear energy hearing disrupted by presence of power company official

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120716p2g00m0dm005000c.html>

SENDAI (Kyodo) -- A government-sponsored event in Sendai to listen to citizens' views on future energy and environmental policy was temporarily disrupted Sunday after a ranking official of Tohoku Electric Power Co. was found to be among the nine speakers chosen and expressed what he said was the company's view in support of nuclear power generation.

The event was the second in **a series of hearings to sample public views on the government's three options for nuclear power generation in the country's future energy mix -- 0 percent, 15 percent or 20-25 percent.** It was the first held in a city ravaged by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

The official, the head of the planning department that plays a central role in the utility's business strategy, expressed support for the 20-25 percent option, saying, "I will speak by summing up the thoughts of the company."

An uproar ensued among the audience with one person asking, "Hasn't the choice of speaker been manipulated?"

The hearing was temporarily suspended. Nuclear disaster minister Goshi Hosono intervened to calm the audience.

The Tohoku Electric official told reporters after the hearing, "The company has taken steps to stem manipulation. I applied (to speak) in the capacity of a private citizen."

The speakers also included three individuals from the Tokyo metropolitan area rather than from the disaster-hit region, a choice critics said could anger people in the region. Hosono said selection of the speakers was "totally random."

According to the secretariat, 105 people applied to speak at the event on Sunday, and around 70 percent of them wished to express views supportive of the zero nuclear option.

Hosono stressed the need for fairness in selecting speakers but expressed displeasure that a Tohoku Electric official was among the speakers at the event. "Organizations can present their policies in various forms, so it is best that we hear the views of individuals as much as possible," he said.

Referring to the Aug. 1 hearing in the city of Fukushima, Hosono said "efforts are necessary to ensure the voices of people in Fukushima Prefecture are heard," suggesting the speakers will not include employees of power companies or those from outside the prefecture.

July 16, 2012(Mainichi Japan)

Is government being fair?

July 18, 2012

Editorial: Gov't should be fair in listening to public opinion on nuclear power

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20120718p2a00m0na002000c.html>

The government's decision to ban employees at electric power companies from expressing themselves during hearings of opinions from members of the general public on Japan's energy policy should be regarded as only natural.

Such hearings are important opportunities to reflect public opinion on Japan's key policies, and not venues to listen to interested parties' assertions.

One cannot help but wonder why electric power industry insiders were initially allowed to attend public hearings on atomic power policy. As long as members of the public doubt whether the government is serious about listening to their opinions, the government cannot ensure fairness of its policy-making process.

Hearings are being held on three scenarios of Japan's reliance on nuclear power as of 2030: scenario 1 under which nuclear plants would be totally shutdown; scenario 2 under which the ratio of atomic power to Japan's total power supply would be 15 percent; and scenario 3 under which the ratio would be 20-25

percent. Specifically, three members of the public who support scenario 1, three others who back scenario 2 and another three who are in favor of scenario 3 are invited to each hearing to express their opinions. The government has introduced such hearings along with deliberative polls -- which consist of public comments, debate and surveys -- as a means to reflect public opinion in its policy-making.

The government plans to hold 11 such sessions across the country. Three sessions have already been held, and the planning manager of Tohoku Electric Power Co. and a section chief at Chubu Electric Power Co.'s nuclear power department expressed their opinions in favor of atomic power at the Sendai and Nagoya sessions, respectively.

The number of speakers is limited to nine at each hearing. If one of the nine is a high-ranking official of a power supplier that is promoting nuclear power, it obviously runs counter to the hearings' purpose of listening to opinions from members of the general public, and raises serious questions about the fairness of such sessions.

Questions also remain about the way such hearings are being held. Speakers express their own opinions, but nobody asks questions and no discussion is held. Since opinions expressed by speakers are not summarized by the organizer, how can they be reflected in the government's energy policy?

According to an advertising agency that serves as the secretariat of the hearings, of those who have applied to express their opinions at the Nagoya hearing, nearly 70 percent support a total elimination of nuclear plants, while over 20 percent back the 20-25 percent scenario. In Sendai, about 70 percent of applicants are in favor of the abolition of all nuclear power stations. Judging from these figures, the government's decision to allow three people each in favor of the three scenarios to express their opinions at the hearings is highly questionable.

Moreover, three people living in the Tokyo metropolitan area were selected as speakers at the Sendai hearing and underscored the need of nuclear power. In Nagoya, four of the nine speakers were from the Kansai or Kanto regions.

Such hearings have been organized across the country on the assumption that public opinion on nuclear power varies from region to region depending on the local situation, such as whether they host nuclear power stations. Therefore, such hearings should be held in a way local communities' opinions are reflected in energy policy.

Biased opinions were expressed in some past symposia and other sessions on nuclear power policy organized by the government in a bid to manipulate public opinion, inviting public distrust. There are observations that the government is reportedly seeking to settle the issue, with an eye to adopting the 15 percent option. Behind the widespread anti-nuclear power campaigns is strong public distrust of the government's stance.

Hearings on energy policy will continue, and the government is also poised to conduct a deliberative poll on the issue. The government should make every effort to ensure fairness in the way it listens to opinions from the public on nuclear power policy in order not to invite public distrust.

Transparency?

July 17, 2012

Another utility employee speaks at nuclear energy hearing, draws flak

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120717p2g00m0dm040000c.html>

NAGOYA (Kyodo) -- At the third meeting sponsored by the government to hear citizens' views on future energy policy on Monday, an official of Chubu Electric Power Co. was picked in a limited quota of speakers and drew flak for expressing a pro-nuclear opinion from some members of the audience, although it was given as a view of a private citizen.

Similar criticism was expressed at the second meeting in Sendai city on Sunday where a ranking official of Tohoku Electric Power Co. expressed a pro-nuclear position.

On Monday, the third speaker started his speech by identifying himself as "an employee of Chubu Electric Power" but saying he is attending as a private citizen, nonetheless creating a tense atmosphere in the venue, with one person in the audience saying, "Is this again manipulation?"

The employee said, "No one died from the direct impact of radiation after the accident at Tokyo Electric Power's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. This situation will not change five or 10 years later."

Another speaker was found to be an employee of the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, which runs the Monju fast breeder reactor project, and said he is skeptical if renewable energy can offer a stable supply of electricity. He did not disclose his affiliation when he spoke.

The secretariat of the event said the nine speakers were selected randomly. Three each are selected to give views on each of the government's three options for energy mix where nuclear power accounts for zero percent, 15 percent or 20 to 25 percent.

The secretariat said a total of 161 applied to speak and 106 were for zero percent, 18 for 15 percent and 37 for 20 to 25 percent.

No exemption for TEPCO

July 20, 2012

Court backs gov't decision not to exempt TEPCO over nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120720p2g00m0dm042000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The Tokyo District Court ruled Thursday it was legitimate for the government not to apply an exemption, which relieves utilities of compensation payments over nuclear accidents caused by natural disasters, to Tokyo Electric Power Co. over last year's nuclear crisis.

In handing down the ruling, presiding Judge Masatoshi Murakami said, "The government's interpretation of the exemption in an extremely limited way was reasonable to some extent."

The lawsuit, filed by an individual shareholder of Tokyo Electric, focused on whether the government should have applied the exemption to the utility, known as TEPCO, in connection with the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant disaster triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

The law on compensation for nuclear accidents includes a waiver clause under which the government, rather than a nuclear power plant operator, would pay compensation for damage caused by a nuclear accident resulting from "an unusually huge natural disaster or a social upheaval."

Murakami said, "There are various interpretations (of the clause) and it is difficult to draw a primary meaning."

Given that the purpose of the law is to protect disaster victims, the government's understanding that the exemption should be applicable to absolutely unimaginable situations is reasonable, the judge added.

The court rejected the demand for state compensation of 1.5 million yen made by the plaintiff, who argued the government's refusal to apply the exemption caused a decline in TEPCO's stock price.

One way to shield radiation

July 21, 2012

TEPCO sub-subcontractor urged employees to cover up their exposure to radiation



The Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant is pictured in this photo taken from a Mainichi helicopter on July 19, 2012. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120721p2a00m0na012000c.html>

An executive of a company commissioned by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) to perform part of the work to bring its crippled nuclear plant under control instructed workers at the site to cover their dosimeters with lead in an apparent attempt to hide their exposure to radiation, it has been learned.

The Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry has launched an investigation into the case suspecting that it could constitute a violation of the Industrial Safety and Health Act, which strictly limits the amount of radiation workers can be exposed to.

"We'll firmly deal with the matter once the practice is confirmed to constitute a violation of any law," the ministry's Labor Standards Bureau said.

In November last year, Buildup, a medium-sized construction company based in Fukushima Prefecture, won a contract to perform part of the work to bring the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant under control as a sub-subcontractor of TEPCO.

About 10 workers of Buildup were engaged in work in December to cover hoses in the plant's contaminated water purification system with insulation materials.

Sources close to the case said a board member of Buildup instructed the workers at a dormitory to shroud their dosimeters with lead covers shortly before the work began at the power plant in an apparent bid to make it look as if they were exposed to far less radiation than the actual amount.

Buildup officials said they cannot contact the board member now.

Article 22 of the Industrial Safety and Health Act stipulates that employers must take necessary measures to prevent workers' health from being affected by their labor. If employers force workers to shroud their dosimeters with lead while working at facilities where radiation levels are high, it could constitute a violation of the clause. Violators could face up to six months in prison or a fine of up to 500,000 yen.

Buildup President Takashi Wada expressed regret over the revelations. "It's extremely regrettable and we take the matter seriously. We'll conduct an investigation into the case based on information from our employees and report the results," he said in a statement.

An official of Tokyo Energy & Systems Inc., a TEPCO subcontractor that farmed out the work to Buildup, said, "We received a report about the case from (Buildup) President Wada. It appears true that the company produced lead covers, but workers have told us they never used the covers although they had been instructed to use them. In any case, it's outrageous."

TEPCO's public relations department said it has instructed Tokyo Energy & Systems to promptly get to the bottom of the incident and report the results.

Job boss wanted dosimeters encased in lead

Tepco crisis workers faced exposure scam

Kyodo, AFP-Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/print/nn20120721x1.html>

ALTERNATIVE, Hearings: Page 2 — An executive at a subcontractor for Tokyo Electric Power Co. forced nine workers dealing with the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant to encase their dosimeters in lead, the company confirmed Saturday.

The executive is believed to have tried to underreport radiation exposure,

prompting the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry to launch an investigation on suspicion of violating the industrial safety and health law, officials said.

The unnamed executive, who is in his 50s and works for Build-Up, a construction firm based in Fukushima Prefecture, told the plant workers Dec. 1 to attach the lead plates to pocket dosimeters provided by Tepco to monitor their radiation exposure, the sources said.

He said during questioning that he issued the instruction to them only once and that they worked at the site around three hours that day, according to the company.

The workers were hired for about four months through last March to wrap pipes at a water treatment facility with heat insulators.

Tepco affiliate Tokyo Energy & Systems Inc., which contracted with Build-Up, said it was told the workers did not use the lead plates, but it is looking into the matter to see if the executive was acting on his own initiative.

Lead is one of the main materials for shielding radiation.

Tepco uses the dosimeters to decide how long workers at the Fukushima plant can deal with the crisis without exceeding the government emergency exposure limit of 100 millisieverts a year.

Hourly radiation of between 0.3 and 1.2 millisieverts was recorded near the work site of the subcontractor employees.

"We are currently investigating the incident. **We learned about this incident only on Thursday after being interviewed by a newspaper,**" Build-Up President Takashi Wada said Saturday. "We truly regret this has happened, and we are taking it very seriously."

A newspaper reported Saturday that the executive told the workers they would quickly reach the legally permissible annual exposure limit of 50 millisieverts without faking the exposure level.

The workers reportedly recorded the meeting.

"Unless we hide it with lead, exposure will max out and we cannot work," the executive was heard saying in the recording, the newspaper reported.

Some of the workers who refused to encase their dosimeters left Build-Up, the paper said.

Vested interests?

July 21, 2012

Chugoku Electric intended to dispatch worker to public hearing to support nuclear power

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120721p2a00m0na011000c.html>

HIROSHIMA -- Chugoku Electric Power Co. intended to dispatch an employee to a government-led public hearing here on energy policy to express the firm's view on nuclear power, an internal document obtained by the Mainichi Shimbun shows.

This is the first time that it has come to light that an electric power supplier attempted as an entity to have an employee attend a hearing, which is aimed at determining the ratio of atomic power to Japan's total power consumption in 2030.

Chugoku Electric Power abandoned the plan after employees of Tohoku and Chubu electric power companies expressed their opinions at similar hearings in Sendai and Nagoya, respectively, and the government decided not to allow industry insiders to make statements at such gatherings.

Chugoku Electric Power's public relations department said it had intended to have an employee attend the hearing, which is scheduled to be held in Hiroshima on July 29, with the organizer's approval.

"We planned to choose one employee to represent the company and apply to take part in the hearing. If allowed to attend it, we intended to have the employee go after gaining approval from the government,"

an official with the public relations department said. "We had no intention of asking multiple employees to apply to participate (to represent the firm)."

"We thought it important to express our opinions as a company responsible for ensuring a stable supply of electric power," the official added.

Tohoku and Chubu electric power companies said their employees expressed their opinions at Sendai and Nagoya hearings as individuals, and denied that the firms were involved as entities.

The internal document, dated July 12, was compiled in the name of the public relations chief of Chugoku Electric Power's business planning department and was addressed to high-ranking officials.

"Workers, mainly those in the business planning department, will apply to participate in the hearing. If they are given an opportunity to attend it, they will express the company's view," the document partly read.

The document said that all employees were free to apply to participate as individuals and submit their opinions on the issue to the hearing organizer.

However, the document banned insiders from asking retirees or business partners to apply to participate in the hearing or submit their opinions to the organizer saying, "It could give the public the impression that we are asking outsiders to express our view on our behalf."

Subcontracting - A new scandal

July 21, 2012

Fukushima contractor covers up worker exposure

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120721_23.html

A subcontractor has been found to have instructed workers at the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant to underreport the amount of radiation exposure by placing a lead cover on their dosimeters.

On Saturday, health ministry officials inspected an office on the plant premises where worker exposure data are stored. The office belongs to the company that provided work to the subcontractor.

The subcontractor, "Buildup", was in charge of applying antifreeze to pipes in locations where high radiation levels had been detected.

According to its president, one executive told workers to cover the dosimeters they were wearing with lead to show lower doses last December.

Their work was part of the operation to bring about a cold shutdown at the plant.

In a telephone inquiry by his boss on Saturday, the executive reportedly explained that he made 9 workers use lead covers once. He said he did so after he was frightened by an alarm that warned of a sudden rise in radiation while he was inspecting the plant. He told the president that he was sorry.

The health ministry suspects that the company may have violated the law that requires dosimeters to be used properly to protect workers.

How worker exposure is controlled

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120721_26.html

Japanese health authorities set the permissible cumulative level for radiation exposure for workers at nuclear power plants at 50 millisieverts per year to protect their safety.

If their exposure exceeds the limit, they are not allowed to work inside radiation control areas.

Employers violating the rule can be punished with prison terms of up to 6 months or fines of up to 500,000 yen or about 6,370 dollars.

Worker exposure is measured by dosimeters they wear while at work, and their employer is responsible for managing them.

At the Fukushima plant, workers receive dosimeters before starting work and return them after work.

The plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, and one of its contractors, Tokyo Energy & Systems, monitored the exposure of workers from Buildup, a subcontractor with an executive suspected of ordering adjustment of dose records. Workers were informed of their doses every day, and cumulative figures were reported to Buildup once a month.

Such data is also reported to the Radiation Effects Association on a regular basis to keep track of workers' cumulative doses even if their employers change.

Buildup's workers were carrying a dosimeter called "Glass Badge" in addition to the digital one they were told to cover with lead.

The health ministry plans to compare the data on both dosimeters for any significant differences, and also compare data records of people working at the same site.

Build-up President Takashi Wada says he's aware of the gravity of the issue.

The president of another subcontractor told NHK that work in a highly radioactive environment is lucrative.

But he said it's out of the question to falsify exposure data. He said he fears the revelation could undermine confidence in nuclear subcontractors.

A man who had worked at the Fukushima plant just after last year's accident says the official dose limit is 50 millisieverts per year but in reality contractors avoid sending workers to the site if the reading goes beyond 20 millisieverts.

He says he himself can no longer work at nuclear power plants as his cumulative dose probably exceeds about 30 millisieverts.

The man says subcontractors cannot send workers to the plant when their doses rise. So, he says, subcontractors want to limit exposure on a daily basis.

The man adds that many veteran employees are now unable to do such work because of their high cumulative doses. He says he wants people to understand the current situation involving a less-experienced workforce.

Covered dosimeters - Follow-up

July 23, 2012

TEPCO subcontractor used Fukushima plant onsite material to cover workers' dosimeters

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120723p2a00m0na025000c.html>

The material used by an executive of a Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) subcontractor to cover the dosimeters of its workers at the damaged Fukushima nuclear power plant in an apparent attempt to hide their exposure to radiation, was taken from inside the plant's site, officials with the firm said.

The executive from Buildup, a Fukushima Prefecture-based construction company that performed part of the work to bring the disaster-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant under control as a subcontractor of TEPCO, used a lead plate for radiation shielding from a storehouse inside the nuclear plant without permission, and used the material to make lead covers for its workers' dosimeters.

The used covers were later thrown away, also at the plant's site, company officials told the Mainichi Shimbun in a recent interview.

Buildup officials and other sources close to the matter further clarified that the incident occurred in early December last year, prior to the beginning of the firm's work at the nuclear power plant. The executive in question, along with several other company employees, took a few millimeter-wide lead plate from the storehouse, and using tools, made covers for their dosimeters from it, the officials say.

It is believed that the executive sought onsite material, and later threw away the lead covers at the power plant's site, because workers at the damaged nuclear power plant are required to pass through a compulsory screening of their possessions when they enter and exit the plant.

Buildup officials say that the executive ordered employees to cover up their radiation doses for the first time during the company's work at the plant between early December to Dec. 20 last year, and used the lead covers only once.

Having worked at the nuclear power plant on two occasions prior to December 2011, once in March last year and a second time between May and July also in 2011, the executive was apparently well familiar with where lead was kept.

Radiation dosages 'falsified' / N-plant workers told to cover meters with lead to lower readings

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120722001780.htm>

The health ministry is investigating allegations that a construction company ordered its workers at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant to cover their dosimeters with lead to indicate lower exposure levels, according to sources.

The Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry searched several sites in Fukushima Prefecture on Saturday and confirmed working conditions at the nuclear plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co.

According to the ministry, the construction company that issued the illegal instruction is Build-up, which is based in Namie, Fukushima Prefecture.

Build-up was a subcontractor of Tokyo Energy & Systems Inc., a Tokyo-based group firm of TEPCO entrusted with restoring the plant, according to sources.

In December, a Build-up executive allegedly instructed nine onsite workers to place lead covers over their dosimeters so they would record lower radiation exposure levels.

Under the Industrial Safety and Health Law, such workers are permitted to receive a maximum exposure of 50 millisieverts a year. Employers are required to accurately measure workers' exposure levels.

If the executive ordered the workers to cover their meters to manipulate exposure readings, it would constitute a violation of the law that is punishable by up to six months in prison or a fine of up to 500,000 yen.

TEPCO said Tokyo Energy & Systems reported Thursday that lead covers for the radiation meters had been produced. However, Tokyo Energy & Systems also said the covers had not been used during work at the stricken plant.

TEPCO said it instructed Tokyo Energy & Systems to further investigate the matter and report its findings. On Saturday, the Fukushima Labor Bureau and the Tomioka Labor Standards Inspection Office inspected Tokyo Energy & Systems' office in Fukushima Prefecture.

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Exec admits ordering cover use

Later Saturday, Build-up President Takashi Wada admitted to The Yomiuri Shimbun that the executive had ordered nine workers to work for about three hours while covering their dosimeters with lead.

Wada said he spoke with the executive who supervised the on-site work over the telephone Saturday.

The executive reportedly told the president: "When I went to the site in advance, I was surprised that the alarm on my active personal dosimeter started ringing so quickly. To reduce radiation exposure readings, I came up with the idea of using a lead shield."

Wada said the executive admitted workers at the plant had used lead covers.

Wada, 57, said the workers told him the executive instructed about four workers to make the covers.

According to Wada, the executive said the covers were used only once--in December when the workers transported material on higher ground west of the plant's No. 1 reactor.

"Nine workers were involved and they worked for about three hours," the executive was quoted as telling Wada. "That was the first and last time the covers were used."

About lead and dosimeters (Follow-up)

July 24, 2012

Lead used to show less radiation

Probe targets ploy to shield dosimeters

Jiji, Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120724x1.html>

KORIYAMA, Fukushima Pref. — The Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry said Tuesday it is investigating whether dosimeters worn by workers trying to contain the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant were manipulated to underreport their radiation exposure and may pursue prosecution.

The ministry meanwhile told Tokyo Electric Power Co. to have all workers, including subcontractors, whose dosimeter readings were suspiciously low to come in for checks to determine their actual radiation exposure.

The announcement of the new probe followed recent revelations that five employees of Build-Up, a subcontractor based in Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, used lead shields at the Fukushima No. 1 plant to cover their dosimeters late last year, as Build-Up apparently tried to make their radiation readings appear lower than the actual figures.

Build-Up executive Teruo Sagara told reporters Monday in Koriyama, however, that he had no intention of having the workers use the lead shields so their dosimeters would give lower radiation readings than what they were actually exposed to, contrary to a Saturday report indicating otherwise.

The investigation into whether attempts were made to manipulate the dosimeter readings will be carried out by the health ministry's regional labor bureau in Fukushima Prefecture.

If the probe turns up violations of the industrial safety and health law, the ministry said it will send the cases to the Fukushima District Public Prosecutor's Office.

"Any law violation will be strictly dealt with," Health, Labor and Welfare Minister Yoko Komiyama told reporters.

"This is an issue that shakes the foundation of the management of workers' radiation exposure," she said, adding that if manipulations did occur, such actions would be unforgiveable.

The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, which started an inspection of Fukushima No. 1 on Tuesday, said it will also check how radiation exposure is monitored and instruct Tepco to take measures to prevent any dose-reading manipulations. NISA is under the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

At a separate news conference, METI chief Yukio Edano condemned Build-Up's alleged attempt to manipulate the radiation exposure readings.

Build-Up executive Sagara, 54, claimed Monday he only wanted to reassure workers as much as possible by delaying when the dosimeters beeped frequently, warning of high radiation exposure. He added that he was among the five and that they discarded the lead shields because they were ineffective.

Sagara said that when he visited the Tepco plant in late November, he feared radiation doses there may exceed the government-set limit of 50 millisieverts per year right away.

He instructed several workers to fashion 12 covers out of lead sheets that had been disposed of at the plant.

On Dec. 1, the five worked for 30 to 40 minutes near reactor 1 with the lead-encased dosimeters in their chest pockets.

With no change in the frequency of the beeps, Sagara said he found them meaningless. He said he discarded all 12 dosimeters with lead covers in the metal disposal site for the plant's reactors 5 and 6 on the following day.

Sagara said using the covers was his idea, and they were not used on any other day. This contradicts Saturday's report that a Build-Up executive, who was not named, again told workers last spring to use lead-encased dosimeters, and that they refused.

Sagara emphasized that he did not force any workers to use dosimeters with lead covers. He said he did not allow three employees who declined to use them to work at the site. He said this was only because he was worried they would not obey his instructions.

The workers wore backup glass badges, which measure the cumulative radiation doses during their work.

Tokyo Energy and Systems Inc., which has contracted to do work at the nuclear plant and used Build-Up, said separately that the maximum gap was 1.3-fold between the cumulative doses measured by glass badges and those based on readings of the shielded dosimeters.

"No major differences were detected," an official of the company said.

Tepco uses dosimeters to decide how long workers at the Fukushima plant can work without exceeding the government-set exposure limit of 100 millisieverts a year.

Lead is one of the major materials to shield against radiation. In the case of Build-Up, it is believed the lead shields were of a thickness that would have only reduced the radiation reading by 15 percent.

Lead covers meant to hide radiation exposure not effective, TEPCO subcontractor says

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120724p2a00m0na011000c.html>

KORIYAMA, Fukushima -- The lead covers for dosimeters that several workers at the crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant used were in fact not effective in hiding their exposure to radiation, the executive of a company who instructed the workers to cheat on radiation exposure revealed on July 23.

Teruo Sagara, a director of Buildup, a Fukushima Prefecture-based construction company, told a news conference that he had decided not to use the lead covers for dosimeters after he and his workers used them once and found they were ineffective in shielding radiation. He implied, however, that he would have continued to use the lead covers if they were effective in hiding radiation exposure, saying, "If they were effective, we would have gone in the wrong direction." At the news conference, he apologized: "I am sorry for having caused you trouble."

When Sagara visited the work site with his workers in preparation for the actual task to help bring the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant under control on Nov. 28, 2011, he was "upset" by the warning sounds of the alarm pocket dosimeters (APDs), he said. "In order to dispel workers' concerns," he had looked for lead vests that could shield radiation, but he decided not to use them because they were too heavy. Then he thought of lead covers.

On Nov. 30, 2011, six people including Sagara himself made 12 lead covers out of radiation-shielding lead plates at the original contractor's storehouse. Sagara instructed the workers to attach them to their dosimeters on that evening.

Sagara said that he had told those workers who voiced worry, "You won't be able to work if radiation doses rise." On the morning of Dec. 1, 2011 -- the first day of their work -- Sagara removed three workers who refused to use the lead covers from the project and left them at their lodging facility. Five people including Sagara attached the lead covers to their dosimeters and carried out their work in a high-dose area. But because the lead covers were made without measuring the size of the dosimeters properly, they did not fit into the APDs. Therefore, after checking the actual radiation exposure following the day's work, the lead covers were found to be ineffective, Sagara said.

After the news conference on July 23, Sagara and Buildup President Takashi Wada visited the Tomioka labor standards inspection office in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, to report what had actually happened.

Ikuro Anzai, honorary professor at Ritsumeikan University, said, "It is possible that similar things are taking place in other places. The government should deal with it as an issue related to work safety and strictly check whether actual radiation exposure is deliberately underestimated."

Hosono defends Naoto Kan

Nuclear disaster minister defended then PM Kan for handling of Fukushima crisis: panel

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120726p2a00m0na011000c.html>

Nuclear disaster minister Goshi Hosono had defended then Prime Minister Naoto Kan for his handling of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, according to details of hearings conducted and released by the Independent Investigation Commission on the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Accident.

Hosono, who had served as special advisor to then Prime Minister Kan at the time of the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis, was quoted as telling the independent panel's closed-door hearing in November last year, "Suppose a prime minister other than Prime Minister Kan was pressed to make decisions there at that time, I have no idea who could be a prime minister capable of making (proper) decisions."

Hosono was questioned by both government and Diet panels tasked with looking into the Fukushima nuclear disaster, but his testimonies to those two separate panels have not been released.

While Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the crippled nuclear power station, denied the utility had proposed to the government that all workers at the plant be withdrawn in the middle of the crisis, Hosono stressed during the closed-door questioning by the independent panel that he had thought the power company sounded out the government about the "complete withdrawal." Hosono then added, "I hesitated to tell them to stay there. I had no idea what decision I should make."

On Kan's decision to leave the Prime Minister's Office to inspect the troubled Fukushima nuclear power plant himself on March 12, 2011, the day after the outbreak of the crisis, Hosono said, "The decision led to Mr. Kan's mental strength to carry the fate of the country and make decisions without sleeping for several days."

The details of the panel's questioning of Tetsuro Fukuyama, a House of Councilors lawmaker from the ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), were also released. Fukuyama, who was deputy chief Cabinet secretary at the time of the nuclear crisis, quoted then Prime Minister Kan as telling senior TEPCO officials shortly after the outbreak of the crisis, "Let me talk to nuclear plant chief Masao Yoshida directly by phone." Then, Fukuyama said the TEPCO officials were hiding themselves and "stealthily" checking Yoshida's cell-phone number. Fukuyama said he had taken their behavior as an indication that every bit of information was coming through TEPCO headquarters. He then expressed his sense of distrust in the utility, saying, "I was stunned at the possibility of TEPCO suppressing the Prime Minister's Office's intentions."

Following manuals not enough in case of emergency

July 27, 2012

Ministry admits faults in its Fukushima responses

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120727_28.html

Japan's education ministry has admitted that its response to the Fukushima nuclear accident was inappropriate in terms of informing residents and addressing parents' concerns about radiation exposure.

A report issued on Friday refers to the government decision not to release radiation maps provided by the United States immediately after the accident began in March 2011.

The report says the government did not have a manual on disclosing results of surveys by foreign organizations.

The ministry admits to mishandling the issue of its radiation exposure limit for outdoor school activities.

In April last year, officials set the limit at 20 millisieverts per year, saying they followed recommendations of an international organization.

But the ministry eventually lowered the limit after parents said it was too high. The report says officials did not fully address the parents' worries.

The report says communication between sections was not smooth because an emergency response framework set up after the accident was different from one referred to in a manual.

Vice education minister Takashi Kii told reporters that following manuals is not enough to protect people's lives and assets during emergencies.

Kii said ministry officials must use their imagination and act without waiting for orders.

Yamaguchi deleted mails about secret meetings

July 27, 2012

Cabinet Office official deleted emails on secret meetings of pro-nuclear parties

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120727p2a00m0na012000c.html>

An official of the Cabinet Office, who chaired secret meetings of pro-nuclear power members of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC), deleted most of the emails on such gatherings before he stepped down, sources close to the case said.

Yoshiharu Yamaguchi, who was a senior policy researcher at the Cabinet Office, deleted the emails after a fact-finding team set up by the Cabinet Office asked those present at such gatherings to submit relevant materials, raising suspicions that he intentionally deleted evidence.

The fact-finding team has launched efforts to restore emails on the server at the Cabinet Office at the instruction of lawyer Tadashi Kunihiro, an adviser to the fact-finding team.

Yamaguchi, who was on loan from Japan Atomic Power Co., returned to the firm on July 1 as part of the restructuring of the secretariat to JAEC following revelations that pro-nuclear power members of the commission, government officials and industry insiders held secret meetings on nuclear power.

Yamaguchi admitted having deleted the emails at the end of June. "I usually delete unnecessary emails. When I left the government, I deleted my email," he said.

When asked whether he did so to cover up what was discussed at secret meetings, he said, "That's not true. I deleted them simply because I thought they were unnecessary. I wasn't instructed by any other person to delete email. I did it at my own discretion."

In early June, Masato Nakamura, counselor at the Office for Atomic Energy Policy of the Cabinet Office, urged its members to submit all emails related to secret meetings.

The fact-finding team, headed by Cabinet Office Senior Vice Minister Hitoshi Goto, subsequently demanded those who attended secret meetings submit all relevant materials including emails in an effort to get to the bottom of the case. They include JAEC Chairman Shunsuke Kondo and four members of the commission as well as officials at the Office for Atomic Energy Policy, the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry and electric power companies.

The Office for Atomic Energy Policy printed out about 1,000 relevant emails that officials had kept in their computers and submitted them to the fact-finding team.

However, as they included few emails Yamaguchi, who played a key role in the secret meetings, had exchanged with those present at secret meetings, the fact-finding team grilled him. He then admitted that he had deleted them.

The team has commissioned a private company to restore the deleted emails. Experts at the company are working to restore them.

TEPCO and its costs

July 27, 2012

Reducing Tepco's costs

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/ed20120727a2.html>

Trade and industry minister Yukio Edano, consumer affairs minister Jin Matsubara and Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura on July 20 decided to let Tokyo Electric Power Co. raise its electricity rate for households by an average 8.47 percent from Sept. 1. On Wednesday, Mr. Edano eventually set the increase at an average 8.46 percent. This is down from Tepco's initial plan to raise the rate by an average 10.28 percent. **Since the rate hike will apply to small-scale factories, supermarkets and convenience stores alike, its effect will be great.**

Judging that Tepco is likely to achieve the goals of its special business plan, the government will soon give Tepco a capital injection of ¥1 trillion, acquire more than half its voting shares, and virtually nationalize the power utility.

Therefore, **it is all the more important for the government to strictly watch whether Tepco is making serious efforts to reduce costs and whether all costs included in its business plan can be justified. Tepco should make its cost details transparent.**

In asking for the 10.28 percent rate hike, Tepco said its financial conditions are deteriorating because of the halt in nuclear power plant operations following the severe accident at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and the resultant increase in the cost to purchase fuel for thermal power plants, whose weight in power generation became greater after the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

Mr. Edano ordered a panel of experts to review Tepco's rate increase request. It managed to decrease costs by ¥50 billion. In addition, a panel for the Consumer Affairs Agency and pertinent Cabinet ministers managed to cut costs by ¥33 billion.

Although the panel for the Consumer Affairs Agency argued that depreciation costs for the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear power plant as well as for the Nos. 5 and 6 reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 plant should not be included in Tepco's costs, this idea was not included in the rate increase decision.

Tepco's rate hike plan assumes that the reactors at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture will restart, one after another, from fiscal 2013. Currently Tepco's electricity supply without nuclear power generation has overcome any shortfalls due to power-saving efforts by the citizenry and businesses. The government should soon work out a road map for weaning Japan away from nuclear power.

The current electricity pricing system, which allows power companies to add certain markups to costs, should be changed so that they will make serious efforts to buy liquefied natural gas for thermal power plants at cheaper prices.

More scandal about subcontractors?

July 28, 2012

Fukushima disaster worker says subcontractors siphoned money from wages

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120728p2a00m0na017000c.html>

A man hired to help bring the disaster at the tsunami-hit Fukushima nuclear plant under control has accused subcontractors of forcing him to work under illegal conditions and skimming off part of his wages.

The 45-year-old Nagasaki Prefecture resident has filed a claim with the Tokyo Labor Bureau accusing Nichieidouryoku Co. of dispatching him to a subcontractor through at least one other subcontractor and forcing him to work under a bogus contract.

The man has also filed a petition with the Nagasaki Labor Bureau against four lower-level subcontractors, complaining that they skimmed off part of his wages.

The Labor Lawyers Association of Japan, which supports the man, said that electric power company subcontractors commonly farm out work at nuclear plants to hired hands through several lower-level subcontractors, and skim off workers' wages.

"This case is just the tip of the iceberg. The situation will never change unless Tokyo Electric Power Co. takes responsibility for subcontractors' employment methods and their safety management practices," a spokesman for the association said.

The association said an unnamed company in Nagasaki Prefecture, referred to as "Company A," introduced a job to remove quake and tsunami rubble in an area within 30 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant to the man in June last year.

The company told him that he would be paid 11,000 yen a day, and instructed him to ask an upper-layer subcontractor, referred to as "Company B," about the details of his work and working conditions.

Company B explained that he would be required to work on the premises of the nuclear plant, outside the reactor buildings, and verbally promised to pay him 14,000 yen per day.

The man signed a contract with Yamato Engineering Service, based in Sasebo, Nagasaki Prefecture, a further upper-layer subcontractor. However, the contract did not specify the amount of his wages.

Despite the explanation from Company B, the man was required to work inside the reactor buildings, dressed in protective clothes, from July 1 to Aug. 9, 2011 at the instruction of supervisors belonging to Yamato Engineering and Nichieidouryoku, a further upper-tier subcontractor.

Even though he was told that he would be paid a dangerous work allowance of about 20,000 yen a day in addition to his regular wages, Company A paid him only 11,000 yen per day.

When the man demanded that Yamato Engineering pay the remainder, the company told him that it had paid 14,000 yen as a daily wage, along with danger pay, to yet another company, referred to as Company C, since he had been dispatched to Company C. Company C was an upper-layer subcontractor for Company B.

The Labor Lawyers Association of Japan pointed out that if Company C had dispatched him to a lower-layer subcontractor, it would constitute a "multi-layer dispatch," and that if he was employed by Yamato Engineering but required to work at the instruction of Nichieidouryoku, it would constitute a bogus consignment contract. Both practices are banned by the Act for Securing the Proper Operation of Worker Dispatching Undertaking.

The association has demanded that labor standards inspection authorities order the man's employer to pay him 630,000 yen in unpaid wages and allowances.

Both Nichieidouryoku and Yamato Engineering officials declined to comment on the case.

"We don't know anything about the case because we didn't have a direct employment contract with the man," a Nichieidouryoku official said.

"Our president is away and can't comment on the matter," Yamato Engineering official said.

SPEEDI no use because "based on assumptions"?

July 28, 2012

Ministry tries to justify withholding SPEEDI fallout forecast data from public

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120728b7.html>

The science ministry claimed Friday it was appropriate to withhold radiation fallout forecast data from the public immediately after the meltdown disaster started at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in March 2011 because the data were "based on assumptions."

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology said in a report that the data on the predicted spread of radioactivity compiled by SPEEDI, the System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information, were an assumed calculation, not necessarily the real situation.

Officials also told reporters the ministry was "not in a position to release the data to the public."

The government has drawn fire for not promptly announcing the SPEEDI data after the crisis started, with critics charging that the lack of information resulted in unnecessary radiation exposure for people who later evacuated from their homes around the Fukushima plant.

In a report published Monday, a government-appointed panel investigating the Fukushima meltdown crisis said the SPEEDI data could have better informed residents about when to evacuate.

The science ministry, which interviewed Yoshiaki Takaki, who was the science minister at the time the crisis started, and other officials as part of its analysis of the actions it took, or didn't, said it is "doubtful" it could have provided trustworthy information to the public. But its report added that "the significance of providing predictions cannot be denied."

The report also admitted the ministry "did not offer enough explanations and caused misunderstandings" regarding the upper limit of radiation acceptable in schoolyards.

The 3.8-microsievert-per-hour limit was set in order to not exceed 20 millisieverts of annual radiation exposure, in line with recommendations by the International Commission on Radiological Protection, the ministry said. ICRP-set annual radiation exposure thresholds in cases of emergency range from 20 to 100 millisieverts.

The ministry said the limit, which triggered harsh protests from children's parents, was just a limit and it did not mean kids playing in schoolyards may actually be exposed to annual radiation amounting to 20 millisieverts.

The report also said the ministry "failed to promptly respond to concerns aired by parents" of elementary and junior high school students in connection with the upper limit of radioactive substances detected in school lunches.

A lot of money

July 31, 2012

TEPCO receives public funds injection

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120731_23.html

Tokyo Electric Power Company has received one trillion yen or around 13 billion dollars in government funds, putting the operator of the Fukushima nuclear power plant under effective state control.

The power company asked for taxpayer money to bolster its finances under a rehabilitation program created with a state-backed bailout fund in May.

The injection on Tuesday came in the form of Tokyo Electric's issuance of preferred stocks to the government.

This gave the government up to 75 percent of the utility's voting rights.

The capital injection is supposed to help the firm pay the massive cost of compensating victims of the nuclear accident and scrapping crippled reactors.

But Tokyo Electric continues to face rough going. The company was recently forced to lower household rate hikes and fuel costs are rising for thermal plants now making up for the loss of nuclear power.

TEPCO's losses

August 2, 2012

Tepco logs ¥288.39 billion group net loss for the April-June quarter

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nb20120802a1.html>

Kyodo

Tokyo Electric Power Co. on Wednesday reported a group net loss of ¥288.39 billion for the April-June quarter due to costs stemming from the catastrophe at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, and revised downward its earnings projections for the full fiscal year.

The quarterly net loss compares with a loss of ¥571.76 billion incurred the year before, said the utility, which fell under effective government control Tuesday by receiving ¥1 trillion in public funds.

Tepco registered an operating loss of ¥108.84 billion for the first quarter of fiscal 2012, compared with a loss of ¥52.05 billion a year earlier. Revenue rose 15.6 percent to ¥1.31 trillion.

The government bought more than 50 percent of the company's voting shares to prevent its bankruptcy and help it compensate people and companies affected by the nuclear disaster, scrap the crippled Fukushima reactors and continue supplying electricity without interruption.

Its financial standing was also hit by increasing fossil-fuel costs to make up for the loss of nuclear power. For the full year, Tepco projects a group net loss of ¥160 billion and an operating loss of ¥305 billion. It expects revenue to increase by 11.7 percent to reach ¥5.98 trillion.

Massive bank loans

Banks provided Tokyo Electric Power Co. with ¥370 billion in loans Wednesday to help the utility continue producing a stable supply of electricity while dealing with the Fukushima nuclear crisis, sources said.

The loans come on top of the government's ¥1 trillion capital injection into the firm, which has been struggling since the March 2011 disasters. The lenders include Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ, Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp. and Mizuho Corporate Bank as well as the government-owned Japan Development Bank.

The loans comprise ¥200 billion in new loans and ¥170 billion in refinancing.

Banks plan to give Tepco a total of ¥1 trillion in loans, including those provided Wednesday, to support the power supplier until it becomes able to issue corporate bonds, according to the sources.

TEPCO continues imposing media restraint

August 2, 2012

TEPCO still limiting media coverage of in-house footage taken shortly after nuke accident

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120802p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) is sticking to its media restrictions for news coverage of footage of teleconferences it held immediately after the outbreak of the crisis at its tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in March 2011.

Despite protests from news organizations and freelance journalists, TEPCO has refused to change its stance.

TEPCO has offered to show its video footage of teleconferences on the nuclear crisis, mainly those between its headquarters and the crippled nuclear plant, from March 11 to 15, to news organizations from Aug. 6.

The utility will show footage totaling about 150 hours, which is stored on a computer at a conference room at the TEPCO headquarters in Tokyo, to journalists on condition that they not film or record any part of the images or identify individual employees except executives. However, it will allow reporters to take notes on the video images.

The power supplier warns that any violators will be asked to leave the office and may be even banned from attending future news conferences organized by the firm.

Initially, TEPCO had offered to allow only one person from each news organization to view the video between Aug. 6 and 10, totaling about 30 hours. At the instruction of Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano, however, the company extended the period to Sept. 7 and decided to allow up to two reporters each at major news organizations to view the footage.

On Aug. 1, the utility finished accepting applications for viewing on Aug. 6 and 7 because it feared it would be flooded with applications for these first two days. From Aug. 8, however, the company will allow news organizations to view the video on the same days they file applications.

TEPCO's public relations department said it has no choice but to ban news media from filming or recording the footage for privacy concerns. "If individual employees were identified by their voices, they could be personally criticized and their families and others around them could be subjected to abuse."

The Mainichi Shimbun urges TEPCO to retract its policy of banning news organizations from recording the footage and even from reporting the contents of footage it obtains through its own news coverage activities.

Keiichi Katsura, former professor of news media at Risho University, criticized TEPCO's policy of press restraints.

"All members of the public are parties concerned with the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant accident. **Therefore, the recording of the teleconferences should be viewed as public property.** It's wrong for TEPCO to enforce press restraints to suit its own convenience," Katsura said.

"TEPCO should rather proactively disclose the footage in order to contribute to clarifying the cause of the accident. How to report the details of the footage should be left to the discretion of each news organization," he said.

Strong signals of public distrust in politics and government

August 1, 2012

Editorial: Poll results, nuke protests show public's distrust in gov't at boiling point

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20120731p2a00m0na012000c.html>

Members of the general public have almost simultaneously sent signals from two locations that their distrust in politics has heightened to an alarming level.

In the Yamaguchi gubernatorial election on July 29, a candidate who ran on an anti-nuclear power platform had a strong showing even though he was narrowly defeated by a former bureaucrat backed jointly by the largest opposition Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its former ruling coalition partner New Komeito.

Meanwhile, a large number of people surrounded the Diet Building during a major anti-nuclear power demonstration in Tokyo on the same day.

The fact that an anti-nuclear power candidate gained strong support from those who back no particular political party in a conservative stronghold, and that a huge number of citizens participated in a movement regardless of their party affiliation, have sounded an alarm bell to established political parties, including the ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and the LDP. In particular, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, who is trying to resume operations at idled nuclear power stations, should face up to the reality that the public's distrust in politics is at boiling point.

The gubernatorial election was a race too close for comfort for the LDP. The party won seats in three of the four single-seat constituencies of the House of Representatives in Yamaguchi Prefecture in 2009 when the DPJ scored a landslide victory. The LDP-New Komeito alliance fielded Shigetaro Yamamoto, a former high-ranking bureaucrat of the Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Ministry, while the DPJ was unable to field any candidate. Under ordinary circumstances, it would have been an easy win for the LDP and Komeito.

However, the candidacy of Tetsunari Iida, who is an advocate of a breakaway from nuclear power and was the brains behind Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto's political rise, drastically changed the situation. During his campaign, Iida demanded that Chugoku Electric Power Co.'s plan to build the Kaminoseki Nuclear Power Plant in the prefecture be scrapped altogether. The LDP and Komeito was alarmed by the growing support Iida gained from prefectural residents by staging a campaign in a way similar to that of Hashimoto's Osaka Restoration Association. Yamamoto, who is in favor of the promotion of nuclear power, insisted that the Kaminoseki nuclear plant project be frozen in a desperate bid to prevent the issue from emerging as a major point of contention during the race.

Even though Yamamoto was elected, no one should downplay the fact that Iida, who launched a grass-root election campaign without the backing of any established political party, only trailed Yamamoto by about 67,000 votes.

According to exit polls by news organizations including the Mainichi Shimbun, 53 percent of voters who support no particular political party, voted for Iida. The possibility cannot be ruled out that prefectural residents directed their criticism of the Noda Cabinet for trying to reactivate nuclear plants and approving U.S. forces' introduction of the Osprey vertical takeoff and landing aircraft to Japan at the LDP and Komeito, which are established political parties. Following the election, these established parties appear to be increasingly wary of any new political parties, including the Osaka Restoration Association, that are planning to field candidates in the next House of Representatives election in a bid to form a third bloc in the Diet.

These moves are closely related to steady growth in the number of participants in anti-nuclear power demonstrations staged in front of the Prime Minister's Office in Tokyo. A massive number of citizens spontaneously participated in the July 29 demonstration organized by a citizens' network despite the scorching heat, filling streets around the Diet Building.

Large-scale, nonpartisan movements, which had not been observed in Japan for decades, should be viewed as citizens' extremely important expression of their will. These movements reflect citizens' growing concerns that the Noda administration is trying to take the opportunity of the reactivation of two idled reactors at the Oi Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture to resume operations at other nuclear plants one after the other and that the government will give up its policy of decreasing Japan's reliance on atomic power to revive its nuclear power promotion policy. The movements also illustrate citizens' anger at the lack of a system under which they can directly reflect their concerns in politics. However, top government officials' response to these moves is extremely slack.

The Mainichi Shimbun's latest opinion poll shows that the approval rating for the Noda Cabinet hit a record low of 23 percent since its inauguration. The sharp decline in the approval rating is attributable to various factors, such as a split of the DPJ and the public's opposition to the consumption tax increase. Noda and members of his Cabinet should take its declining popularity seriously as the public's warning

against the high-handed manner in which the Noda administration has decided on policy measures, such as the reactivation of nuclear plants and the introduction of the Osprey aircraft.

Don't ask them where they work

Gov't won't stop power company officials from taking part in energy policy polls

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120801p2a00m0na008000c.html>

The government will not exclude power company officials from participating in the upcoming deliberative polls aimed at hearing public opinion on the country's future energy policy, it has been learned.

Criticism has arisen over the selection of participants in previous deliberative poll sessions, in which utility officials voiced their opinions in support of the promotion of nuclear power. The government, in response, had once decided to exclude utility workers from taking part in those hearings, but it determined that there will be no problem if utility workers happen to be chosen on a random basis in deliberative polling starting from Aug. 4.

The government is conducting deliberative polling on top of public hearings at 11 locations across the country over what percentage nuclear power should account for in the country's future energy mix by 2030 -- 0 percent, 15 percent, or 20-25 percent. In contrast to ordinary public hearings, deliberative polls allow participants to debate issues and deepen their understanding before they express their opinions.

The organizing committee for the deliberative polling conducted a nationwide telephone survey on men and women aged 20 or older between July 7 and 22, to which 6,849 responded. After confirming their will to participate in deliberative polling, 301 had become eligible to take part as of July 28. The committee said it asked respondents about their age, address and occupation, but that it withheld from asking the names of their workplaces, leaving the possibility that utility workers may be among participants of deliberative polling.

"If we screen participants, it'll be tantamount to manipulating public opinion and constitutes a 'set-up,'" said an official of the organizing committee.

All decided in advance?

August 4, 2012

Official pushed pronuke stance

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120804a7.html>

A senior **government official in charge of nuclear policy planning** on Friday admitted pressing the Japan Atomic Energy Commission last year over continuing to generate nuclear power.

Industry minister Yukio Edano, who oversees the country's energy policy, expressed regret over the incident, telling a news conference he doesn't want the public to think the government is scheming to maintain Japan's reliance on atomic energy.

Kyoji Yoshino, a director at the Natural Resources and Energy Agency, on Dec. 27 handed a document to the commission's head, Shunsuke Kondo, stating that "analyzing a scenario for abolishing nuclear power could encourage those concerned (about safety issues) and would not help maintain" atomic energy operations, the industry ministry said.

Kondo has been tasked with reviewing Japan's new energy policy.

Yoshino, head of the agency's nuclear energy policy planning division, received a verbal reprimand from the industry ministry.

Edano claimed Yoshino penned the document only in a private capacity, but added, "While the government has yet to decide whether or not to keep nuclear power, (Yoshino's behavior) could be considered by the public as government maneuvering to maintain the atomic energy."

"I submitted the document as a way to exchange views between administrative bodies, but I inadvertently wrote too much," Yoshino said.

In January, a panel under the commission began discussing Japan's future nuclear fuel cycle in light of the Fukushima disaster.

August 3, 2012

Senior gov't bureaucrat discouraged consideration of zero nuclear power option

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120803p2a00m0na010000c.html>

A senior official at the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy (ANRE) is under fire for writing that analysis of a possible end to nuclear power would threaten the survival of atomic energy in Japan.

ANRE nuclear power policy chief Kyoji Yoshino wrote to the Atomic Energy Commission in December last year, saying, "Analyzing a scenario in which Japan were to give up nuclear power may help shore up the courage of the cautious factions, but it would not aid the continuation of atomic energy." The comment was an apparent attempt to restrain the commission from considering the elimination of nuclear power.

The government is evaluating three scenarios for Japan's energy future, including one that envisages the complete abandonment of nuclear power in 2030.

Yoshino's comments were disclosed at an Aug. 3 news conference by Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Yukio Edano, who stressed that they were contained in "a memo written by (Yoshino) as an individual," and did not reflect government policy. However, Edano added, "**It's unavoidable that some people will see this as proof the government is scheming to continue atomic power generation.**"

The industry ministry has issued a reprimand to Yoshino over the document.

According to the ministry, Yoshino passed the document to Atomic Energy Commission Chairman Shunsuke Kondo during a visit to the commission in December 2011 to discuss the proceedings of a subcommittee on Japan's nuclear fuel cycle project. The document asked that, before the government decides on the role of nuclear power in Japan's energy plans, the commission restrain discussion and analysis of the future of the nuclear fuel cycle project on the assumption that Japan will completely abandon nuclear energy.

Yoshino has since told a ministry internal inspection that he "deeply regrets" writing the document.

TEPCO never learns

August 4, 2012

Editorial: TEPCO must be condemned for news media restrictions

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20120804p2a00m0na009000c.html>

We must condemn Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) over its restrictions on news media access to footage of videoconferences it held immediately after the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The utility will show the videoconference footage to news organizations on request starting Aug. 6. However, the company has altered parts of the videos out of consideration for the privacy of employees who appear in the videos.

TEPCO has agreed to show the edited footage to the media with various conditions attached. It bans reporters from recording the footage or identifying ordinary employees who are not listed in the company's own crisis investigation report. Furthermore, the utility demands that news organization never release any of the footage or images from it that they obtain through their own sources.

The power company has even hinted it will expel journalists who refuse to comply with these rules from its offices or ban them from attending its future news conferences. Such media restrictions are absurd considering that the footage is public property, as well as the public's right to know and the freedom of the press in Japan. We strongly urge TEPCO to respond to news organizations in a flexible manner when it shows the footage.

About 150 hours of videoconference footage between TEPCO headquarters and the stricken Fukushima No. 1 plant will be released to the press, covering the roughly four days from March 11, 2011 -- the day the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the nuclear crisis -- to March 15.

During that period, hydrogen explosions blew apart the buildings housing the plant's No. 1, 3 and 4 reactors. The No. 2 reactor's cooling function was lost and sea water was injected into the No. 1, 2 and 3 reactors. Amid this critical situation, then Prime Minister Naoto Kan visited the TEPCO headquarters on the early morning of March 15, and warned the utility in no uncertain terms against withdrawing workers from the plant.

The nuclear disaster came as a shock not only to the Japanese public but also the international community. The TEPCO videoconference footage is indispensable for clarifying how the utility tried to bring the crisis under control and how far workers grasped the condition of the overheating reactors, as demanded by the international community.

Since TEPCO has received a massive infusion of public funds and been effectively placed under state control, the company is all the more accountable to the public for the crisis and its response. As such,

TEPCO must release all relevant videos without restrictions for analysis by third parties. The company is set to show the footage only to the media, but researchers and ordinary citizens must be given access to the videos as well. Moreover, it should release footage from March 16 and beyond as well.

Needless to say, news organizations must report on the videos while giving maximum consideration to the privacy of individuals who appear in them. At the same time, however, it is possible for the media to identify ordinary workers who played an important role in responding to the crisis even if they are not in managerial positions. **Assuming the responsibility for the consequences of this is one of the things the news media is supposed to do**, TEPCO should be fully aware of news organizations' role in this regard.

We cannot help but be astounded by the manner in which TEPCO initially proposed to reveal these important videoconferences to the media and the world. Specifically, the utility had planned to allow only one reporter from each media outlet to view the video within about 30 hours over five days starting Aug. 6. TEPCO's plan certainly made it appear as if the company was deliberately trying to make it as difficult as possible for any third party to get to the bottom of the crisis. In the end, the utility extended the period to Sept. 7 at the instruction of Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano.

The Japan Newspaper Publishers & Editors Association urged TEPCO on Aug. 3 to release the relevant videos in their entirety and do away with all press restrictions. TEPCO should humbly accept this demand.

TEPCO's footage of first five days

August 6, 2012

August 6, 2012-08-06

Tepco airs internal crisis footage

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120806x2.html>

By KAZUAKI NAGATA
Staff writer

Tokyo Electric Power Co. on Monday began allowing journalists to view 150 hours of teleconferencing footage between its headquarters and the Fukushima No. 1 plant, showing how executives interacted with workers in the first five days of the meltdown crisis that erupted on March 11, 2011.

Some of the footage, which was finally disclosed after resistance from Tepco, portrayed the extreme tension and chaos that reigned as the crisis escalated toward hydrogen explosions in reactors 1, 2 and 3, raising fears that the primary containment vessels give way.

The footage also showed Tepco Managing Director Akio Komori, one of the key executives involved in handling the crisis, urging others to decide under which conditions workers would have to be withdrawn as the utility surmised that the fuel rods in reactor 2 were fully exposed at 6:22 p.m. on March 14.

"Somebody needs to come up with a criterion for a pullout. At some point we need to make a decision on whether we can stay at the plant or (its) control rooms. Please start considering the criterion," Komori said around 7:30 p.m.

Tepco claims it was only discussing a partial withdrawal of workers and never considered a total pullout from the plant.

But then Prime Minister Naoto Kan and other government officials suspected that Tepco was considering abandoning the plant for good amid the meltdowns. A total pullout would have triggered even more meltdowns and a much larger release of radioactivity over eastern Japan.

The 150 hours of footage only has audio available for 50 hours, and about 100 of the nonsound hours include teleconferences between Tepco's Tokyo headquarters and the Fukushima No. 1 plant. The teleconference network connects Tepco's major facilities, such as Tepco's headquarters in Tokyo, the Fukushima No. 1 and No. 2 plants, an off-site center and the Kashiwazaki Karia plant. The footage is divided by several screens and shows scenes of these places.

The 50-hour video was recorded at Tepco headquarters, and the 100 hours of nonsound video was recorded through the network at Fukushima No. 2.

Tepco claimed that the audio capture and image capture need to be set up separately, but workers, according to Tepco, failed to turn on the audio recording for the 100-hour footage.

The silent footage includes the time when Kan visited Tepco headquarters early on the morning of March 15.

Apparently Kan had a heated exchange with the utility's officials over their handling of the crisis, but the camera was shooting Kan from behind and facial emotions were not captured.

Kan, fearing Tepco was considering quitting the plant, went to the headquarters to take over emergency operations by setting up a joint headquarters.

Tepco claims the emotional exchange with Kan only served to undermine the morale of the workers, while Kan claimed his visit was useful to the government in handling the crisis.

The footage also showed another heated exchange involving Tepco workers. Soon after reactor 3 was rocked by a hydrogen explosion at around 11 a.m. on March 14, Masao Yoshida, then chief of the plant, hurriedly called Tepco headquarters.

"It's probably reactor 3, and it has just exploded!" Yoshida said.

The report caused a big stir at the plant and Tepco HQ, as the voices of confused workers could be more loudly heard from the footage. Some yelled "Check the parameters of reactor 3!" while others were calling around to check if everyone was OK.

Kan demands full disclosure of TEPCO video

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120806_31.html

Former Prime Minister Naoto Kan has demanded a full disclosure of the TEPCO teleconference video recorded in the aftermath of last year's nuclear accident. Kan led the disaster response as prime minister.

Kan said an unconditional and full disclosure is necessary to get to the bottom of what happened after the accident. He compared the importance of the footage with the voice recorder of a crashed plane.

Kan said the video showing his visit to the TEPCO headquarters on March 15th last year does not have audio. He said he wants to see everything recorded including the audio.

Manipulation, again

August 7, 2012

Pro-nuclear power experts used secret meetings to manipulate deliberations

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120807p2a00m0na009000c.html>

Secret meetings of pro-nuclear power experts organized by the Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) "manipulated" deliberations by a subcommittee on Japan's nuclear fuel cycle by removing policy scenarios that would adversely affect power suppliers, a report by a Cabinet Office investigation team has revealed.

The report, which was submitted to nuclear disaster minister Goshi Hosono on Aug. 6, also revealed that the JAEC held a "coordination meeting" attended by power suppliers to influence the conclusion by the subcommittee. "It was inappropriate from the viewpoint of neutrality, fairness and transparency," the report concluded.

According to the report, the secret meetings -- which were technically called "study meetings" -- "guided discussions by a subcommittee by removing scenarios that would adversely affect utilities. The possibility that those meetings influenced the conclusion by the subcommittee cannot be ruled out."

The team's finding contradicts JAEC's claim that the secret meetings did not influence subcommittee discussion on the nuclear fuel cycle. The subcommittee was set up last September to review Japan's nuclear fuel cycle policy in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. "We will examine the report and disclose what responses we will make," JAEC Chairman Shunsuke Kondo told reporters.

The initial part of the report examined the characteristics of the secret meetings by analyzing e-mail dispatched by the Cabinet Office. Because one of the e-mails stated that "The direction (of discussions) will be examined by the study meetings, based on which discussions will be made," the report points out that those meetings "were aimed at influencing not only working-level meetings but other discussions as well."

The report then recognizes the fact that a policy scenario that would adversely affect the continuation of research and development of the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor was deleted from policy options as a result of a secretive meeting held on March 8. "**There was an induction of discussions under the strong influence of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry,**" the report said.

While acknowledging that most of the subcommittee members denied during their interviews that the study meetings influenced their conclusion, the report said, "If the scenarios presented have already been sifted through, that would affect discussions. The possibility that it influenced the (subcommittee's) conclusion cannot be ruled out."

Furthermore, the report disclosed that the JAEC held a coordination meeting attended by its chairman and power industry officials, where they discussed the conclusion to be drawn by the subcommittee.

After the investigation team restored e-mails from the Cabinet Office's computer server, it emerged that JAEC held a "coordination meeting" on May 1 to discuss the subcommittee's conclusion, called a "comprehensive evaluation." The meeting was attended by JAEC Chairman Kondo, Vice-Chairman Tatsujiro Suzuki, officials from the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan -- a consortium of 10 utilities -- and Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd., the operator of the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture.

Prior to the meeting, a draft made by Suzuki was distributed to attendees via e-mail, based on which they adjusted their opinions, according to the report.

Cabinet Office team blasted for failing to get to bottom of secret meetings on nuke power

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120807p2a00m0na008000c.html>

A Cabinet Office fact-finding team has come under fire for failing to get to the bottom of secret meetings between pro-nuclear officials after it released a report that stopped short of concluding whether the gatherings had influenced policy discussions at the Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC).

The team, comprised of 12 members including Cabinet Office Senior Vice Minister Hitoshi Goto, spent about 1 1/2 months on its investigation into secret meetings of JAEC members and others favoring nuclear power.

The team needed to confirm specifically what was discussed at such secret meetings to determine whether and how far the discussions influenced policy decisions at a JAEC subcommittee that was reviewing the nuclear fuel cycle project in which spent nuclear fuel would be reprocessed for reuse in nuclear reactors.

However, attendees and organizers of the secret meetings claimed that no minutes were compiled on any of the gatherings. The team managed to obtain memoranda on the outline of discussions at some meetings submitted by the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA), which operates the prototype fast-breeder reactor Monju in Fukui Prefecture, the core of the nuclear fuel cycle project.

Tatsujiro Suzuki, vice chairman of JAEC, told the fact-finding team that those present at such meetings representing the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry and the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan (FEPC) were taking note of what was being discussed.

Nevertheless the ministry said no such memorandum has been found. FEPC admitted keeping memoranda but refused to submit them to the team for privacy concerns.

Akira Yoshikawa, a senior official at the Cabinet Office, raised doubts about Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry officials' denial that they took notes. "I asked the ministry a few times whether it kept memoranda on the meetings, but it responded they didn't. It's extremely doubtful they did."

Lawyer Yasushi Murakami, who served on a special fact-finding team on sumo wrestlers' and stablemasters' involvement in illegal baseball gambling, is paying close attention to the fact that Goto, senior vice minister at the Cabinet Office, asked attendees of secret meetings to cooperate in its investigation.

"Those who refused to follow orders from their appointees would be punished. However, a Cabinet Office senior vice minister has rank only over Cabinet Office officials," Murakami said. "If the investigative team needed to gain cooperation from other ministries and agencies concerned, the prime minister should have issued the order."

Murakami also pointed out that FEPC would have submitted relevant memoranda it keeps if it had been instructed by the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry, the regulator of the industry, to do so.

However, neither Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, nor Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano, took such action, illustrating their lack of awareness of their responsibility, which hindered efforts to get to the bottom of the scandal.

Yoshikawa later said, "We have no choice but to ask them to voluntarily cooperate."

When launched, the fact-finding team was comprised of only seven members. Lawyer Tadashi Kunihiro, who is an expert in crisis management, had not been appointed to the panel until July 13.

"The organization that conducted the investigation was inadequate," said lawyer Nobuo Gohara, who chaired a third-party investigative panel on allegations that Kyushu Electric Power Co. attempted to manipulate public opinion on whether to reactivate idled reactors at its Genkai Nuclear Power Plant in Saga Prefecture. "Even if the number of members of such a panel is gradually increased, it never produces any positive results. Getting to the bottom of an incident is difficult if the top official lacks sufficient awareness about the problem."

TEPCO's videos show situation "out of hand"

August 7, 2012

TEPCO meeting video shows decision to not announce cancellation of rolling blackouts

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120807p2a00m0na004000c.html>

The vice president of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) said at a teleconference in the early morning hours of March 14, 2011, the first day of rolling blackouts after the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster, that the company would not announce its decision to cancel rolling blackouts that day, it was learned from video released by TEPCO.

In the end, at 6:25 a.m., TEPCO announced the cancellation of rolling blackouts for the first planned area, but disruptions to train services still occurred.

According to the comments made by then vice president Takashi Fujimoto on the video, the decision to cancel the pre-noon rolling blackouts came after then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano reproached him over them, saying, "You will kill people using artificial respirators at home. If you proceed while knowing that, **we will hold you accountable for murder.**"

A reason given by Fujimoto on the video for not announcing the cancellation was, "If we hold a press conference (announcing a cancelation), it will instead cause chaos." A person from the company's headquarters said at the time, "We'll just have to let the situation be that it turned out we were able to get by without (pre-noon) blackouts."

Footage shows rift between PM's Office and TEPCO over initial handling of nuclear crisis

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120807p2a00m0na011000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) released video footage on Aug. 6 of teleconferences it held in the crucial first days of the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, underscoring **a deep rift between the Prime Minister's Office and the utility over the handling of the world's worst nuclear crisis since the 1986 Chernobyl disaster.**

The footage shows how the nuclear crisis got out of hand while the power company and the Prime Minister's Office were at loggerheads over how to bring the crisis under control. A video clip with sound started with bitter complaints about then Prime Minister Naoto Kan by Ichiro Takekuro, who was dispatched from TEPCO to Kan's office to serve as a liaison between the two entities.

In the footage, Takekuro said at around 11 p.m. on March 12, 2011, "He (Kan) got really mad very often. You name it. When I gave him a briefing, he told me, 'On what grounds? Can you say things will be alright that way even if something happens?' He was harshly screaming at me." The footage confirms that discord emerged between the Prime Minister's Office and TEPCO immediately after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis.

The footage also shows scenes of Masao Yoshida, chief at that time of the crippled Fukushima nuclear power station, being hard pressed to handle the emergency situation while radiation levels there kept rising.

In a teleconference soon after 12:30 p.m. on March 14, 2011, Yoshida told TEPCO headquarters, "Exposure doses are reaching their limits. I want you to pay attention to that!" Then TEPCO President Masataka Shimizu told Yoshida in a conciliatory tone, "Please keep trying in one way or another!"

The footage also recorded a scene in which Yoshida got so frustrated by the failure to cool down the nuclear reactors and stop their meltdown. At around 1 p.m. on March 14, 2011, Yoshida asked TEPCO headquarters to take steps to release hydrogen into the atmosphere from the No. 2 reactor, saying, "I want you to think of ways to open a hole (in the reactor building) immediately by using helicopters or whatever."

The footage also shows a scene that suggests that then TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata may not have predicted a hydrogen explosion at the No. 3 reactor at all. In a telephone conversation with Takekuro at around 7 p.m. on March 13, 2011, Katsumata said, "It looks like we may be able to open the vent at the No. 3 (reactor). I think that the problem of hydrogen is very small." In the end, a hydrogen explosion ripped through the No. 3 reactor at around 11 a.m. on March 14, 2011.

Nothing but a "cover-up"

TEPCO news media restrictions nothing but textbook cover-up attempt

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20120807p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, has at last given the media access to hours of company videoconference footage recorded in the opening days of the nuclear disaster in March 2011. However, this access comes with onerous restrictions devised, or so the utility says, to protect the privacy of individual employees mentioned in the videos.

The some 150 hours of footage covers videoconferences between TEPCO headquarters in Tokyo and the Fukushima No. 1 plant from March 11 -- the day the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the crisis -- to March 15. And though the videoconference content is vital to our understanding of how the nuclear disaster unfolded, TEPCO officials in the company of lawyer Hideaki Terashima informed reporters at a briefing that 1,665 audio segments and 29 video segments had been "masked" to keep the names of non-executives and their jobs off the record. The edits, TEPCO continued, were based on Article 13 of the Constitution, guaranteeing "respect for the individual."

On top of the clipped content, reporters who came to see the videos -- stored on a computer in an audio-visual room inside TEPCO headquarters -- were forced to sign a pledge not to record or photograph any portion of the videoconferences, and not to "slander" specific TEPCO employees. Once the document was signed, the reporters -- up to a maximum of two from each news organization -- were allowed into the AV room.

TEPCO is holding up the defense of privacy codified in the Personal Information Protection Act as its reason for these restrictions on this most essential information. It can rather be said that this is nothing but a textbook sham to help the utility cover up a scandal of the gravest degree.

The videoconference footage that TEPCO has so cavalierly snipped and clipped and altered behind a wall of high-powered legal representation is of the greatest importance; a key to sorting out what the company was doing as three of its reactors melted down and radioactive fallout blanketed the countryside in the worst global nuclear disaster since Chernobyl.

TEPCO is not a government organization with the concomitant requirements for transparency. The videoconferences, however, are the kind of content that must be revealed not just to the news media but to the people at large. The company must also admit that the restrictions it has placed on journalists, whose duty it is to examine and disseminate the information to the people of Japan, are both reprehensible and absurd. (By Hiroshi Dai, "Open Newspaper" Committee, and Ken Aoshima, City News Department)

EDITORIAL

Tepco's actions unacceptable

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/ed20120807a1.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. has started showing to media groups and journalists 150 hours of teleconference footage recorded during the first days of the nuclear crisis at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. It is deplorable that Tepco did not volunteer to show the footage earlier. At first it refused to disclose it, citing the need to protect the privacy of Tepco employees and subcontract workers. It only agreed to disclose the footage after trade and industry minister Yukio Edano prodded the company to do so.

Although it agreed to release the footage, Tepco attached various conditions to showing the footage, including restrictions on the activities of journalists. Tepco's attitude will deepen mistrust over its activities. It will convey the message that Tepco is not taking serious its responsibility for a disaster that made large areas of Fukushima Prefecture uninhabitable and uprooted the lives of tens of thousands of people.

Given the scale of the disaster, the video footage should never have been regarded as Tepco's private property. It is indispensable in revealing the truth of the unprecedented nuclear disaster. The video footage may provide answers to crucial questions such as whether Tepco planned a full pullout from the plant. It also covers exchanges between the prime minister's office and Tepco over the pumping of sea water into the No. 1 reactor and the release of radiation into the atmosphere. At the very least, media access to this material must be guaranteed, and the government should take steps to ensure the video footage becomes part of the public record.

The footage was recorded for four days from March 11, 2011, when the nuclear disaster began. It mainly covers teleconferences between Tepco headquarters and Tepco officials at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. Strangely, only about 50 hours of the footage includes audio. Among the silent portions is the footage of then Prime Minister Naoto Kan's March 15 visit to Tepco headquarters, during which he reportedly had heated exchanges with Tepco officials over their handling of the disaster.

The restrictions Tepco placed on reporters who view the video included a ban on making their own recordings of the Tepco footage and a ban on disclosing the names of Tepco officials and workers seen on the footage, except those whose names were disclosed by Tepco's own investigation. Moreover, Tepco has censored the video by blurring its employees' images and disguising their voices. Tepco even prohibits media organizations from disclosing video footage they have collected on their own.

In view of the critical importance of the footage to understanding how the disaster unfolded, Tepco should remove the restrictions. If Tepco refuses, steps should be taken to force them to do so.

"Brilliance without conscience"

August 7, 2012

Yoroku: Morality crucial in dealing with nuclear power

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20120806p2a00m0na008000c.html>

In 1948, three years after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, U.S. Army Commander Omar Bradley said, "**The world has achieved brilliance without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants.**"

Nuclear bombs kill tens of thousands of people in one moment, causing long-term emotional and physical suffering for victims and their descendants. Since turning a blind eye to this absurdity, the world has gone without reversing this deranged morality for years.

Aug. 6, 2012, marks the 67th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

The error of believing that mankind can contain nuclear power is perhaps not caused by any scientific faults, but by the absence of morality. The late anti-nuclear scientist Jinzaburo Takagi warned that the kind of moral restraints necessary to prevent nuclear accidents would not come naturally to scientists accustomed to making calculations on computers, which can later be fixed.

Last year, in commemorating not only the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the heels of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, calls for the abolishment of nuclear weapons and the elimination of our dependence on nuclear power intensified. It was an opportunity for Japan to take a close look at its conscience and morals, and ask: **what is the stance that the only nation to have experienced atomic bombing, and one of the most quake-prone countries in the world, should take against nuclear weapons and energy?**

A year has since passed. The current administration has sped along on the path of nuclear reactor restarts, as if the Fukushima disaster never happened. There no longer is any excitement around U.S.

President Barack Obama's push for a "world without nuclear weapons" that he called for in a speech three years ago. The morals of politics must have been full of holes from the very beginning.

There's only one truth that we can arrive at from Bradley's remorseful statement. It is that nuclear weapons and nuclear power are too dangerous to entrust to "brilliance without conscience" and "ethical infants." ("Yoroku," a front-page column in the Mainichi Shimbun)

TEPCO's videos

The Yomiuri on TEPCO's footage of the first days of the Fukushima crisis:

August 8, 2012

TEPCO reveals N-crisis video footage

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120807005526.htm>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. has shown for the first time video footage of its teleconferences in the days after the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami, showing the firm's response to the crisis at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The footage, which it began to show to reporters Monday, includes 150 hours of recorded teleconferences among officials at TEPCO's headquarters in Tokyo, the Fukushima Nos. 1 and 2 nuclear power plants and two other locations.

It covers teleconferences held just after the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant was hit by tsunami, until March 16.

The footage vividly captures the confusion among TEPCO officials as they tried to manage the hydrogen explosions at the Nos. 1 and 3 reactor buildings, and documents their slow response to the crisis.

TEPCO released only part of its collection of footage and modified the audio, which prompted criticism that it has disclosed insufficient information.

The 150 hours of video footage is in two parts. The first is 100 hours of silent recordings from the the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear power plant, while the second is 50 hours of footage with sound recorded at TEPCO's headquarters.

The issues mainly discussed in the footage include:

- Hydrogen explosions at the Nos. 1 and 3 nuclear reactor buildings.
- Injection of seawater to cool the No. 1 reactor.
- Evacuation of workers from the plant.
- Then Prime Minister Naoto Kan's visit to TEPCO's headquarters.
- Preparations to vent the No. 2 reactor and release steam to reduce pressure inside the reactor, enabling the injection of water to cool it.

In the footage, just after the hydrogen explosion of the No. 3 reactor on March 14, Masao Yoshida, then director of the plant, tensely said: "Headquarters, headquarters, it's a crisis, crisis. An explosion has just occurred."

Officials at the headquarters responded by hastily calling the relevant institutions to report the accident, the footage shows.

Meanwhile, Kan, who visited the headquarters, is shown in the footage giving instructions to officials on two occasions. However, as there is no sound accompanying the footage, Kan's words are unknown.

According to the final report of a government panel charged with investigating the nuclear crisis, Kan strongly said, "Withdrawal is impossible in the face of a crisis that could lead to the nation's collapse."

TEPCO initially refused to reveal the video footage, but later agreed. However, it modified the audio in the footage to prevent individuals other than executives from being identified.

The utility is permitting certain representatives of the media to watch the footage inside its headquarters for one month, but viewers are banned from recording or photographing the video. Instead, TEPCO distributed a 1-1/2-hour summary of the footage.

However, releasing information in this manner has prompted media organizations and observers to demand full disclosure of the footage.

TEPCO video heavily altered / Alternation shows utility's reluctance to make information available

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120807004826.htm>

The recently disclosed video of Tokyo Electric Power Co. teleconferences that took place just after the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has been significantly altered, with many images blurred and audio heavily obscured.

The media had requested the recording of the teleconferences be released immediately after the nuclear crisis began.

However, the about 150-minute-long video is another example of TEPCO's less than positive attitude toward disclosing information about the crisis.

TEPCO said it edited audio, such as people's speech and other sounds, 1,665 times in the video, and blurred images another 29 times.

"It's to protect the privacy of individual employees and we aren't intentionally [withholding information]," a TEPCO official explained.

However, even then TEPCO President Masataka Shimizu has been blurred in parts of the video, making his face unrecognizable. Even when his face is visible, his expressions are at times unreadable.

Some audio sections have also been bleeped out multiple times, or simply cut mid-speech.

The video screen is evenly split into six sections as teleconferences were held between the utility's headquarters in Tokyo, the Fukushima No. 1 plant and other locations. The quality of the images is generally poor.

However, a technical staffer at a video imaging company suspects the images have been altered more than necessary.

For instance, at one point, then General Manager Masao Yoshida at the No. 1 plant makes an X with both hands in reference to a sea water injection into the No. 1 reactor.

"When he makes the X, only his hands have been blurred out," the staffer said.

TEPCO has until now refused to disclose the video, saying it was protecting the privacy of its employees. The firm's new management, which came into power on June 27, was behind the video's disclosure.

However, TEPCO placed several conditions on the video's disclosure, including prohibitions on recording the video's visual and audio content or naming nonexecutive employees. Should media companies violate these conditions, TEPCO will bar them from viewing the video again and participating in its press conferences.

TEPCO provided the media with an abridged, 90-minute copy of the video. TEPCO has given the media permission to view the full video at its headquarters during a one-month period.

Initially, TEPCO said it would limit the viewing period to five days and permit only one reporter from each company.

Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano requested TEPCO to make accommodations and as a result, the firm extended the viewing period to one month.

The Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association asked TEPCO to disclose all teleconferences in their entirety without any alterations. However, the video only includes footage from the evening of March 11 to March 16, 2011--about five days in total.

This reluctance to readily make information available was evident within the video footage.

Around the time some experts suggested a hydrogen explosion had taken place at the No. 3 reactor building, then TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata was on the phone with a senior TEPCO executive.

"It's my judgment on whether we can cause the general public anxiety. If I'm asked about that [a hydrogen explosion at the No. 3 reactor] at the next news conference, I'll deny it and say it would never happen," Katsumata said.

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Early morning blackout aborted

TEPCO had also planned a rolling power blackout for early March 14 last year, but decided against it when the Prime Minister's Office strongly urged them to refrain from a morning blackout, video footage revealed Monday.

TEPCO implemented its first rolling blackout the same day, but avoided doing so for the entire morning.

The previous evening, TEPCO had announced it would carry out the planned blackout the next morning in some areas in Tokyo's 23 wards and Isogo Ward in Yokohama, among other places.

However, in a teleconference shortly after midnight, then TEPCO Vice President Takashi Fujimoto revealed then Chief Cabinet Secretary Edano, then Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Tetsuro Fukuyama and Renho, then state minister in charge of government revitalization and energy saving, had all demanded that there be no blackout during the early morning hours.

"I was told, 'You would kill people dependent on artificial respirators or artificial heart-lung machines at their homes. If you knowingly do so, we'll accuse you of murder,'" he said.

Many unanswered questions even with the videos

August 8, 2012

Depth of Fukushima No. 1 evacuation plan unclear in videos

By JUN HONGO

Staff writer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120808a2.html>

Scrutiny of the 150 hours of teleconferencing footage recorded by Tokyo Electric Power Co. in the initial days of the March 2011 meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 plant shows that crucial decisions were being made hastily.

Tepco on Monday started letting journalists view the footage — 50 hours with audio and another 100 without — of the first five days of the crisis.

The video shows top executives discussing the "evacuation" of workers from the nuclear plant. But it didn't give definitive clues on one critical question — whether Tepco was abandoning the plant for good amid the radioactive fallout.

"At what time will all the workers be evacuating from the site?" Akio Takahashi, a senior executive at Tepco's Tokyo headquarters is heard asking Sakae Muto, then executive vice president, at 7:55 p.m. on March 14, the audible portion of the video shows.

By that time, Tepco had already concluded that the nuclear fuel assemblies in reactor 2 were fully exposed because critical coolant water had evaporated in the reactor.

If left uncooled, the nuclear fuel rods will melt and eventually breach the pressure vessel and damage the outer containment vessel, releasing massive amounts of radioactive fallout into the environment.

Takahashi asked again, "all the people will soon evacuate from 1F (a reference to Fukushima No. 1) to the visitor hall of 2F (the nearby Fukushima No. 2 plant), right?"

Tepco President Masataka Shimizu is heard saying at around 8:20 p.m. that "a final evacuation has not been decided yet" and that he is in the process of checking with "related authorities," possibly referring to the office of then Prime Minister Naoto Kan.

Tepco claims it never considered totally abandoning Fukushima No. 1 and maintains that Takahashi was only talking about evacuating only noncritical workers, thus leaving the minimum necessary to deal with the crisis.

But Kan and other top government officials suspected Tepco was preparing a total withdrawal. They have said that a full pullout would have caused meltdowns in all of the plant's six reactors as well as their spent-fuel pools, because there would have been no one there to restore and continue cooling operations. This scenario, they said, would have caused catastrophic radioactive fallout across eastern Japan. Earlier reports even indicated the whole Tokyo area would have been in jeopardy.

Yukio Edano, the chief Cabinet secretary at the time, said Shimizu called him at the prime minister's office early on the morning of March 15, seeking approval to evacuate workers from the plant. The scene was not captured on the video.

Edano concluded from the conversation that Shimizu was looking to have all the workers retreat from the plant. Edano recalled replying: "If we did such a thing, the situation would be out of control. It would become worse and worse and just unstoppable."

Edano said Shimizu was hesitant to answer, apparently realizing the gravity of what a total withdrawal would mean.

Shimizu later claimed he couldn't remember if he placed that call to Edano at that time. The video footage released Monday gave no clue as to whether that exchange took place.

Kan, also gravely concerned by Tepco's apparent intention to withdraw from Fukushima No. 1, visited the utility's head office early on the morning of March 15 to set up a joint headquarters to take over emergency operations at the plant.

The video also included images of Kan's visit. During a roughly 14-minute exchange, he reportedly condemned the Tepco executives present for considering a pullout. There was no audio portion accompanying the footage.

Tepco has claimed about 100 hours of the teleconference footage contained no audio because workers failed to set up and activate the audio recording function.

The footage also showed those on the forefront of the crisis demonstrating their true grit.

Masao Yoshida, then chief of the power plant, is recorded as saying elderly veterans on site "are ready to work as a (suicide) squad" to secure a pipe to be used for pumping seawater into reactor 2 to cool it down. Aged people are less vulnerable to the effects of radiation exposure than younger people.

The 150-hour-long footage was shown at Tepco's HQ and no copying was allowed. The utility only released a 90-minute edited version of the video to the public.

There is no such thing as nuclear safety

August 10, 2012

Hibakusha: Nuke safety biggest lie

By SHINGO ITO

AFP-Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120810f2.html>

HIROSHIMA — The marks that still scar Sunao Tsuboi's face from the 1945 bombing of Hiroshima are a grim reminder of the power of the atom as a wave of wariness about nuclear power sweeps Japan.

Ground zero: Doves fly over Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park during a memorial ceremony Monday to mark the 67th anniversary of the world's first atomic bombing. AFP-JIJI



Nearly 170,000 people perished instantly in the searing heat or from radiation in the days and months after a U.S. plane unleashed the deadliest weapon ever used and ushered in the nuclear age.

Nearly seven decades on, Tsuboi, one of a dwindling number of survivors of the world's first atomic attack, is raising his voice against nuclear power in a country still reeling from the Fukushima No. 1 plant catastrophe that started in March 2011.

"In terms of being nuclear victims, we are the same," Tsuboi, 87, said of those affected by the nuclear disaster.

He was on his way to university when the "Little Boy" A-bomb exploded over Hiroshima in a flash of blinding light and intense heat on Aug 6, 1945. In addition to his burns, Tsuboi has also suffered intestinal

cancer that may be linked to radiation exposure and says he sees little difference in the dangers posed by atomic weapons and atomic power.

"Nuclear technology is beyond human wisdom. . . . I still want to see a nuclear-free world while I'm alive," he said.

He is making his appeal as a bitter debate swirls over the future of Japan's 50 remaining commercial reactors, which once met around a third of the country's electricity needs, but which were idled following the Fukushima meltdowns.

Fears of electricity shortages have led the government to order the reactivation of two reactors at the Oi nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture, despite an increasingly vocal antinuclear movement in a country where public protests remain rare.

Those who experienced the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which took place three days later and killed up to 80,000 people by the end of 1945, said television images of the Fukushima crisis brought back terrible memories.

"The TV reminded me of the dreadful scenes," said a sobbing Misako Katani, 82, one of just a handful of hibakusha who survived both attacks.

No one is officially recorded as having died as a result of the Fukushima disaster, but **many who fled the area and those who remain, including workers decommissioning the crippled plant, worry about the long-term effects of excessive radiation exposure.**

The quake and tsunami knocked out the reactors' cooling systems at the Fukushima No. 1 power station in March 2011, causing three to suffer meltdowns that spewed radioactive fallout over a large area and forced thousands to evacuate.

Scientists have warned it could be decades before it is safe for some residents to return home.

"I think we can share the same sadness with people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki," said Sachiko Sato, a Fukushima evacuee who attended the annual Hiroshima A-bombing commemoration ceremony Monday along with tens of thousands of others. **"In my mind, Fukushima is like a third nuclear victim, following Hiroshima and Nagasaki."**

Toshiyuki Mimaki, a 70-year-old hibakusha, added: "We want to work together with the people in Fukushima and unite in calling for an end to nuclear victims."

But for some aging victims, there are few parallels between 1945 and 2011.

"There is nothing to compare to what I experienced" at the time of the Hiroshima bombing, said Shigeji Yonekura, 79.

"The atomic bomb was dropped in war and no one helped us, while the Fukushima accident occurred in peacetime and a lot of people offered help."

Many people continue to insist the atomic bombings brought World War II to a swift end by forcing Imperial Japan to surrender, preventing many more casualties from a land invasion planned for later that year.

Despite his own experience, Yonekura is resigned to the possibility that resource-poor Japan may not be able to abandon atomic energy altogether. "Nuclear power may be a necessary evil," he said.

But Miyako Jodai, a survivor of the Nagasaki bombing, said the Fukushima crisis and the government's botched response have turned her against atomic energy.

Several reports have heaped criticism on the government and Tokyo Electric Power Co., with one parliamentary probe labeling Tepco's Fukushima nuclear crisis a "man-made disaster."

"I was convinced that the peaceful use of nuclear power should be accepted because reactors were safe," said Jodai.

"But after seeing the accident and the government's handling of the aftermath, I felt like I had been betrayed."

A "culture of irresponsibility" or worse

August 11, 2012

SPEEDI report deepens suspicions

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/ed20120811a1.html>

SPEEDI, a computer simulation system used to determine or predict dispersions of radioactive substances, is supposed to be utilized during a nuclear disaster to help people evacuate to safe areas. But in the early stage of the crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the government did not make public the predictions made by SPEEDI. In the absence of relevant information, some people fled to places where radiation levels were actually higher.

On July 27, the education and science ministry, which is in charge of SPEEDI, issued a report based on a probe of its handling of SPEEDI data. The report attempted to justify the ministry's decision to withhold SPEEDI-based predictions of the dispersion of radioactive fallout from Fukushima No. 1.

What is deplorable is that there is no evidence that ministry officials ever seriously considered utilizing SPEEDI to help residents safely escape the radiation danger. The ministry's organizational **culture of irresponsibility** is highlighted by the fact that the probe could not even determine whether ministry officials held discussions on the question of whether SPEEDI-based predictions should be disclosed for evacuation purposes. If someone feels that **a cover-up** is going on in the ministry, he or she cannot be blamed.

SPEEDI — short for System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information — is the same system that the Nuclear Safety Commission uses to make risk calculations. It divides the nation into a fine geographic grid of 250-by-250-meter squares to predict how radioactive materials will spread in the event of a disaster at a nuclear power plant.

The ministry could have used SPEEDI to keep the public informed of the geographical distribution of nuclear substances released by Fukushima No. 1, along with the radiation levels, and what the distribution of radioactive substances and radiation levels might be if the situation at the plant worsened.

The ministry report stated that because information on real conditions at the reactors was lacking, the accuracy of SPEEDI predictions on the distribution of radioactive substances could not be known. But attention should be paid to the fact that the government commission to investigate the Fukushima nuclear crisis stated that **even though the amount of radiation released per unit area was not known, SPEEDI-based predictions could have been used to enhance the safety of those residents forced to evacuate.**

If hypothetical amounts of radioactive substances released from the reactors had been fed into SPEEDI in the absence of real data, SPEEDI could have predicted the directions in which radioactive materials would disperse.

It has been known that the education and science ministry utilized SPEEDI-based predictions in choosing the points in Fukushima Prefecture for measuring radiation levels and provided SPEEDI-based predictions to the U.S armed forces.

Given these facts, it is not far-fetched to say that from the very beginning, the ministry had no intention of using SPEEDI for the sake of protecting local residents from radiation hazards.

Another leakage of secrets

August 16, 2012

Prosecutors to probe leak of nuclear policy agenda to power suppliers

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120816p2a00m0na015000c.html>

The Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office is poised to launch an investigation into an alleged **leakage of secrets by national public servants to power suppliers over Japan's nuclear policy.**

The move comes as the special investigation unit of the prosecutors' office accepted on Aug. 15 a complaint filed by a group of lawyers against members of the Cabinet Office's Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) and other officials for leaking the agenda of JAEC subcommittee meetings on the country's new nuclear policy to power suppliers.

According to the complaint, JAEC Chairman Shunsuke Kondo, Vice Chairman Tatsujiro Suzuki and 25 other officials handed to seven officials from the power industry a total of 24 sets of documents spanning 364 pages during secret "study meetings" held between December last year and April this year. The documents included information classified as "Level 2" confidentiality in the three-stage confidentiality designations, which should not be disclosed to anyone outside the government body.

The complaint was filed by 21 lawyers from Tokyo and 11 other prefectures. It was initially filed to the Supreme Public Prosecutors Office by 18 lawyers on July 18, who were later joined by three lawyers from Fukushima and Osaka prefectures.

Prosecutors are poised to **investigate the accused officials on suspicion of violating the National Public Service Law.**

NISA put pressure on TEPCO to keep quiet

August 16, 2012

NISA told Tepco to delay reporting looming explosion

Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120816a4.html>

The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency ordered Tepco in March 2011 to delay announcing that the pressure level in one of the Fukushima No. 1 plant's wrecked reactors was spiking to critical levels, teleconference footage released by the utility shows.

Images of Tokyo Electric Power Co. teleconferences during the initial stages of the nuclear crisis, as well as other materials and information, confirm that Tepco was forced to defer an announcement after pressure inside the reactor 3 containment vessel suddenly spiked to alarming levels around 6 a.m. March 14.

Masao Yoshida, then manager of the crippled plant, instructed workers to temporarily evacuate the reactor building, fearing a hydrogen explosion was about to rip it apart, and Tepco began preparing to announce the development to the press.

However, the utility was instructed to withhold the information by NISA, which is under the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. The agency then made an announcement shortly after 9 a.m. March 14 — just two hours before a hydrogen explosion destroyed the upper part of the structure housing reactor 3.

The reactor 1 building had suffered a similar blast two days earlier. Both reactors, along with reactor 2, subsequently experienced catastrophic meltdowns.

Before the explosion occurred at reactor 3, a Tepco public relations team based at the Fukushima No. 1 plant prepared a press statement about the surging pressure level.

The footage, however, shows that in a conversation with the utility's headquarters in Tokyo, one member of the team said, "We've been stopped by the government and are being made to wait before issuing any announcement to the press."

"NISA officials are blocking any release of information on the matter," a person who appears to be a head office employee says in the video images. "The agency's officials are saying that (Tepco) should not be the entity to announce this either."

Another voice on the recordings can be heard stating that NISA had refused to give Tepco permission to announce the pressure surge, saying, "We've been strongly requested, instructed not to announce this."

NISA has said it kept Tepco's announcement on hold because officials were unable to get in touch with its chief to obtain the necessary permission.

TEPCO on shaky grounds despite public money

August 17, 2012

Tepco's shaky revival plan

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/ed20120817a2.html>

The government on July 31 injected ¥1 trillion into Tokyo Electric Power Co., virtually nationalizing the utility, which was teetering in the wake of the nuclear crisis at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Now that Tepco has avoided bankruptcy thanks to the injection of public money and received government approval to raise the prices of electricity for households, it must shed its bureaucratic mindset and its traditional corporate culture, characterized by arrogance toward consumers, and make its operations transparent.

In compensating nuclear disaster victims, Tepco should not delay the processing of compensation claims because of differences with them over minor points.

In addition to the government's capital injection, which has enabled it to acquire a majority of Tepco voting shares, banks provided ¥370 billion in loans to Tepco on Aug. 1. But Tepco is still in a desperate financial situation.

For example, the costs for decommissioning the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and removing radioactive materials from contaminated areas are putting great pressure on the company. The possibility cannot be ruled out that the costs will swell to several trillion yen.

As Tepco President Naomi Hirose said in reference to the government capital injection and the bank loans, "Tepco has been presented with a last chance by the people."

In the April-June period, Tepco suffered a net loss of ¥288.3 billion on a consolidated basis. It revised the expected net loss for the business year that began in April from ¥100 billion to ¥160 billion. In the three-month period, the fuel cost for thermal power plants, which have been substituting for offline nuclear power plants, shot up 54.3 percent to ¥624.6 billion.

The main pillars of Tepco's special business operation plan for its reconstruction consist of raising electricity prices for households by an average 8.46 percent from Sept. 1 and restarting in phases the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture from April 2013.

Although the operation of each reactor at the plant is expected to reduce Tepco's total costs by ¥80 billion a year, the prospects of restarting the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, which has seven reactors, is dim. Clearly Tepco's reconstruction plan is on shaky ground. The government at least has taken the position that Japan's reliance on nuclear power should be reduced. The voice for ending such reliance is strong among the Japanese.

If the government and Tepco try to go ahead with the plan to restart the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, they will face strong opposition from local governments concerned and people opposed to nuclear power.

TEPCO: More problems ahead

August 17, 2012

Tokyo aims to end power sale to TEPCO in March 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120817p2g00m0dm090000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The Tokyo Metropolitan Government has asked Tokyo Electric Power Co. to terminate in March next year their contract under which the government sells electricity it generates through its power facilities to the utility, sources close to the matter said Friday.

The Tokyo government wants instead to arrange a competitive tender so that it can sell its power to the highest bidder and invigorate the electricity market by allowing new entrants into the electricity business.

Tokyo says it sold electricity produced by its three hydropower plants to TEPCO for around 1 billion yen in fiscal 2011.

In April, Gov. Shintaro Ishihara said that he wanted to change the current system so that Tokyo could sell power to firms other than TEPCO.

Tokyo intends to submit a draft plan to make that happen to the local assembly in September, the sources said.

The current power sale contract between Tokyo and TEPCO is valid until 2019 but Tokyo maintains that it would not have to pay any compensation to the utility even if it cancels the contract.

TEPCO has admitted that the Tokyo government has requested to end the contract but the utility does not intend to do so before the contract's expiration date.

"Dubious" donations from TEPCO and Tohoku

August 20, 2012

TEPCO, Tohoku Power made dubious transactions to Rokkasho nuke plant village

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120820p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and Tohoku Electric Power Co. paid a total of 400 million yen to an Aomori Prefecture village near a nuclear plant under construction following last year's Fukushima nuclear disaster, it has been learned.

TEPCO, the operator of the disaster-crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, and Tohoku Electric paid the massive amount of money to the Aomori Prefecture village of Rokkasho **under the pretext of promoting local fisheries following the nuclear crisis at the plant in March last year.** Rokkasho is neighboring Higashidori village, where the utilities' **Higashidori Nuclear Power Station is under construction.**

Although the utilities denied that the payments were "donations," insisting that the money was earmarked as part of the construction cost of the Higashidori nuclear plant, they were not included in the plant's initial costs such as personnel expenses, based on which electric charges are calculated.

According to the utilities and sources familiar with the Rokkasho Village Office, Rokkasho Mayor Kenji Furukawa demanded that TEPCO and Tohoku Electric "cooperate in regional development" aside from compensating fishermen in connection with the construction of the Higashidori nuclear plant when the utilities negotiated with the village's fisheries cooperative over additional compensation. Mayor Furukawa was serving as a mediator in the talks.

Both parties reached an agreement in 2009 that the utilities pay an annual 200 million yen to the Rokkasho Village Office for five years starting in fiscal 2010, and a total of 400 million yen was paid to the village in May 2011 and May 2012.

The village office earmarked the funds as "miscellaneous income" in its budget and provided the entire amounts to the fisheries cooperative, which were used for replacing squid-fishing boat equipment and other purposes.

According to sources close to the village, the municipal office sought cooperation from the utilities after the village's tax revenue declined due to a delay in the completion of a nuclear fuel reprocessing plant at the village.

In its comprehensive special business plan drawn up by TEPCO in May this year, the utility stated that it would "abolish donations." The company explained that the funds provided to Rokkasho Village "are not interpreted as donations as they were expenses related to construction work."

"There was no problem in receiving the money because it was decided before the disaster (at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant)," said Rokkasho Deputy Mayor Mamoru Toda in defending the transactions. "We will discuss what we will do from now on."

TEPCO and Tohoku Electric are jointly planning to construct four reactors at the Higashidori nuclear plant. The No. 1 reactor run by Tohoku Electric started operations in 2005. The construction of the other No. 1 reactor, run by TEPCO, began in January last year, but the work has been suspended since the Fukushima nuclear disaster broke out in March that year.

Minamiosumi last resort ?

August 25, 2012

Hosono denies nuke disposal report

By KAZUAKI NAGATA

Staff writer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120825a7.html>

Environment Minister Goshi Hosono denied on Friday a media report that the government has asked **the town of Minamiosumi, Kagoshima Prefecture**, to be the host for final disposal of radiation-contaminated soil and other waste generated by the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

"We've been looking into various possibilities, but we haven't officially asked any specific municipalities (about the final disposal site) yet," Hosono told reporters, noting there are many complex factors involved so final decisions are still a long way off.

But Hosono did not clearly deny that the town on the Osumi Peninsula, at nearly the southernmost point of Kyushu, is not a candidate site.

TBS TV reported Thursday the government considers Minamiosumi as a strong candidate site and has been talking to the town.

"We have not heard anything about this," said Yuichiro Furutono, an official in the Minamiosumi Municipal Government, adding that officials there were surprised by the report.

He said the town has not been officially contacted by the central government on this topic.

Hosono said he knows the Minamiosumi mayor, as the town has a national park, and that he has talked to him about what's going on in Fukushima and the debris disposal problem. But he said he discusses those issues with all municipal leaders he comes into contact with.

Finding a final disposal site will be a key element in proceeding with decontamination efforts in Fukushima, where a massive amount of radiation-contaminated soil has to be removed and stored along with other waste.

Before the contaminated waste goes to the final disposal site, it is expected to be stored in interim storage facilities in Fukushima for decades, perhaps until 2045.

The government is seeking sites in Fukushima for interim storage facilities, but local leaders are concerned that the waste will end up staying there after 2045, which is why finding the final disposal site is crucial.

Hosono has repeatedly said the final disposal site will be outside Fukushima, as it is not fair to put all of the burden on people in that prefecture.

The government plans to develop technologies to reduce the volume of waste before it goes to the final site.

Simple greetings or leading role?

August 25, 2012

Atomic energy commission head Kondo took leading role in secret pro-nuclear meetings

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120825p2a00m0na012000c.html>

Shunsuke Kondo, chairman of the Cabinet Office's Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC), told a secret meeting of pro-nuclear power experts that he would have a say over Japan's level of dependence on nuclear power when a task force set up under the commission drew up a new nuclear power policy, it has been learned.

Kondo's comment, made on Dec. 8 last year, appeared in a record of proceedings of the secret meeting, released by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry's Agency for Natural Resources and Energy on Aug. 24 following a disclosure of information request from the Mainichi Shimbun. It is the first time Kondo's comments on the issue have been made public.

Secret meetings of pro-nuclear power experts were held 23 times between November last year and April this year, and Kondo attended the first four meetings. Though he previously admitted having attended the meetings, he had stated that he had merely given greetings.

The records show that Kondo issued instructions pertaining to the agenda of the commission's Shin Taiko Sakutei Kaigi (conference to work out a new outline) and a meeting of experts discussing Japan's nuclear fuel cycle program -- **indicating that he played a leading role in the secret gatherings.**

The Agency for Natural Resources and Energy released a total of 58 pages of records covering seven meetings. In the records pertaining to a Dec. 8 meeting, Kondo was quoted as saying that even if discussions on the formulation of a new nuclear power policy weren't going smoothly, he would "take control of the issue" if it came down to it. He reportedly added that if discussion on nuclear policy remained unsettled and there was wavering over whether or not Japan should adopt a zero-nuclear power policy, then he would "control the final way the issue was presented."

At the time, the commission was planning to create a "new outline" for overall nuclear power policy based on discussions at the Shin Taiko Sakutei Kaigi. "The final way the issue was presented" referred to the new outline. Kondo thus indicated that he would ensure that the commission would decide that Japan would retain nuclear power.

In the records for the Dec. 8 meeting, Kondo was quoted as saying, "I've compiled papers on the points at issue, so how about discussing the formulation of a new outline based on these?" He was also quoted as calling for discussion on the Monju experimental fast-breeder reactor in Fukui Prefecture at a following subcommittee meeting.

The secret meetings -- attended by members of the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, as well as members of the electric power industry -- were exposed in a report by the Mainichi Shimbun on May 24. The findings caused an uproar among Sakutei Kaigi members and since May 29 the task force has not convened a meeting.

The Japan Atomic Energy Commission plans to replace members of the task force and resume meetings, but the selection of new members has progressed slowly, and the new outline for nuclear power in Japan is at a standstill.

Commenting on his statements in the records, Kondo said, "For me, this is part of the world of greetings. I merely spoke of my resolve as chairman." Referring to the new outline, he said, "In the end I'll take the responsibility.

American advice

August 31, 2012

Ex-US nuclear regulator chief urges transparency

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20120831_16.html

The former head of the US nuclear regulator has stressed the importance of information disclosure for the new nuclear safety agency that Japan will launch next month.

Gregory Jaczko met Fukushima residents during his recent trip to Japan. He served as the chairman of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission for about 3 years until July.

Jaczko told the residents that nuclear power plants should not be operated without a guarantee that major accidents that involve large-scale evacuations will not occur.

He also commented on the new nuclear regulatory body that will replace the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency in the near future.

The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency lost the confidence of the public after the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in March last year.

Jaczko said information disclosure, including the transparency of the decision-making process, is essential for the new regulator to gain public trust.

He said the recent anti-nuclear protests in Japan are understandable as nuclear energy is a controversial subject. He added that dialogue is important as the government and the people will ultimately have to make a decision on this issue.

More official warnings

September 1, 2012

Minister gives verbal warnings to atomic energy panel chiefs over secret meetings

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120831p2a00m0na012000c.html>

Nuclear disaster minister Goshi Hosono gave verbal warnings to the heads of the Cabinet Office's Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) on Aug. 30 for holding secret pro-nuclear meetings.

A total of 23 pro-nuclear meetings that took place between November last year and April this year under the guise of study sessions were "inappropriate from the standpoint of neutrality, transparency and fairness," Hosono told the pair.

Shunsuke Kondo, chairman of the JAEC, said he will return one month's salary, some 1,055,000 yen, while Vice Chairman Tatsujiro Suzuki will give back 465,500 yen, or half of his monthly salary, to take responsibility for their actions in connection with a review of the nation's nuclear fuel cycle policy.

But the JAEC did not revise a policy decision statement it submitted to the government in June, insisting that the secret meetings did not affect the outcome of deliberations on a new nuclear power policy.

The JAEC held the 23 closed-door study sessions by inviting only pro-nuclear people, including representatives of the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan, and kept them separate from open meetings of a subcommittee on the future of the nuclear fuel cycle. In its policy decision statement, the JAEC said it will be appropriate to pursue a combination of reprocessing spent nuclear fuel and burying it if the government is to set a ratio of nuclear power at 15 percent in 2030.

An investigative team of the Cabinet Office pointed out Aug. 6 that the possibility that the secret meetings have influenced the JAEC's conclusion cannot be ruled out. The JAEC deliberated the issue during a special meeting on Aug. 30 but decided not to change the policy decision statement.

But in order to maintain the transparency and fairness of its policy decision process, the JAEC says it will keep a memo outlining the content of each meeting to be attended by the chairman and at least two other commission members and will not ask private-sector people for comment in advance on future decision documents.

Also on Aug. 30, Cabinet Office Administrative Vice Minister Takashi Matsumoto separately gave verbal warnings to three members of the Cabinet Office's nuclear power policy office for distributing documents to pro-nuclear parties during the secret meetings before those documents were made public.

Tours of nuclear plants reserved to supporters of nukes

September 7, 2012

Nuke plant operator refuses tour for anti-nuke lawmakers

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201209070039>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Hokuriku Electric Power Co. in late August refused a request by Social Democratic Party leader Mizuho Fukushima and other party officials to tour the Shika nuclear power plant in Ishikawa Prefecture because they support a phasing out of nuclear power, sources said.

The Toyama-based utility told the SDP officials that they "could not afford to deal with people who did not share the understanding for the need of atomic energy," according to the sources.

"We are receiving so many requests for tours," said an official at Hokuriku Electric's community relations and development division. "Workers on the ground are very busy. We declined the request because we concluded it was low on our list of priorities. We feel that even if we granted a tour to officials of a political party that espouses a phase-out of nuclear energy, we were not likely to win their support for nuclear power."

"We asked Hokuriku Electric officials for a further explanation of what the problem is," said an SDP official who filed the request for an inspection tour. "But they said they didn't even want us to come and ask questions as long as we were not pro-nuclear. We will be sending Hokuriku Electric a letter of request in the name of our party."

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

TEPCO can't afford to invest in alternative energy

September 7, 2012

INTERVIEW: TEPCO chief says no money to develop renewables

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201209070017>

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The head of the Japanese utility that owns the tsunami-hit Fukushima nuclear power plant said Sept. 6 that he believes nuclear power should be part of the country's energy mix, even though the government and the public seem to feel differently.

Naomi Hirose, president of Tokyo Electric Power Co., also said **the utility can't afford to invest in alternative energy** since the earthquake-tsunami crisis last year, which wiped out the Fukushima No. 1 plant and caused extensive radioactive meltdowns that took months to control.

TEPCO was saddled with huge compensation and cleanup costs after the nuclear crisis. The company was nationalized in July after receiving a trillion yen (\$12.8 billion) public bailout.

The company had attempted some diversification of its energy mix before the March 11, 2011, earthquake-tsunami. **TEPCO built three mega-solar power plants and more than a dozen windmills with its affiliate, Eurus Energy Holdings Corp.**

But the company's difficult financial picture following the crisis means it doesn't have the money to invest in renewable energy, Hirose told The Associated Press at TEPCO headquarters in Tokyo.

"We tried to develop those renewable powers, but unfortunately after 3.11 we do not have much money and we probably cannot spend as much money to build renewable energy," he said.

Hirose, 59, assumed the top post at the struggling company in June with the task of turning around its business. A resumption of TEPCO's idled reactors in northern Japan would help, but gaining local support for that would be difficult, he acknowledged.

"It is true that in order to be in healthy financial condition, nuclear power is helpful," he said, referring to its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata, northern Japan, which has seven reactors idled for inspections. "But we do not have any specific schedule for a restart."

Hirose said it is preferable to have diverse energy sources, including nuclear energy, "not just for energy security but also for the price."

Following last year's disaster, the government is finalizing a new energy policy to reduce or eliminate nuclear power. Surveys show the Japanese public overwhelmingly supports a complete phase-out of nuclear energy.

Before the accident, Japan relied one-third of its energy needs on nuclear energy and was planning to increase that to 50 percent by 2030.

"Honestly, a change of policy from 50 percent (nuclear dependency) to zero is quite troubling," he said, even though scaling down nuclear operation would have been inevitable for TEPCO given its responsibility in the world's worst nuclear accident since Chernobyl.

Hirose said, however, TEPCO would follow any energy mix the government decides as part of its energy policy.

The Fukushima crisis triggered widespread doubts about the safety of nuclear energy, making it difficult for the government and nuclear operators to restart the country's 50 reactors, which had been shut down for routine inspections. The last one among them went offline in May.

Two of them were restarted in July to avoid a power crunch during high-demand summer season, but that triggered large protests outside the prime minister's office.

Hirose vowed to fully assess the damage and cause of the nuclear crisis at Fukushima.

The Fukushima plant has largely been stabilized but decommissioning it entirely will take decades since the cleanup of its badly melted reactors requires unprecedented work, research and development of necessary technology.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Remuneration of TEPCO's directors and executives down 30%

September 8, 2012

TEPCO leaders receive average 13 million yen in pay

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201209080047>

September 08, 2012

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Executives at Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, will each receive an average of 13 million yen (\$165,000) in annual pay, an outside panel decided on Sept. 7.

TEPCO's "compensation committee," consisting solely of outside directors, decided to allocate a total of 230.34 million yen in remuneration for the utility's **22 directors and executive officers**.

The money will cover the one-year period from the company's general shareholders' meeting of June 2012 to next year's shareholders' meeting.

The figure is less than 30 percent of the corresponding amount for the accounting year that ended in March 2011, the month the Fukushima nuclear crisis started to unfold.

However, a simple comparison is misleading because TEPCO was reorganized into a "company with committees," as stipulated under Japan's Companies Law, in June 2012. The utility, struggling to come up with money to compensate victims of the nuclear accident, effectively came under state control and now has a much different management setup.

"Remunerations are compensation for the performance of duties," a TEPCO representative said. "We believe we should provide a certain amount of remuneration, partly from the viewpoint of securing personnel who are worthy of being entrusted with management."

The pay for TEPCO President Naomi Hirose and 14 other executive officers, who are in charge of practical affairs of management, account for 195 million yen of the total. The remunerations for Chairman Kazuhiko Shimokobe and five other outside directors totaled 20.34 million yen.

Shimokobe, however, turned down all of money allotted to him, TEPCO officials said.

In the March 2011 accounting year, TEPCO's 33 directors and auditors were allocated 864 million yen in remuneration, with 22 inside directors receiving 700 million yen, or **31.81 million yen each on average**.

Then Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and then President Masataka Shimizu were allotted about 72 million yen each.

Following the Fukushima nuclear crisis, Katsumata, Shimizu and all executive vice presidents returned their pay from May 2011.

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

METI's influences nuke policy

September 9, 2012

Industry ministry opposes change to nuclear fuel recycling policy

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120909p2g00m0fp006000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The Japan Atomic Energy Commission kept alive an option of reprocessing all spent nuclear fuel in its proposal to the government after it faced **opposition from the industry ministry and power companies to scrapping the long-standing fuel recycle policy**, committee documents showed Saturday.

As part of the government's energy policy review process, the commission tasked with setting basic nuclear energy policies initially planned to propose in June that it would be "desirable" to change the full recycling policy, according to the documents seen by Kyodo News.

The documents suggest that the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which has aggressively sought expansion of nuclear power use, exercised its influence to resist a possible change to Japan's current policy to reprocess all spent fuel from nuclear reactors and recover plutonium for reuse.

Following the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, the government is considering reducing the portion of total electricity generated by nuclear power in 2030 to zero, 15 percent, or 20 to 25 percent, compared with 26 percent in fiscal 2010.

According to the commission documents and sources close to the matter, the commission initially planned to drop the option of reprocessing all spent fuel from its proposal under the scenario of 20-25 percent reliance on nuclear power.

In the proposal presented to the government, the commission said that both reprocessing and direct disposal of spent nuclear fuel should be pursued if nuclear reliance is to be cut to 15 percent or lower while recycling of all spent fuel is a viable option for the 20-25 percent scenario.

An industry ministry official overseeing the nuclear fuel recycling demanded that the commission's secretariat keep the option of full reprocessing in the proposal, telling it that consideration should be given to a local government in Aomori Prefecture which hosts various nuclear fuel reprocessing and radioactive waste storage facilities, according to the documents and the sources.

The Aomori village of Rokkasho recently decided to seek the removal of spent nuclear fuel accepted from across Japan if the central government gives up on the fuel recycling policy.

Power company employees working at the commission's secretariat also opposed scrapping the full recycling option, according to the sources.

A commission member said a unanimous agreement on the proposal could not be reached and the members decided to reflect the industry ministry's view on it.

Electricity summer demand no problem - Was the restart of Oi reactors necessary?

September 8, 2012

INSIGHT: Utilities clamor for reactor restarts despite meeting summer demand

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201209080057>

September 08, 2012

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Electric power companies are becoming increasingly desperate to restart their nuclear plants to stay afloat, warning of rate hikes and blackouts if their reactors remain offline. But the utilities are ignoring the key question of whether nuclear energy is really needed to meet the nation's power demand.

"Unless more nuclear plants are brought back online, our balance sheet will worsen, threatening a stable power supply," Makoto Yagi, president of Kansai Electric Power Co., told a news conference on Sept. 7.

Yagi said the company will consider all possible options, suggesting a rate hike, if the shutdowns continue at nuclear plants.

The utility posted a net loss of 99.5 billion yen (\$1.26 billion) in the April-June period, compared with a net profit of 34.4 billion yen a year earlier.

Despite public opposition, the government in July reactivated two reactors at Kansai Electric's Oi nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture before electricity demand hit a peak in summer.

But Kansai Electric figures suggest that electricity demand could have been met without the Oi reactors running largely because of power savings by households and businesses.

Kansai Electric's supply capacity was 11.8 percent higher than power demand on Aug. 3, when consumption peaked in the Kansai region.

If the Oi reactors had not been restarted, the margin would have fallen to 2.7 percent, below the 3-percent benchmark that utilities say is required to prepare for an emergency.

However, experts said Kansai Electric could meet demand if it secured electricity from other companies.

The peak demand in the Kansai region was 26.8 gigawatts on Aug. 3, and the Oi reactors supplied 2.4 gigawatts. But Kansai Electric and other utilities in western Japan, which use the same frequency, had a

combined surplus capacity exceeding 9 gigawatts, according to the energy strategy council of the Osaka prefectural and municipal governments.

“It was highly likely that Kansai Electric could do without any reactors online, given that (households and businesses) saved power even after the Oi reactors were restarted,” said Kazuhiro Ueta, a professor of environmental economics at Kyoto University, who chairs the panel.

“We must analyze how much power-saving efforts have become part of the daily lifestyle and discuss whether nuclear plants are necessary based on the finding.”

Ueta's panel has called for suspending the Oi reactors again after summer.

The government's power-saving campaign ended in the Kansai, Shikoku and Kyushu regions on Sept. 7. Of the 50 nuclear reactors in Japan, only the Oi reactors are in operation.

In the Kansai region, power usage was cut by 11.1 percent from two years earlier, exceeding the target of at least 10 percent. Consumption fell 9.5 percent in Kyushu, largely in line with the 10-percent target, and 8.3 percent in Shikoku, above the 5-percent target.

But electric power companies continue to lobby for restarting nuclear reactors, saying their very survival is at stake.

“We will reach a dead end in a few years,” a senior Kansai Electric official said. “We will not be able to cover the snowballing costs even if personnel expenses are slashed to zero.”

In addition to Kansai Electric, seven regional electric utilities suffered net losses in the April-June period.

Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s net loss ballooned to 101 billion yen from 8 billion yen a year earlier on increased fuel costs for thermal power generation.

The company will skip a midterm dividend for the first time in 32 years as the net loss for the April-September period will reach 165 billion yen.

Michiaki Uriu, president of Kyushu Electric, said the company will consider a rate hike unless nuclear reactors are restarted.

“Electric utilities are eager to restart nuclear reactors for the sake of their operations,” said Takumi Fujinami, a senior researcher at Japan Research Institute. “A rate hike will likely be unavoidable if nuclear reactors remain offline.”

But power companies themselves would likely have to pay a price for increasing their electricity rates.

The government will demand the companies streamline operations if it approves a rate hike for household customers.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, raised rates for household users by an average of 8.46 percent in September.

The company was forced to lower the average annual income of employees by more than 20 percent from 7 million yen to 5.5 million yen. It also reviewed its fringe benefits and fuel procurement costs.

A senior Kansai Electric official said the company is loath to follow in TEPCO’s footsteps.

“Like TEPCO, we would be made a wreck of by politicians if we raised electricity charges,” the official said.

The government estimates that a household that pays 9,900 yen a month for electricity bill may have to shoulder more than 20,000 yen if nuclear power generation is abolished in 2030.

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Vested interests - What impact?

September 16, 2012

New no-nuke plan has vested interests worried

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120916a6.html>

Kyodo

The official declaration Friday that Japan will pursue a nuclear phaseout by the 2030s is drawing opposition and concern from areas that host atomic facilities and Western countries closely linked to related projects in Japan.

Aomori Prefecture, home to a nuclear fuel recycling plant in the village of Rokkasho, is wary it could become the final disposal site for spent fuel and radioactive waste if the government terminates its recycling policy.

The new energy policy states that fuel reprocessing will have to continue for a while, but with an eye to opening talks on a rethink.

Issei Nishikawa, the governor of Fukui Prefecture, which has the highest concentration of nuclear reactors in the country at 14, said the government's decision "contradicts the prime minister's remarks in June, when he said nuclear power generation is an important source of energy."

"The prime minister should go back to his original stance and promote nuclear power policy by ensuring safety," Nishikawa said at a prefectural assembly meeting.

Yasushi Furukawa, the governor of Saga, home to the Genkai nuclear power plant, raised the risk of global warming.

"If we increase thermal energy as an alternative, how are we going to reduce carbon dioxide emissions?" he asked.

Internationally, Britain and France, where Japan sends its spent nuclear fuel for reprocessing, after which it is shipped back, are concerned about how the decision will affect the future viability of those facilities.

The United States is also expressing concern because the use of Japanese nuclear technology has been spreading after a three-decade moratorium on nuclear power plant construction.

Public reaction has been mixed, with some voicing distrust in the government's resolve and others hailing the move.

"Although the government decided to continue nuclear reprocessing, it might start saying it will stop the project in a year or two," a 47-year-old woman from Rokkasho said.

But a 52-year-old woman in Aomori Prefecture said, "I do not want the government to operate nuclear plants and reprocessing plants, because of safety concerns."

Some experts doubted the viability of the new energy policy and saw it as **a populist political measure ahead of upcoming leadership elections in the major political parties.**

Should culprits have been named?

September 17, 2012

Head of nuclear disaster investigation defends report

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120917a5.html>

By YURI KAGEYAMA
AP

The head of a major investigation into the Fukushima nuclear disaster is defending his report against criticism that his panel avoided blaming individuals and instead blamed elements of the nation's culture.

Pointing the finger: Kiyoshi Kurokawa, who headed the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission, speaks during an interview in Tokyo Thursday. AP



Kiyoshi Kurokawa, a doctor who headed the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission, said he sticks with his view that the catastrophe was "Made in Japan," underlining collusion

among the regulators and the utility that set off the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl. He said his panel intentionally stopped short of naming individual culprits.

"No one takes responsibility in Japan, even those in positions of responsibility," Kurokawa said last week at his commission office in Tokyo. "This is unique to Japan, a culture that stresses conformity, where people don't complain."

People are complaining, however, about the commission's report, not only for lacking specifics on responsibility but for making statements on Japanese culture that appeared in the English-language version of the document but not the Japanese version.

The 641-page report, released in July, compiled interviews with 1,167 people and scoured documents obtained from nuclear regulators and Tokyo Electric Power Co., the utility that ran Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

A devastating March 2011 tsunami set off by a 9.0-magnitude quake destroyed backup generators and sent the quake-damaged Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant into multiple meltdowns and explosions. About 150,000 people were eventually evacuated from a 20-km no-go zone, and fears remain in Fukushima that cancer and other illnesses will grow as a result of radiation.

The independent panel of 10 experts, including a lawyer, former diplomat and chemist, was appointed by the legislature. It is a style of investigation that was common in Western nations but unprecedented in Japan.

The panel's report has drawn fire from Japanese and overseas critics alike.

"One searches in vain through these pages for anyone to blame," Columbia University professor and Japan expert Gerald Curtis wrote in an opinion piece submitted to the Financial Times. "To pin the blame on culture is the ultimate cop-out. If culture explains behavior, then no one has to take responsibility."

Tatsujiro Suzuki, vice chairman of the government Atomic Energy Commission, which promotes nuclear technology, was critical of the differences between the English and Japanese versions of the report. He said it appeared to be putting on one face to the Japanese people, while presenting another abroad.

The preface of the English version said, "What must be admitted — very painfully — is that this was a disaster 'Made in Japan.' Its fundamental causes are to be found in the ingrained conventions of Japanese culture: our reflexive obedience; our reluctance to question authority; our devotion to 'sticking with the program'; our groupism and our insularity," he wrote in the English version.

The passage wasn't in the Japanese message. But Kurokawa said that he made similar points in other parts of the report in Japanese.

He said he wanted to reach a global audience by pointing to "amakudari," the longtime practice of handing plum jobs to retired bureaucrats, the nation's half-century domination by a single party, and elitist employees taking lifetime jobs for granted, as a peculiar "mindset" that fosters irresponsibility, slow decision-making and dubious governance.

"I didn't want to say it, but it is 'Made in Japan,' " Kurokawa said. "This is about Japanese culture and values. There is nowhere else quite like that."

Tokyo prosecutors recently accepted a request by a group of lawyers to carry out a probe into criminal charges of professional negligence against regulators and the plant's management. If prosecutors move ahead, their power to subpoena records, raid offices and question officials would be far greater than that of Kurokawa's panel.

Kurokawa said such an investigation was welcome as a sign of a "healthy democracy." He said his six-month investigation offered plenty of fodder for a criminal inquiry. He said it showed that bureaucrats brushed off evidence of tsunami risks that had been clear as far back as 2006, and that representatives from international watchdog groups took travel money from the utilities. He said it may not have the names, but the dates and circumstances are there so all the investigators have to do is check, he said.

Japanese media have reported that prosecutors waited for Kurokawa's report before deciding to take up a criminal investigation. The report's finding that the accident was preventable and man-made made it more likely the prosecutors would investigate.

The NRA just a "cosmetic change"?

September 20, 2012

Nuke watchdog a 'cosmetic' change

New regulatory agency faulted for ties to discredited predecessor

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120920a3.html>

By KAZUAKI NAGATA
Staff writer

Created to replace a nuclear regulatory system discredited by the Fukushima disaster, the new five-member Nuclear Regulation Authority, launched Wednesday, is already being faulted as a cosmetic change.

Experts note that most of the employees at the NRA's secretariat are the same bureaucrats who were working at the old regulatory authority, the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency.

Nothing has been done, they said, to dismantle the old bureaucratic culture that blurred the lines of responsibility and made regulators who lacked independence and nuclear expertise reluctant to force utilities to toe the line.

For example, a new regulation forbidding personnel from returning to their original ministries to keep them focused on the new entity has been made toothless by a five-year moratorium.

What's needed to change the culture, they said, are outside pressures to monitor the new system, and government-backed programs, such as those providing overseas training, to keep bureaucrats motivated.

"The most important point is that the secretariat that supports the highly independent five-member commission must have independence and expertise," said Shuya Nomura, a professor at the Chuo Law School who was a member of the Diet panel that probed the causes of the Fukushima No. 1 triple meltdown crisis.

In its final report released in July, the Diet panel said that NISA failed to enforce regulations because the utilities, with their greater nuclear expertise, were able to get the upper hand, a situation known as "regulatory capture."

As a part of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which was promoting nuclear power, NISA's independence was always in shaky, and it finally came under heavy fire for that.

To correct the problem, the new regulatory body, which has a staff of about 480, including more than 300 from NISA, will operate as an agency under the Environment Ministry to avoid the influence of the ministries tasked with promoting nuclear power, and to support a new highly autonomous five-member commission.

Nevertheless, the commission's power and autonomy are compromised because "the secretariat under the commission that handles actual work is still pretty much the same as NISA, which means we can't really expect the culture to be changed," said Hiroshi Tasaka, who was a special adviser to former Prime Minister Naoto Kan and helped deal with the Fukushima disaster.

Thus the public's focus on the commission is misguided, the experts said. Although antinuclear activists claim that some of the commissioners, including Chairman Shunichi Tanaka, former vice chairman of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission, are unqualified to run an independent watchdog because of their previous ties to the nuclear industry, the key is the secretariat. Simply separating a regulatory section from METI will not solve the problem because the government has taken a lax stance on personnel oversight.

In general, METI bureaucrats are reassigned every few years, mainly based on seniority, and often shuttle between the nuclear promotion and regulation sections. Consequently, they would usually avoid boldly changing the policies of their predecessors.

Because METI's mission was to promote nuclear power, there was no incentive to place its best people at NISA to tighten regulations, according to Nomura of Chuo Law School.

While experts at the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission are qualified to operate reactors, Kenkichi Hirose, former head of NISA, told the Diet panel that officials were kept busy with paperwork, Nomura said.

Although the government is set to bar bureaucrats from returning to their ministries, loopholes in the rule remain, the experts warned. For example, a moratorium has been placed on that rule for the first five years of the new agency's debut, allowing bureaucrats to go back to their ministries if they choose.

"The next five years will be critically important to grow a new regulatory culture," so the moratorium should not be applied so that they will focus on their job, said Tasaka, a professor of business at Tama University who has a doctorate in nuclear engineering.

The secretariat needs to be a body that people will want to work for, said Nomura, citing the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission as an example of a place considered prestigious by U.S. federal workers.

Furthermore, it's necessary to have outsiders scrutinize the performance of the new regulatory body, Tasaka said. For instance, an expert from overseas, such as a former NRC member, should be included to play a role similar to that of an outside director at a private firm. However, doing this may require changing the law to allow foreigners to take such a position.

The Diet should also form a committee to check the NRA and its secretariat, Tasaka said. "It requires tremendous effort to reform an institutional culture whether it's a private firm or public organization . . . It must have outside pressure," said Tasaka.

Disaster recovery funds diverted to irrelevant projects

September 21, 2012

Yoroku: Noda should 'exterminate termites' that eat away at disaster recovery funds

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20120921p2a00m0na012000c.html>

A book published in ancient China carries a story about termites eating away at money in a government coffer. During the reign of the Kangxi Emperor (1654-1722), the fourth emperor of the Qing Dynasty, enormous amounts of gold bullion disappeared from a safe storing revenue from taxes imposed on salt. Surprised bureaucrats examined the safe and found mountains of powder on the floor along the wall. They dug through the powder and found a huge number of termites.

When burned in a furnace, the powder turned back into gold bullion, but the gold fell short of its original value. The same book also carries a story about termites eating away at silver that Hebei province officials stored in a box.

An article in the Mainichi Shimbun's evening edition published in Tokyo on Sept. 13 quotes a legislator elected from an area hit by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami as lamenting that "termites are swarming over funds set aside for the restoration of disaster-hit areas, and **diverting much of the money to projects irrelevant to disaster recovery.**" He is talking about **projects such as those that make government buildings quake-resistant, the purchase of weapons for the Self-Defense Forces, research on nuclear fusion and subsidies for artists' overseas performances.**

On Sept. 9, the "NHK Special" program aired by the public broadcaster reported that funds set aside for disaster recovery projects had been **diverted to anti-terrorism and anti-Sea Shepherd measures**, amazing residents of disaster-ravaged areas. Needless to say, over half of 19 trillion yen allocated for disaster recovery efforts over the five-year period following the quake, tsunami and ensuing nuclear crisis will be raised by tax hikes.

On the other hand, sufficient financial assistance has not been extended to small- and medium-sized companies and small shops in disaster-hit areas, as a result of which many such areas remain deserted.

Taxpayers accepted tax hikes over a 25-year period to cover disaster recovery efforts because they sympathized with residents of disaster-stricken regions -- not because they wanted to help make Tokyo taxation offices quake-resistant.

Before the ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) took over the reins of government in September 2009, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda had compared corporations that offer lucrative post-retirement jobs to bureaucrats who once supervised them to termites and demanded that such "bugs" be exterminated. What the DPJ-led administration called "political leadership" has declined to the worst possible level. However, the Noda administration needs to now show leadership to contribute to the restoration of northeastern Japan, which has been devastated by the disasters. ("Yoroku," a front-page column in the Mainichi Shimbun)

Criminal probes of TEPCO to start soon

September 29, 2012

Criminal probes planned

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120929a8.html>

JJI

Prosecutors will start full criminal probes over last year's accident at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power station, informed sources said.

Starting in early October, prosecutors will be gathered from various district offices to launch full-scale investigations, the sources said Thursday, adding that materials for the probes have already been submitted voluntarily by some parties.

Prosecutors are expected to start interviews with Tepco executives and others soon. They are expected to decide by March on whether to file criminal charges.

In August, four district prosecutors' offices received criminal complaints over the nuclear accident triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Complaints received by the Kanazawa and Nagoya district offices will be transferred to the Tokyo office. Investigations over the nuclear crisis will be covered by the Tokyo and Fukushima offices.

In these complaints, Tepco executives and government officials are accused of causing injury to people who lived near the stricken nuclear plant through professional negligence.

Tepco and government officials failed to take enough precautionary steps against huge earthquakes and tsunami, and failed to make appropriate responses to the crisis, according to the complaints.

Report says Futaba hospital can't be blamed for patients' deaths

October 1, 2012

Hospital blameless in patient deaths during nuke disaster evacuation: report

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121001p2a00m0na018000c.html>

A hospital near the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant made no mistakes during a hasty evacuation in March 2011 during which 40 patients and nursing home residents lost their lives, according to a report released on Sept. 30 by investigators commissioned by the hospital.

"The deaths were caused by the nuclear disaster," the report on the evacuation of Futaba Hospital in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, concluded, adding that "the hospital did everything it could, and committed no errors." The report furthermore emphasized that, **despite the hospital's repeated requests for help from the municipal authorities and the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), the evacuation of the patients began late and took too long once started, both of which played a part in the deaths.**

The report was presented to 124 attendees at a Sept. 30 briefing in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, including 60 surviving family of the deceased patients and families of some residents at the neighboring nursing home Deauville Futaba, who also passed away during the evacuation. **Not all of the attendees were satisfied with the report, put together by two attorneys representing the hospital administration, with some questioning whether the hospital was in fact completely blameless, and others angry that the final document contained no apology for the loss of their loved ones.**

The report stated: "The nuclear disaster forced the hospital to evacuate to a location at least 20 kilometers away, and put the facility in a position where aid was difficult to obtain. As such, there is a causal relationship between the nuclear disaster and the patient deaths."

Hospital Director Ichiro Suzuki, 78, told attendees at the briefing, "It's very unfortunate that so many of our patients died, but I have no intention of apologizing" -- apparently drawing shock and anger from some bereaved family members.

The investigation, led by attorney Kiyonari Inoue, was launched in May 2011, and collected information and statements from several organizations that participated in the evacuation, including the Okuma town government, the Fukushima Prefectural disaster response headquarters, and the SDF. The details of the evacuation contained in the report, however, differed little from those laid out in the central government's investigative report on the nuclear disaster released in July this year. Director Suzuki stated that the hospital plans to continue its investigation, and will also provide surviving family members who are filing compensation claims against nuclear plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) with all the information it has obtained.

One 73-year-old man who said he lost his 43-year-old nephew during the hospital evacuation told the Mainichi he wasn't at all satisfied with the report.

"The director's words were so plain. He didn't communicate any emotion," the 43-year-old said. His nephew, who had a muscle-wasting disease, was among the last group of patients to be evacuated from Futaba Hospital on March 16, 2011 -- five days after the earthquake and tsunami that triggered the nuclear disaster. He died soon after his arrival at a hospital in Nihonmatsu, Fukushima Prefecture.

A woman from Okuma who lost two relatives at the Deauville Futaba nursing home also left the information session unhappy.

"It really looked like the hospital was just trying to justify its actions. I'm not convinced by what they're saying," she said.

One 54-year-old man whose 82-year-old father was a resident at the Deauville Futaba nursing home, however, was more conciliatory, telling the Mainichi, "In my opinion, an earthquake plus a nuclear disaster is sure to cause panic. The late start to the evacuation couldn't be helped."

The evacuation took three routes over the course of four days. According to both the central government and hospital reports, on March 12, 209 of the hospital's 338 patients plus 64 staff boarded buses provided by the municipality for the prefectural town of Miharu, where they spent the night in a junior high school gym before heading to Iwaki the next day.

Director Suzuki, who had stayed behind with the remaining patients, pleaded with the police and the SDF to evacuate them. Aid did not come, however, until about 4 a.m. on March 14, when the SDF took 34 patients and all 98 residents of the Deauville Futaba nursing home to a health care center in Minamisoma, north of the hospital and the nuclear plant.

The passengers were scheduled to take a different set of buses from there to Iwaki, but the head of the health center thought their conditions made the transfer too difficult. This meant that the SDF buses, which were supposed to head back to Okuma to retrieve the people still at Futaba Hospital, ended up taking a circuitous five-hour journey to Iwaki with their first load of patients, eight of whom died en route or soon after arriving in Iwaki.

Back in Okuma, Suzuki waited for the SDF to come back. However, at about 10 p.m. on March 14, a police officer ordered him to evacuate temporarily to neighboring Kawauchi village. This and other moves confused attempts to link up with the SDF again until 9 a.m. on March 15. The remaining Futaba Hospital patients were sent in two groups to Nihonmatsu, the last arriving at midnight.

Four patients died at Futaba Hospital while waiting for evacuation, and one went missing.

What happened to reconstruction funds?

October 2, 2012

Disaster reconstruction funds ending up in the wrong hands, slowing work

Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121002a8.html>

Suspensions have arisen that ¥17 trillion reserved for postdisaster reconstruction work in the fiscal 2012 budget has been spent on projects that have little to do with rebuilding the Tohoku region.

Some of the rebuilding funds have been spent outside Tohoku's disaster zones to build roads and quake-proof tax office buildings. Even a project by the Japan Atomic Energy Agency to research nuclear fusion received ¥4.2 billion.

In a third supplementary budget for fiscal 2011, ¥500 billion was earmarked for a postdisaster reconstruction support fund to finance companies setting up factories, but the subsidies were also provided to businesses that built plants outside the afflicted areas.

"To be honest, I cannot approve the way (some of the funds) have been used," reconstruction minister Tatsuo Hirano told a recent news conference.

The budget should be spent on projects that directly contribute to the reconstruction of Tohoku, Hirano said, adding the use of the funds will be reviewed strictly while compiling the fiscal 2013 budget.

With others in the government voicing similar concerns, the Finance Ministry has started reviewing the criteria used to funnel subsidies into reconstruction programs, government sources said.

Senior Vice Finance Minister Yukihisa Fujita said budget appropriations for projects in prefectures little affected by the disasters will be put on hold to boost reconstruction efforts.

In the three prefectures hit hardest by the March 2011 disasters, about 80 percent of the debris and rubble left by the tsunami has yet to be disposed of in Iwate and Miyagi. In Fukushima Prefecture, work has just started on decontaminating areas affected by fallout from the Fukushima No. 1 plant's crippled reactors.

Evacuees staying away

JJI

FUKUSHIMA — Many who evacuated areas 20 to 30 km from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant have yet to return home, including in locations where the central government lifted its emergency evacuation preparation advisory more than a year ago.

The government in April 2011 designated parts of the municipalities of Minamisoma, Tamura, Naraha and Kawauchi, as well as the whole of Hirono, in Fukushima Prefecture as areas where residents should be on standby to evacuate depending on radiation levels.

As a result, many people left these areas, located just outside the initial 20-km no-go zone set up around the station after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami caused three catastrophic core meltdowns.

Though the advisory was lifted Sept. 30 last year, about half of the 59,000 residents remain reluctant to return to the affected areas because of radiation fears.

Work to decontaminate houses is under way in Hirono and Kawauchi but has yet to start on a full scale in Tamura and Minamisoma due to the difficulty of finding facilities to temporarily store contaminated soil.

The slow reconstruction of local infrastructure also has discouraged locals from returning. Going back to communities located extremely near the plant is even more arduous, as many shops and hospitals remain closed.

Of the total 22 elementary and junior high schools that were shut down after the advisory was issued, 16 have resumed classes in their original facilities. But the number of students is far smaller than before.

To make it easier for residents to return home, the municipal governments of Hirono and Kawauchi moved their head offices back to the municipalities after having to temporarily relocate them elsewhere.

Is this just due to lack of funds?

October 2, 2012

Abolishment of Nuclear Energy Library removes 40,000 files from public view

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121002p2a00m0na016000c.html>

The Nuclear Energy Library, a facility that offered ordinary residents access to information on nuclear power, has been abolished since its jurisdiction was transferred from the former Nuclear Safety Commission to the newly formed nuclear regulatory agency, it has been learned.

There are no signs that the library will reopen, and the fate of roughly 40,000 files in the library that the public can no longer access is up in the air.

The nuclear regulatory agency was formed with the goal of increasing transparency in nuclear power administration, but the library's closure has sparked criticism that the efforts to release information have only deteriorated under the agency.

The closed library, covering an area of about 600 square meters, is located in a private building in Tokyo's Kasumigaseki district close to the former Nuclear Safety Commission. It offered access to copies of application documents and safety screening reports that are required when constructing and operating nuclear power plants, in addition to the minutes of government meetings. After the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, about 100 people reportedly used the library each day.

The library was set up in 1997, in the wake of criticism over the way information was released following a sodium leak at Japan's Monju fast-breeder reactor in 1995 and the subsequent cover-up of a video taken after the accident. The facility contains many hard copies of documents that can't be viewed online, and when it was open visitors were able to view and copy the data.

However, when the operations of the now defunct Nuclear Safety Commission were transferred to the nuclear regulatory agency, the secretariat for the new Nuclear Regulation Authority, the library was abolished as of Sept. 14. No replacement facility has been arranged in the private building housing the newly established nuclear regulatory agency in Tokyo's Roppongi district, and most of the files remain in the library's Kasumigaseki office.

When questioned about the abolishment of the library, a representative of the agency's general affairs section told the Mainichi, "The organization has changed and I haven't heard the background to the decision." The representative said it had not yet been decided whether budget funds would be allocated to keep the library in operation.

Kenji Sumita, a professor emeritus at Osaka University and former acting head of the Nuclear Safety Commission, criticized the library's closure.

"An access point for ordinary residents to obtain information about nuclear power should be maintained. The regulatory agency's response is simply shabby, and to restore confidence in nuclear power it should quickly be reopened," he said.

The agency has instructed workers to forbid reporters from entering its office, and it has restricted the scope of the information it releases, barring reporters for political party newspapers from news conferences.

Yukiko Miki, director of nonprofit organization Information Clearinghouse Japan, voiced concerns about the situation.

"It's unforgivable for the level of information release to fall below the level seen before the Fukushima nuclear accident," she said.

More cover -up

October 3, 2012

Secret meetings held on Fukushima nuclear crisis's impact on human health

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121003p2a00m0na014000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- The prefectural government here held secret meetings among a panel of experts on the nuclear crisis's impact on human health to **work out scenarios for official deliberation sessions based on the view that there is no causal relationship between the disaster and the outbreak of cancer**, sources close to the case said.

Fukushima Prefectural Government officials also told the attendees not to reveal to outsiders that such secret meetings took place.

A prefectural government official has told the Mainichi that it convened the preparatory meetings of an expert panel in an effort to prevent any confusion at the official meetings and avoid causing anxiety to prefectural residents. However, the official admitted in an interview with the Mainichi Shimbun that the secret meetings were inappropriate and said they would not take place again.

"We wanted to facilitate the official sessions by listening to the panel members' opinions in advance. We can't argue if we are blamed for holding secret meetings. We regret having such gatherings. We'll not hold such meetings anymore," said the official, who belongs to the prefectural government's health and welfare department.

Fukushima Medical University Vice President Shunichi Yamashita, who chairs the experts' panel, said he did not think attendees were making any secret arrangements in the meetings.

"I understand that preparatory meetings were held for the panel to listen to explanations of the results of health surveys. No decisions were made at these gatherings, and I didn't consider them secret meetings," he said. "If they stir a sense of distrust among members of the public, I don't mind discontinuing such gatherings."

The expert panel was set up in May last year after the March 11 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. The panel offers advice on the results of health surveys that Fukushima Medical University is commissioned by the prefectural government to conduct on local residents. Currently, it consists of 19 members, including experts in radiology and medical professors as well as national government officials.

The panel has so far held eight sessions, and the details of what was discussed at most of the meetings as well as their minutes have been disclosed.

However, it has come to light that members of the panel secretly held preparatory meetings shortly before each of the sessions at the proposal of an official of the prefectural government's health and welfare department, which serves as the secretariat of the panel.

All materials distributed to the members at such secret meetings were later recovered and no minutes were compiled in order to cover up the existence of the gatherings.

Before the eighth official session in the city of Fukushima on Sept. 11 this year, a health survey had confirmed for the first time that a child living in the prefecture was suffering from thyroid cancer.

During the preparatory meeting for that session, the members shared the view that there is no causal relationship between the nuclear disaster and the outbreak of the cancer. They then worked out a scenario under which one of the members would ask a question about whether there was a causal relationship between the crisis and the cancer and the university would answer the question.

At the official session, one panel member actually asked whether there was a causal relationship. In response, a Fukushima Medical University professor denied the suspicion, pointing out that it took at least

four years after the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986 before the number of thyroid cancer patients increased.

In a preparatory meeting prior to the third session in July last year, prefectural government officials asked members of the panel not to reveal such secret sessions to outsiders.

The health and welfare department official admitted that officials had asked members of the panel to keep secret what they discussed at preparatory meetings and recovered all materials after such gatherings partially to prevent the results of the health survey from leaking to the media before being officially announced.

Official investigation into diversion of disaster funds

October 4, 2012

Diet panel to probe diversion of disaster recovery funds for other purposes

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121004p2a00m0na014000c.html>

A Diet panel is set to launch an investigation into the diversion of funds allocated from the state budget for disaster recovery efforts to disaster prevention measures outside disaster-stricken regions, legislators said.

State Minister for Disaster Recovery Tatsuo Hirano has already begun a probe into the case as the budget for the restoration of areas devastated by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and the ensuing Fukushima nuclear crisis are mainly funded with a special tax hike.

Officials with the Finance Ministry and other ministries concerned explained the diversion of such funds to top members of the House of Representatives Committee on Audit and Oversight of Administration behind closed doors on Oct. 3. In response, the committee decided to investigate the case through a subcommittee while the Diet is not in session on the grounds that it must get to the bottom of the problem.

During the explanatory meeting, the legislators called into question the diversion of funds earmarked for disaster recovery projects to eight other projects, including boosted measures to protect research whaling ships from attacks by the anti-whaling organization Sea Shepherd and an Okinawa Prefecture national highway improvement and construction project.

The Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry argued that the stepped up measures to protect whaling ships is necessary for the recovery of quake- and tsunami-stricken Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, which is home to key whaling-related facilities.

The Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Ministry also defended the project to improve and construct national highways in Okinawa because the project is covered with funds for nationwide disaster prevention efforts, which are part of the disaster recovery budget.

Legislators raised questions about the explanations.

"Members of the general public will hardly understand such diversions. It's the responsibility of the Diet to conduct an investigation into the issue although the Diet isn't in session now," one of the top members of the committee said.

"I suspect that officials used various tricks to divert disaster recovery funds," another said.

Furthermore, the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry has come under fire from the legislators for using funds to extend subsidies for businesses in disaster-hit areas to a contact lens factory in Gifu Prefecture which is outside the disaster areas.

A ministry official explained that it extended the subsidy to the Gifu company because its factory has procured materials for contact lenses from Fukushima and Ibaraki prefectures, which are affected by the disasters.

Apart from the eight projects, the Mainichi Shimbun has also learned that the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry set aside 4.2 billion yen for the Japan Atomic Energy Agency's project to build nuclear fusion research facilities in Aomori and Ibaraki prefectures.

The ministry justified the practice. "The basic policy of disaster recovery stipulates that the knowledge held by industries in disaster-hit regions should be fully utilized to establish a hub for technological innovation in such areas," an official said.

The diversion of funds is in line with the government's basic policy of disaster recovery set in July last year, which allows funds set aside for disaster recovery to be used for disaster prevention measures across the country.

Following the March 11 quake, numerous local governments asked the national government to strengthen disaster-prevention measures in areas other than quake- and tsunami-stricken regions. In response, the central government decided to use about 1 trillion yen out of an estimated 19 trillion yen -- which is expected to be set aside for recovery funds -- for areas outside disaster regions.

The disaster recovery budget is funded through an increase in residential taxes that local governments levy on their residents.

The basic policy of disaster recovery also calls for the use of funds allocated for recovery efforts to finance measures to prevent manufacturers affected by the March 2011 disasters from moving out of Japan.

By fiscal 2012, the government had allocated approximately 1 trillion yen to cover nationwide disaster prevention expenses. The ministries and agencies concerned demanded that some 940 billion yen be earmarked from the fiscal 2013 state budget for such projects. Therefore, the total amount is viewed as certain to surpass the 1 trillion yen that the government had initially planned.

State Minister for Recovery Hirano as well as Finance Minister Koriki Jojima said they will consider closely reviewing allocations of funds for disaster-prevention measures implemented outside disaster areas.

"I think the use of funds raised through a tax hike for such purposes is questionable," Hirano told a news conference on Sept. 19.

"We'll strictly limit projects to be covered by such funds as we compile the next fiscal year's budget," Jojima told a news conference on Oct. 1 shortly after being appointed to his post.

Decide in advance what people should say

October 5, 2012

Fukushima Prefecture prepared proceedings for nuke radiation meeting

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121005p2a00m0na015000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- The Fukushima Prefectural Government drew up proceedings for a health research panel prior to a formal July 2011 meeting on nuclear radiation, **deciding in advance what members should say**, the Mainichi has learned.

The drafted proceedings included concluding remarks about the results of the research on the health of Fukushima Prefecture residents and asked study panel members not to indulge in questions and answers about reproduced data from the System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information (SPEEDI). The system was used to predict the spread of radioactive materials following the disaster at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

When contacted by the Mainichi Shimbun about the choreographed proceedings, a prefectural government official in charge said the Fukushima government "may have produced" a chart of proceedings but declined to make further comment.

Only recently it emerged that the study panel held secret preparatory sessions to compare and adjust opinions about the results of the research, and rehearsed proceedings before a formal meeting in July last year.

During a prefectural assembly session on Sept. 3, Fukushima Vice Gov. Fumio Murata denied that the prefectural government had prearranged the proceedings. But the prepared chart mentioned the need to make arrangements with a particular scholar, whose real name was disclosed.

In its investigations, the Mainichi confirmed that a chart of proceedings had been created for the third meeting of the study panel on health management research. According to sources familiar with the proceedings, prefectural government officials in charge of health and welfare prepared the chart and distributed copies of it to panel members on July 23, 2011, a day before the formal meeting. Members were later found to have held a secret meeting on July 17.

The chart of proceedings runs two pages and lists the content and progress of deliberations. One of the items in the chart referred to test results of whole body counters and urine tests, and ended with the prearranged conclusion that internal exposure to cesium 134 and cesium 137 was less than 1 millisievert in total and extremely low, and that such exposure among residents of other regions was believed to be far lower.

As for progress in the research, the chart referred to SPEEDI, which was not effectively used by the central and prefectural governments. It urged panel members not to delve into questions and answers about SPEEDI's reproduced data due to the possibility that the SPEEDI issue alone might draw attention. If

that happened, the chart says, members were advised to tell the meeting that the issue would be discussed by the dose assessment committee after checking in advance with a scholar on the panel.

Fukushima Prefecture says the third meeting was open to the public for the first time and proceeded in accordance with the chart. A prefectural government official said the chart may have been prepared for the panel chairman, Shunichi Yamashita, vice president of Fukushima Medical University.

Former Miyagi Gov. Shiro Asano, now professor of Keio University's Shonan Fujisawa Campus, says the the prearranged proceedings probably reflected the local administration's emphasis on scheduling, but added that getting caught up in high-profile issues ended up undermining prefectural residents' trust. He said that even if there was confusion during the panel's meeting due to the absence of a scenario, people could have evaluated the meeting highly, saying it was not staged.

"What is required foremost over the handling of the nuclear accident is a sense of trust," he said, adding the Fukushima Prefectural Government lacked that and should start all over again by giving top priority to winning the trust of prefectural residents.

One way of wasting public money

October 5, 2012

250 million yen wasted on doubled real-estate fees for evacuee housing

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121005p2a00m0na012000c.html>

Municipalities wasted some 250 million yen of taxpayers' money by doubly paying real-estate agents introduction fees for evacuee housing in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, a probe by the Board of Audit of Japan has found.

The board uncovered the double payments across some 10,000 contracts in the three prefectures, which were hit hardest by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster and ensuing nuclear crisis. As of Oct. 1, there were 73,675 government-rented apartments offered around the country for evacuees.

The Board of Audit, which reported its findings to the Diet on Oct. 4, says the problem is that the Disaster Relief Act is out of touch with reality.

The board said a notice on the act released by the Ministry of Welfare in 1947 stated that "relief should be given in the form of materials, and cash should only be handed out when it has to be." This prevents disaster evacuees who rent their own apartments from receiving money to cover the rent, so municipalities rent apartments for evacuees instead.

In April last year, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) decided that when municipalities rent apartments where disaster evacuees are already living, they will cover the evacuees' payments for rent and contract fees up until then. This resulted in municipalities paying both their own fees for making the contracts and the fees of the evacuees.

The Board of Audit examined payments in seven prefectures and discovered many instances of double payments. According to sources, there were around 5,000 cases in Miyagi Prefecture, around 4,500 in Fukushima Prefecture, and a few hundred in Iwate Prefecture. In all three prefectures the introduction fees were equivalent to half a month's rent, and for an individual contract the fee was around 25,000 yen.

The MHLW has released a notice asking municipalities not to make double payments, but one municipality official says, "In contractual procedures with real-estate agents, we have no option but make the double payments."

The Board of Audit views the principal of giving assistance in the form of materials rather than cash as the problem, and in its report it concluded, "It is necessary to include a loosening of this principal in future considerations."

A MHLW representative commented, "We will issue calls against double payments, but at this time we are not planning a review of the principal of giving assistance in material form."

In addition to double payments, the Board of Audit's investigation found that municipalities had fallen behind on rent payments in some cases, and that there had been delays in evacuees entering the apartments. These problems occurred because local municipalities were overburdened, causing delays across the board. A Board of Audit official says, "Financial rent assistance (for evacuees), which is a simpler process, should be considered."

However, a MHLW representative noted, "There are people including elderly residents who can't find housing on their own. To provide sound relief to disaster victims, it is important to give housing, not money, which may be spent on things besides rent."

A Hyogo Prefectural government employee who experienced the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake says, "Considering the administrative abilities of local governments, I think that financial assistance for self-

rented apartments would be better, but there are pros and cons for both approaches, and there is no right answer."

Gov't to keep an eye on recovery budget

Gov. to review use of reconstruction budget

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20121007_08.html

Japanese officials plan to review whether the special budget is being used appropriately for the reconstruction of areas hit by an earthquake and tsunami in March last year.

The government plans to allocate at least 19 trillion yen, or 240 billion dollars, for reconstruction projects.

The government will finance the budget by issuing bonds and raise taxes to redeem them.

But there are reports that part of the budget is being used for unrelated projects.

Reconstruction Minister Tatsuo Hirano told reporters that he has instructed the Finance Ministry to review several projects to be financed by the budget.

Officials will examine a 29-million-dollar expense for measures to counter anti-whaling activists in the Antarctic Ocean.

They will also review a 53-million-dollar expense to build nuclear-fusion research centers in Aomori and Ibaraki prefectures

Japan shares lessons on disaster preparedness

October 8, 2012

Japan ready to share 3/11 disaster lessons

World to gather in Sendai for meeting on risk management

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121008x3.html>

Kyodo

When a two-day international conference on disasters and development opens Tuesday in the disaster-hit city of Sendai, Japan will have its moment to shine — relating to the world how it survived last year's catastrophic earthquake and tsunami and sharing lessons about disaster preparedness.

Global leaders, disaster experts and survivors will gather in Sendai for the "Sendai Dialogue," a meeting hosted by the government and the World Bank to focus on ways to reduce the economic impact of natural disasters.

It will draw lessons from the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami that devastated vast areas of the Tohoku region, especially in Iwate, Fukushima and Miyagi prefectures.

The dialogue, part of the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, which also begin Tuesday, will be attended by finance and development ministers as well as top officials from international institutions including World Bank President Jim Yong Kim and IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde.

Delegates are scheduled to visit sites in the disaster-stricken areas, including an elementary school that was one of the few buildings in Sendai's Arahama coastal district to remain standing after the tsunami.

With devastation by natural disasters a shared reality for developed and developing nations, the Sendai meeting aims to create a global consensus on how to prepare better for disasters and learn from Japan's multiple disasters last year, organizers said.

The Sendai Dialogue will open with a plenary session in which Japan's experiences will be conveyed through speeches by Sendai Mayor Emiko Okuyama and reconstruction minister Tatsuo Hirano as well as stories told by high school students who survived the disasters.

Japanese delegates are expected to stress the need to both enforce disaster prevention measures and pursue urban development for disaster-resilient infrastructure, while discussions will also focus on challenges facing developing nations when drawing up disaster prevention measures, the organizers said.

Finance Minister Koriki Jojima, who says the meeting will be a good chance for Japan to demonstrate how it has recovered from the disasters, will attend a high-level session Wednesday and call for disaster risk management to become a priority in the global development agenda.

Delegates aim to wrap up the meeting with an agreement to boost disaster preparedness and mitigate related economic risks.

The earthquake and ensuing tsunami left about 20,000 people dead or unaccounted for, with damage estimated at about ¥16.9 trillion, far larger than the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake in the Kobe area.

Studies after the disasters have shown that Japan's recovery was faster than expected thanks to its disaster risk management.

Developing countries, however, lack the funds and expertise to reduce the economic consequences of natural disasters, which may become more frequent and costly with rapid urbanization and climate change.

U.N. data show that more than 200 million people are affected by natural hazards every year and annual economic losses exceed \$200 billion. Some disaster experts say investing in disaster resilience instead of disaster response systems is more beneficial and cost-effective.

On the sidelines of the dialogue, prominent figures from various fields such as business and the arts from both Japan and overseas are set to meet Wednesday to share stories about resilience and hope in the face of disasters. Among them will be Sendai-born pianist Michie Koyama.

Create more resilient societies

October 11, 2012

Intl disaster meet wraps up in Sendai

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T121010003486.htm>

SENDAI (Jiji Press)--Policymakers and experts from around the world agreed Wednesday on the need to create societies that are more resilient to disasters as they wrapped up their two-day special meeting here on disaster reduction and prevention.

The conference, dubbed the Sendai Dialogue and cohosted by Japan and the World Bank Group, "will further strengthen the global commitment for managing disaster risks for resilient growth and development," Finance Minister Koriki Jojima and World Bank President Jim Yong Kim said in a joint statement.

About 320 delegates from 40 countries and eight international organizations attended the meeting in Sendai.

Ahead of the meeting, which started Tuesday, participants including IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde visited areas hit hard by the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami.

In the closing session, Lagarde described Japan's postdisaster recovery as showing "incredible resilience." The outcome of the Sendai Dialogue will be reported to an IMF-World Bank Development Committee meeting scheduled for Saturday in Tokyo.

October 10, 2012

Japan, World Bank meeting on disaster risk management opens in Sendai

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121010b5.html>

Kyodo

SENDAI — Global leaders and disaster experts gathered Tuesday in Sendai for an international conference hosted by Japan and the World Bank on disasters and development, with reconstruction minister Tatsuo Hirano vowing to do more to create disaster-resilient communities.

At the two-day Sendai Dialogue, about 320 delegates from 40 countries, including disaster survivors, will share lessons from the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami that devastated vast areas of the

northeast — especially the prefectures of Iwate, Fukushima and Miyagi — and map out steps to limit the economic impact of natural disasters.

Mayor Emiko Okuyama of Sendai, the capital of Miyagi, said in her opening remarks that about a year and half after the disaster the city continues to "make rapid progress toward reconstruction and revitalization."

Still, Okuyama, delivering her address in English, said the city's "biggest challenge" lies in how to move ahead with reconstruction.

The earthquake and tsunami set off the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant. Quake-related damage has been estimated at about ¥16.9 trillion.

Participants in the Sendai Dialogue, which is part of the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in Tokyo this week, include World Bank President Jim Yong Kim, IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde, Finance Minister Koriki Jojima and his counterparts from other countries, including Colombia and Thailand.

Some of the delegates are scheduled to visit sites in the disaster areas, including an elementary school that was one of the few buildings in Sendai's Arahama coastal district to remain standing after the tsunami.

In his keynote speech, reconstruction minister Hirano stressed the government's role in strengthening measures to help disaster-hit communities recover. "Our country . . . the disaster-affected communities will certainly bounce back," he said.

He added he hopes Japan, through steps it has taken and will take, can contribute to global efforts toward disaster mitigation.

Representing disaster survivors, two female high school students from Sendai, Rina Iwamoto and Risa Shibahara, recounted how they survived the disaster with the help of local communities.

Jojima will attend a high-level session Wednesday, joined by Kim and Lagarde, to highlight the need to make disaster risk management a priority in the global development agenda, before delegates wrap up the meeting with an agreement to boost disaster preparedness to mitigate related economic risks.

On Tuesday, delegates shared what Japan had learned from a joint study with the World Bank about the benefits of its disaster prevention measures, such as reinforced buildings, early warning systems and education, and the challenges it continues to face in rebuilding the disaster zone.

On the sidelines of the dialogue, prominent figures from business, the arts, politics and science will gather Wednesday to share stories about resilience in the face of disasters.

U.N. data show that more than 200 million people are affected by natural hazards every year and annual economic losses come to around \$200 billion. Experts say investing in disaster resilience is more beneficial and cost-effective than merely focusing on disaster response financing.

See also

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121010p2g00m0dm032000c.html>

Global leaders eye better disaster preparedness in Sendai meeting

Missing minutes of meetings

October 9, 2012

Fukushima gov't hastily compiled minutes of experts' meetings over health survey

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121009p2a00m0na017000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- The prefectural government here hastily compiled the minutes of meetings by experts on a survey on the nuclear crisis' impact on local residents' health and released the details only after being asked by a local resident to disclose such documents, it has been learned.

A Fukushima Prefectural Government official reportedly compiled the minutes based on his notes but the number of pages is less than half that for later sessions.

A critic has pointed out that the act has damaged the confidence in official documents.

"Under the freedom of information system, government organizations are supposed to disclose documents that they created if requested to do so. If such bodies are allowed to compile documents after being asked to disclose them, they could create documents to their own advantage," said Yukiko Miki,

leader of a nonprofit organization working on the disclosure of government information. "Such an act could damage the public's confidence in disclosed public information. It's even worse than the national government's failure to compile minutes on meetings on the Great East Japan Earthquake."

An official with the prefectural government's health and welfare department, who compiled the minutes, said he was too busy when the first to third meetings were held to note the details. "The first three meetings were in chaos. I knew I would have to compile the minutes but later forgot to do so. I was worried because the national government's failure to compile such minutes was called into question."

The official of the health and welfare department, which serves as the secretariat of the panel, compiled the minutes of the fourth session of the experts' panel on Oct. 17 last year and for later meetings of the panel, and posted them on the prefectural government's website.

In early April this year, a man living in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Koriyama noticed that the minutes of the first to third sessions had not been uploaded to the website, and asked for access to the documents under the prefectural government's freedom of information ordinance.

However, the minutes of the first three sessions had not been compiled by that time.

The official in charge hastily compiled the minutes of these sessions based on his notes and showed them to the man in mid-April before uploading them to the prefectural government's website. At the time, the national government was under fire for failing to compile the minutes of meetings on the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

Each of these minutes consists of less than 10 pages, less than half those of the fourth and later sessions, each of which is about 20 to 30 pages.

The prefectural government is now investigating allegations that the prefectural government held secret "preparatory" meetings to coordinate views among panel members prior to its official meetings, and is expected to announce the results shortly.

First meeting of TEPCO's reform committee

October 13, 2012

TEPCO convenes N-reform panel

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T121012003513.htm>

Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s nuclear reform committee, a third-party group tasked with reexamining the causes of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and proposing safety measures, held its first meeting Friday at the company's head office in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo.

Dale Klein, former chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, is chairing the Nuclear Reform Monitoring Committee formed by the struggling utility.

At the meeting, Klein said that since nuclear power will continue to play a role in the world's energy supply, TEPCO needs to implement drastic reforms.

TEPCO aims to compile a reform plan for its nuclear energy division, which was responsible for exacerbating the situation during the Fukushima accident, by the end of the year.

At the meeting, a TEPCO official said the reforms would not be limited in subject or scope.

The committee's five members also include Barbara Judge, former chair of Britain's Atomic Energy Authority, and Kenichi Ohmae, a business consultant who previously worked as a nuclear engineer at Hitachi Ltd.

The committee is to propose safety measures for nuclear power plants and will monitor whether the plan is properly implemented.

It is rare for a nuclear energy division at a power company, a type of business usually seen as quite insular, to reflect the opinions of outsiders in its operations.

TEPCO hopes the reform plan will allow it to resume operations at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture, which the company sees as key to its rehabilitation.

(Oct. 13, 2012)

Former US NRC chairman urges TEPCO reform

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20121013_08.html

Former chairman of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission Dale Klein says Tokyo Electric Power Company will not be able to sustain itself without reforming its management. The operator of the troubled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has come under criticism since the accident in March of last year.

Klein spoke to NHK on Friday after the first meeting of a panel of outside experts set up by TEPCO to improve nuclear safety and corporate management. Klein is the head of the 5-member panel.

Klein said prior to the accident, TEPCO had become overly confident and did not question the safety of its nuclear plants. He said the company was apparently underestimating the power of nature.

Klein said the new third-party panel is proof that TEPCO recognizes the need for reform. He said management acknowledges that the company cannot continue without reform. He urged all employees to share that awareness.

At Friday's meeting, TEPCO presented to the panel a basic reform plan drafted by an in-house team. It admitted for the first time that it failed to take stronger measures to protect the Fukushima Daiichi plant from tsunami. The utility said it will carry out reform with no sanctuaries.

Prior to the meeting, Klein visited the Fukushima Daiichi plant and checked mainly the Number 4 reactor, which is feared to develop problems in the event of another earthquake.

Klein said based on his observation of the reactor's fuel pool and available information, he thinks the building is safe and can withstand quakes.

Klein said widespread uncertainty about the pool among the Japanese public was caused by early misinformation that it had no water inside.

He said once incorrect information is out, it makes it difficult for a company to establish confidence even when the information is later proven to be wrong.

Klein added that TEPCO should undergo investigation by an external body, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Fukushima disaster could have been avoided

October 13, 2012

Utility feared vital safety steps would hurt image

Tepco finally admits crisis was avoidable

AP

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121013x1.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. has acknowledged for the first time that the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant could have been avoided.

In a statement Friday, Tepco's internal reform task force said the utility was aware safety improvements were necessary before last year's tsunami resulted in three catastrophic core meltdowns at the facility, but failed to act because it feared the political, economic and legal consequences of implementing additional measures.

"Looking back on the accident, the problem was that preparations were not made in advance," the task force, led by Tepco President Naomi Hirose, said in the statement.

"Could necessary measures have been taken with previous tsunami evaluations? It was possible to take action" by adopting more extensive safety measures, the task force concluded.

But Tepco feared efforts to better protect its nuclear facilities from major natural disasters would trigger antinuclear sentiment, interfere with operations and increase litigation risks, according to the task force.

The utility said it could have mitigated the impact of the meltdowns if it had diversified power and cooling systems by paying closer heed to international standards and recommendations.

Tepco also should have provided training for its employees on practical crisis-management skills, rather than conducting obligatory drills as a mere formality, the task force added.

The admissions mark a major reversal for Tepco, which had defended its preparedness and crisis management since the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami knocked out power to the Fukushima No. 1 plant, leading to the triple meltdowns, massive evacuations and decontamination work that will take decades to complete.

The statement was released after Tepco's Nuclear Reform Monitoring Committee, headed by former U.S. nuclear regulatory chief Dale Klein, held its inaugural meeting Friday. The five-member committee monitors the task force's reform plans.

"It's very important for Tepco to recognize the need to reform and the committee is very anxious to facilitate the reforms necessary for Tepco to become a world-class company," Klein told a news conference Friday. "The committee's goal is to ensure that Tepco develops practices and procedures so an accident like (the Fukushima meltdowns) will never happen again."

The reform plans aim to use the lessons learned at Tepco's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture. The cash-strapped utility wants to restart the facility's seven reactors, but officials at the utility denied the plans are aimed at improving its public image to gain support for the plant's reactivation.

"The reforms are intended to improve our safety culture, and we have no intention to link it to the possibility of resuming operations at the (Kashiwazaki-Kariwa) plant," said Takafumi Anegawa, Tepco's official in charge of nuclear asset management. "We don't have any preconditions for our reforms."

The Fukushima No. 1 plant has been stabilized to a considerable extent, but is still running on makeshift equipment as workers continue preparations to decommission the four wrecked reactors, a process expected to take as long as four decades.

Additional safety measures have been installed at nuclear power stations nationwide since the Fukushima crisis under government instructions, including bolstering seawalls, adding backup power and coolant water sources, and enhancing crisis-management training. But plant operators will be required to take further steps as the Nuclear Regulation Authority, the new watchdog launched in September, ups safety requirements.

Investigative reports compiled by the government and Diet panels said collusion between Tepco and government regulators allowed lax supervision and allowed the utility to continue lagging in safety measures.

Tepco's Anegawa said the task force plans to compile recommendations by the end of the year "that would have saved us from the accident, if we were able to turn back the clock."

TEPCO admits fault in Fukushima nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121013p2a00m0na007000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) has for the first time admitted it failed to take adequate measures to prevent the disaster at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The statement marks a major turnaround from TEPCO's previous insistence that the meltdowns were the result of "unforeseeable tsunami."

"If we had taken measures based on previous tsunami evaluations and adopted sufficient countermeasures against severe accidents, (the nuclear disaster) could have been handled," TEPCO stated on Oct. 12.

The statement is a stark contrast to an in-house accident investigation report compiled in June, which made the "unforeseeable tsunami" claim and sparked harsh accusations against the utility of base self-justification.

Also on Oct. 12, TEPCO held the first meeting of an expert panel to its executive board, called the Nuclear Reform Monitoring Committee. The firm's new mea culpa was incorporated into a draft presented by the firm's Nuclear Reform Special Task Force. The task force is designed to map out detailed reform plans for the utility's nuclear energy department, under the supervision of the Nuclear Reform Monitoring Committee.

The draft pointed out that the nuclear disaster could have been dealt with if the company had taken into consideration the possibility of tsunami beyond expectations, and that the utility could have diversified its safety equipment in reference to severe accident measures adopted overseas.

"You can take this as our company's view," said Takafumi Anegawa, chief of the secretariat of the task force and general manager of TEPCO's Nuclear Asset Management Department. His remarks affirmed that the latest views conflict with those of the in-house investigation panel, but Anegawa stopped short of explaining the reasons for the discrepancy in detail.

Dale Klein, former chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) in the United States and who now chairs TEPCO's Nuclear Reform Monitoring Committee, stressed the need to drastically reform TEPCO in order to continue to use nuclear power as an energy source. The committee is tasked with screening reform proposals made by the Nuclear Reform Special Task Force and supervising its progress.

October 12, 2012

TEPCO admits to insufficient tsunami measures

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20121012_29.html

Tokyo Electric Power Company has admitted for the first time that its measures to protect the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant from tsunamis were insufficient.

The company acknowledged its failure at the first meeting of an independent panel on Friday.

The 5-member panel, headed by former chairman of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission Dale Klein, aims to help the utility reform its management. The firm has been the focus of criticism since the nuclear disaster in March last year.

The firm presented to the panel a reform plan drafted by an in-house team. It said the utility was able to take necessary steps to prepare for tsunamis before the accident, and should have had more effective organization and held practical disaster prevention drills.

The team said TEPCO should address issues pointed out by the government and Diet investigative panels, and carry out reforms without exceptions.

The plan is an about-face from the utility's final report on its probe into the accident, released in June.

The report said the firm was not fully prepared for a nuclear disaster, but defended its decisions and responses after the Fukushima Daiichi accident. The government and Diet investigative panels severely criticized the report.

Team member Takafumi Anegawa says the company's stance on the accident has changed. He adds that TEPCO will not win public understanding by saying the company did all it could but failed to prevent the accident.

What sort of a safety system is that?

October 12, 2012

J-Alert emergency warning system not functioning at 40 percent of municipalities

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121012p2a00m0na001000c.html>

Although 99 percent of 1,742 cities, towns and villages, including Tokyo's 23 wards, across the country have hooked up with the nationwide J-Alert emergency warning system, only 998 of them, or less than 60 percent, are capable of broadcasting emergency information through automatic activation of community wireless systems, a survey by the Board of Audit shows.

The survey reveals that the automatic broadcasting system does not activate in 569 municipalities even during an emergency because the locations either do not have a community wireless system, or have fallen behind in digitalizing the wireless system or have heeded complaints from residents about the midnight wails of sirens.

The Board of Audit compiled a report stressing the need to implement a system that properly notifies residents of emergency information and submitted it to the Diet on Oct. 11.

Developed by the Fire and Disaster Management Agency, the J-Alert system is operated by local governments. The Board of Audit's survey, excluding 14 cities, towns and villages in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures hardest hit by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and subsequent nuclear disaster, shows that 1,719 of 1,728 municipalities are equipped with the J-Alert system.

The system can automatically activate community wireless systems via a communications satellite, but 478 local governments have not installed automatic activation gear. Meanwhile 294 of them do not have a wireless system or their wireless systems are analog and cannot respond to digitalized information because of a price tag of 200 million yen to 300 million yen to modernize the system.

A total of 91 cities, towns and villages have refrained from utilizing the J-Alert system even after installing the automatic activation system because of complaints about the incessant drone of sirens from residents and a series of false alarms after the disasters. The Board of Audit survey also shows that 152 local governments can broadcast to only certain sections of their municipalities because of delayed coordination after mergers.

Shocking misappropriation of disaster funds

October 12, 2012

Editorial: Gov't must move fast to ensure disaster recovery cash flows to areas in need

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20121012p2a00m0na002000c.html>

Revelations that large portions of the national budget allocated to recovery from last year's Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and ongoing nuclear disaster have been funneled to non-disaster areas has caused wide repercussions. The opposition bloc sought to hold a meeting of a House of Representatives Audit and Oversight of Administration Committee subcommittee to get to the bottom of the matter, but it was called off when members of the ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) failed to show up.

It is disgraceful that not only have funds been effectively misappropriated for purposes that are not necessary related to post-quake reconstruction, but that the government's response has been so passive once the facts emerged. Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda's attitude toward the issue is too lax, and we demand that the government address the issue promptly, including conducting a fundamental review of the reconstruction budget.

The party that once led investigations into "vanished pensions" and other money issues seems to be no longer. In spite of questions being raised about how taxes are spent, the DPJ will not agree to a deliberation in the Diet, which is in recess. It is a sign that the party has begun to put its guard up.

Examples of the questionable use of the reconstruction budget continue to emerge. According to reports, a total of 12 billion yen was spent on seismic renovations of government agency facilities. Did it not occur to the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism or the Ministry of Finance to demand that priority be placed on seismic

renovations of local government facilities in disaster areas, since the funds were set aside for reconstruction? Whatever happened to a sense of responsibility among those in government service?

Reconstruction Minister Tatsuo Hirano has requested the Finance Ministry to conduct a fact-finding survey, and the Government Revitalization Unit of the Cabinet Office has launched its own investigation. However, it's already been one month since the airing of public broadcaster NHK's special program that first uncovered the questionable spending, and over two weeks since we demanded that the issue be

resolved. Perhaps the reason the government has been so slow to respond is because the prime minister has not shown a willingness to lead the way.

Among the examples of spending that have come under fire, there are cases that do not deserve criticism. The first task is to comb through all spending so far, and sort it into that which was truly related to reconstruction efforts and that which wasn't. Some cases may call for a halt to budget implementation.

Once that sorting process is completed, the approximately 1.2 trillion yen of the "national disaster countermeasures" budget not under the jurisdiction of the Reconstruction Ministry should be split off from the approximately 4.5 trillion yen in the fiscal 2013 special budget request for reconstruction. Without such drastic moves, reconstruction funding will end up in non-disaster areas. Such a situation will not appease taxpayers, now burdened with a 25-year tax increase to fund the reconstruction efforts.

Some in the opposition bloc see this as a prime opportunity to attack the current administration. However, the basic policy laid out by the government last year was worded in such a way that allowed for the possibility of allocating reconstruction funds to non-disaster areas. Plus, it's unlikely that the use of past budgets was ever pursued so fervently in the Diet.

We are now at a point where the opposition should actively let the government know what it should do. Our first priority should be to correct the government's past errors so that necessary and sufficient reconstruction funding is delivered to areas struck by last year's triple disasters.

Careful with that money!

October 15, 2012

Gov't urged not to use quake reconstruction budgets for other areas

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121015p2a00m0na015000c.html>

The government should hammer out a clear-cut policy not to direct budgets for the reconstruction of areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami for other purposes, Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) Policy Research Committee Chair Goshi Hosono stated over the weekend.

Hosono made the remarks during a Fuji TV program on Oct. 14, following a string of revelations that massive amounts of "reconstruction budgets" have been diverted to measures unrelated to disaster recovery efforts, drawing fire from the public.

"The government should set out a clear direction that reconstruction budgets would not be used in areas other than those hit by the quake disaster," Hosono said.

"The government had initially proposed the law with the idea of limiting the budgets' use to disaster-affected areas, but it was later decided that the budgets be authorized for all of Japan based on the opinions of the Liberal Democratic Party. I believe the idea was not mistaken as a whole," he said.

"Areas outside the disaster-hit zone are settling down, so it is fine to change the course (of the budgets)," he added.

Regarding the DPJ's nuclear energy policy to be incorporated into the ruling party's manifesto for the next House of Representatives election, Hosono said, "The government and the DPJ have laid out a policy to inject all necessary resources into a goal of zero nuclear reactors in operation by the 2030s, and the policy will be clearly stipulated in the manifesto."

Funds allocated to suicide prevention projects from quake reconstruction budgets

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121015p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Over 3 billion yen has been allocated to nationwide suicide prevention projects out of reconstruction budgets set aside for areas devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, it has been learned.

The revelation is the latest in a series of much-criticized diversions of budgets for quake reconstruction to projects that have little or no connection to disaster recovery efforts.

According to the finding, the Cabinet Office has granted 3.7 billion yen to suicide prevention projects nationwide as part of the third supplementary budget for fiscal 2011 and demanded another 3 billion yen in the fiscal 2013 budget -- out of budgets for "nationwide disaster prevention measures," which are part of the reconstruction budgets. The nationwide disaster prevention budgets are intended for use in preparation for potentially imminent major disasters, such as a quake hitting Tokyo or a temblor occurring in the Nankai Trough in the seabed off central to western Japan.

An official of the Office for Policy of Suicide Prevention of the Cabinet Office defended the budgetary measures, saying, "Suicide prevention projects constitute disaster prevention in that they are meant to prevent psychological damage emanating from the quake disaster."

The suicide prevention projects, called "regional suicide prevention emergency stepped-up measures," are intended to support projects such as suicide hotlines operated by municipal governments and counselor training -- through prefectural governments across the country.

The projects have heretofore been funded by general accounts since fiscal 2009. At a press conference on Oct. 12, Minister of State for Disaster Management Mikio Shimoji said, "In light of the urgency, I wonder if it's right to demand budgets for suicide prevention projects from the nationwide disaster prevention budgets, while the Cabinet Office has demanded general account budgets since before the quake disaster," suggesting that the Cabinet Office's budget demand for the next fiscal year is likely to be reviewed.

The Cabinet Office has earlier defined expenditure prerequisites for nationwide disaster prevention budgets as projects that have immediate effects, taking into consideration that reconstruction budgets are funded by tax hikes for disaster recovery efforts.

A representative of the Office for Policy of Suicide Prevention said, "The number of suicides increased on the heels of the Great East Japan Earthquake. The suicide prevention budgets are also intended to prevent suicides in case a major quake hits the Nankai Trough area and from other quakes, but it may be a bit hard to understand."

The nationwide disaster prevention budgets were created with the aim of preparing for mega disasters, taking heed to the lessons left by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. However, the idea of funding future disaster prevention measures from reconstruction budgets for a past disaster is hard to understand for the public. A spate of revelations that reconstruction budgets have been diverted to projects that are not highly urgent or effective have also raised questions.

"I think some twists are needed, such as separating nationwide disaster prevention budgets from reconstruction budgets," said Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Yuichiro Hata.

Out of the approximately 19 trillion yen set aside as reconstruction budgets, some 1 trillion yen is expected to be earmarked for nationwide disaster prevention budgets. In December last year, the Cabinet Office cited possible future disasters subjected to the nationwide disaster prevention budgets. They included major aftershocks of the Great East Japan Earthquake, a Nankai Trough tremor, a quake directly hitting the Tokyo area, and a tremor around the Japan Trench and Chishima Trench.

The ministries and agencies have allocated the nationwide disaster prevention budgets to projects in areas outside the disaster-hit zone as well, such as work on national roads in Okinawa Prefecture and anti-quake and anti-tsunami measures at government buildings. By fiscal 2012, some 1 trillion yen has been earmarked for those purposes, and another 940 billion yen in budgets is demanded for fiscal 2013. Criticism has been mounting over delayed budget implementations for disaster-affected areas.

Financially-strapped coastal prefectures, where potential damage from the Nankai Trough quake is projected, have demanded an increase in nationwide disaster prevention budgets. A representative of the Wakayama Prefectural Government criticized the central government, saying, "We have been taking only direct measures, such as setting up evacuation routes, as part of projects covered by the nationwide disaster prevention budgets. I wonder why they budget for projects that have nothing to do with disaster prevention."

"Write articles that make good use of voices that are being suppressed"

Editorial: Newspapers should deepen coverage of quake, tsunami and nuclear crisis

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20121015p2a00m0na005000c.html>

One year and seven months have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and ensuing nuclear crisis occurred on March 11, 2011. Since the outbreak of the triple disasters, newspapers and other media outlets have been called into question over how they should face the serious damage caused by the temblor and tsunami as well as the nuclear disaster and what they should convey to their readers and viewers.

Newspaper publishers should take the opportunity of Newspaper Week that began on Oct. 15 to consider how to deepen their coverage of the triple disasters.

Many questions have been raised over disaster countermeasures as recovery work progresses in disaster-hit areas. One of these questions is how funds allocated for disaster recovery efforts have been used. Reporters have patiently covered the situation of disaster-ravaged areas and checked whether the government's response to the situation is appropriate. They have also tried to deeply examine important challenges to the restoration of disaster areas. These are important roles that newspapers should carry out.

In particular, newspapers should continue to pay close attention to the situation in Fukushima Prefecture where the serious nuclear crisis has been prolonged.

The government has declared that the tsunami-stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant has been brought under control on the grounds that it has been brought to a stable condition called a "cold shutdown." Still, photos of the inside of one of its nuclear reactor containment vessels, which were taken recently, show that it was filled with steam.

Radiation levels inside the containment vessels remain high and the amount of water contaminated with radioactive substances has kept increasing at the power plant. There are no prospects that the crippled power station can be decommissioned and dismantled in the foreseeable future.

The situation concerning Fukushima residents' daily lives remains serious. The government has begun re-designating evacuation zones but its efforts to build infrastructure in affected areas has been delayed. Many residents' lives have drastically changed since the March 11, 2011, disasters.

Discussions were held on how journalism should cover the nuclear disaster during a national meeting of the deliberative panel on news media's ethics last month. Jun Sakuma, city news editor with the local newspaper Fukushima Minpo, reported the worries of residents near the power plant.

He pointed out there are differences in views on radiation contamination even within a family, and that there are residents of the same area who have evacuated to other areas and others who remained in their neighborhoods, while different areas in the same municipality have been designated as different evacuation zones.

"There is division in many communities in the disaster-hit area. We sometimes wonder whether we can help local residents by describing their differences in our articles," Sakuma told the meeting, highlighting the viewpoint of the local newspaper that is particularly close to local residents. The regional daily received this year's Japan Newspaper Publishers & Editors Association Award for its coverage of the nuclear disaster because its coverage "exposed problems involving the disaster from various perspectives and verified the numerous aspects that have been behind the disaster and whether the countermeasures have been appropriate."

During discussions at the national meeting of the ethics panel, a reporter of another local daily warned that it would be inappropriate if the nuclear crisis was simply bracketed as the "Fukushima problem" and treated merely as a local issue. We must take his opinion seriously.

In May, the Mainichi Shimbun exposed that secret meetings were held between pro-nuclear experts and power company and government officials on the promotion of the nuclear fuel cycle project -- in which plutonium is extracted from spent nuclear fuel and used for fast-breeder reactors. Its reports revealed through journalists' patient coverage that nuclear experts, businesses and government officials colluded behind closed doors to draw up a tactic to lead official discussions in favor of the project.

The Japan Newspaper Publishers & Editors Association selected as one of its official slogans the phrase, "**Write articles that make good use of voices that are being suppressed,**" which was originally written by Yoshiharu Oiwake, a resident of Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, from among numerous entries. The Mainichi Shimbun is determined to continue to confront and report what is going on in Japan and the world.

Little food coop sues TEPCO over loss of confidence

October 14, 2012

Food co-op sues Tepco over soiled reputation

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/fl20121014x2.html>

By TOMOKO OTAKE
Staff writer

Nanohana Seikyo — a Chiba Prefecture food distribution cooperative with about 11,500 members — made headlines last month when it took on the role of David by suing the corporate Goliath that is Tokyo Electric Power Co. for losses in sales incurred as a result of the March 2011 nuclear disaster.

In its civil suit filed on Sept. 24 at the Chiba District Court, the co-op is seeking ¥22.91 million in damages from the utility company that operates the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The amount being sought is minuscule set against the hundreds of billions of yen Tepco has already paid to corporations and individuals affected by the disaster — let alone the estimated ¥4.5 trillion that it, with massive injections of public money, is likely to have to pay in damages and compensation due to the explosions and reactor meltdowns at the plant, and the resulting releases of radioactive materials.

Nonetheless, the case is of crucial importance, since it raises the fundamental question of who bears ultimate responsibility for all the public anxiety over — and the loss of confidence in — food safety in post-Fukushima Japan.

Shinji Kase, head of the 38-year-old co-op, told The Japan Times in a recent interview that his organization had long sourced food from Fukushima, with the goal of delivering pesticide- and additive-free non-genetically modified foods to its members. However, to do this, he explained, it has been vital to establish long-term relationships with farmers in order for them and the co-op to work together toward the goal of delivering safe food.

Since the March 2011 disaster, Kase said Nanohana Seikyo — which has become active in the anti-nuclear campaign — had started independently testing the food it handled, including produce from Fukushima, applying radiation limits far stricter than those set by the government. Despite its testing, however, the co-op's sales have plummeted and some of its members have left.

"Around 50 members who had trusted us withdrew from our co-op, citing clearly their fears of radiation risks as the reason," Kase said. "Many more have quit without exactly saying why — but we think it's attributable to the disaster."

In its restitution scheme, Tepco already has a provision for compensating businesses that have incurred financial damage as a result of *fūhyō higai* — a term that means "damage from speculation or a bad reputation."

Nanohana Seikyo's current suit follows an out-of-court compensation claim it filed in November 2011 for ¥18.73 million to cover lost revenue and its extra costs due to the radiation testing. After examining that claim, Tepco paid a total of ¥10.51 million in January and April this year. In June, however, the utility informed Nanohana it was under no obligation to pay the ¥8.22 million balance since the co-op's loss in sales had no causal relationship with the accident, according to a letter from Tepco to the co-op, a copy of which has been obtained by The Japan Times.

Kase said he suspects that recent moves by other co-ops to file compensation claims made Tepco wary, and that's why it had taken that position.

What really enraged Kase about Tepco's move, though, was not so much its withholding of money but the way it rejected the claim — hence the suit now filed claiming damages from the utility, he said.

Specifically, in that letter from Tepco it was the following sentence that so offended Kase: "With regard to food products that your co-op deals in, when there is a possibility that (member consumers) will refrain from buying products and cause damage based on speculation that those products might be tainted with radioactive materials, your co-op has the option of taking preventive measures, such as sourcing your food from other suppliers," Tepco wrote.

In other words, as Kase regards it, Tepco was effectively telling the co-op, "If your consumers don't buy from Fukushima farmers for fear of radiation risks, you should get your food from somewhere else."

What's more, Kase said Tepco also hinted that Nanohana Seikyo's independent food testing was an extra frill that didn't warrant compensation. To support that claim he cited the following from that letter: "The results of your radiation tests show no radioactive substances have been detected in almost all of the foods. It cannot be judged, therefore, that the tests are absolutely necessary. It can be considered that you have been conducting (radiation tests) to allay your members' concerns as part of your business judgment."

Hence at issue here, as Kase sees it and has asked the court to rule on, is whether or not it is the responsibility of distributors to pay costs incurred when they try to meet consumer demand by monitoring food independently, because their consumers do not entirely believe the government's testing or its safety limit. And further, when consumers don't even trust the results of such independent tests, and stop buying food from safety-conscious retailers, who should be blamed?

So clearly, despite the relatively petty amount being sought, Nanohana Seikyo's damages suit raises major issues.

"Ideally, it should be Tepco — as a party that spread radiation all around — conducting radiation tests of food and making sure all foods are safe," Kase said. "If we change our policy and drop our producers (when our test results show their food is safe), we won't be ourselves — because we have long championed the idea of building trust with producers."

The Japan Times contacted Tepco to discuss the lawsuit and the issues it raises, but its spokesman said it had no comment to make.

The Chiba District Court will have its first hearing on the case on Nov. 27. A ruling is not expected until sometime next year.

Former Fukushima Governor convicted

October 18, 2012

Conviction to be set for ex-Fukushima gov.

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T121017003732.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

The Supreme Court has rejected appeals by both the prosecution and former Fukushima Gov. Eisaku Sato, who was convicted of bribery related to a dam building project, meaning his sentence of two years imprisonment suspended four years is set to be finalized.

Sato, 73, is suspected of urging a construction contractor to purchase land from his brother. The court also rejected appeals from the prosecution and Sato's brother Yuji, 69, who was convicted of bid-rigging and bribery, and sentenced to 18 months in prison suspended four years.

October 17, 2012

Ex-Fukushima governor loses appeal over bribe-taking conviction for dam project

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121017p2a00m0na006000c.html>

The Supreme Court has upheld a suspended prison term for former Fukushima Gov. Eisaku Sato, known as a critic of the central government's nuclear power policy, for accepting a bribe over a dam construction project.

The top court dismissed an appeal by Sato, 73, against a Tokyo High Court ruling that sentenced him in October 2009 to two years in prison, suspended for four years. The court also upheld a high court ruling that sentenced Sato's 69-year-old brother, Yuji, to 18 months in prison, suspended for four years, for conspiring with the former governor in the case.

Former Gov. Sato criticized the top court ruling. "I never received any bribe, and the ruling is unacceptable. I'm disappointed at the judicial branch that was unable to clarify the facts," he said in a statement released by his defense lawyer.

In a symposium held at Fukushima University in February, Sato criticized prosecutors for pressing false charges against him. "I was hit with a false accusation because I voiced opposition to the national government's policy."

The defense counsel may seek a retrial in the case.

According to the indictment, Sato gave preferential treatment to Maeda Corp. in a tender for the Fukushima Prefectural Government's Kido Dam construction project in 2000.

In return, the then governor conspired with his younger brother to sell a land lot owned by a company run by the brother to Mizutani Kensetsu, a subcontractor of Maeda, for 973.72 million yen, a figure higher than the property's market price of 800 million yen, sometime between August and September 2002, giving the pair 173.72 million yen as a bribe, prosecutors alleged.

The former governor pleaded not guilty to the charges during his trials.

In August 2008, the Tokyo District Court recognized that the pair accepted approximately 73.72 million yen as a bribe, and sentenced the former governor to three years in prison, suspended for five years, and his brother to 30 months in prison, suspended for five years.

The Tokyo High Court scrapped the ruling after deeming that it could not determine that the market price of the land lot was 80 million yen at the time of the deal and refused to recognize the difference in the selling price and what was claimed to be the market price as a bribe. In an extremely rare move, however, the appeal court recognized the proceeds of selling the property to Mizutani Kensetsu as a bribe.

Both the defendants and the prosecution appealed the ruling to the Supreme Court.

Kurokawa in Washington on lessons from "man-made" disaster

October 17, 2012

Fukushima panel chair calls for sharing lessons

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20121017_20.html

The Japanese scientist who led an expert's panel on the Fukushima nuclear accident says it is important to share the lessons learned from the disaster with the rest of the world.

Kiyoshi Kurokawa, who chaired the Japanese Diet panel's investigation into the accident, gave a speech in Washington on Tuesday.

Kurokawa explained the main points of the report the panel submitted in July. The report criticized the nuclear regulatory authorities and the operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, for their lack of preventive measures.

It termed the nuclear accident a "man-made disaster," and called for the creation of a permanent Diet committee to oversee the work of nuclear regulatory authorities.

Kurokawa told his audience that the report has been translated into English and is now available on the panel's website. He said this will enable people around the world to share the lessons of the disaster.

He also referred to the measures at nuclear plants in the United States. The country introduced new measures after the September 11th attacks in 2001. For example, it is now mandatory for plants to have additional backup power systems.

Kurokawa said Japan did not introduce such measures although the government was aware that they had been installed in the US. He pointed out that if those systems had been in place at Fukushima, the accident could have been prevented.

Shortage of funds or misuse?

October 20, 2012

Misuse of reconstruction funds

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/ed20121020a1.html>

It has surfaced that a special account budget to fund the reconstruction of communities devastated by the 3/11 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disasters has been used to pay for unrelated projects. As to be expected, the shortage of funds due to budget mismanagement has angered affected residents. The Diet should scrutinize the use of the fiscal 2012 reconstruction budget and disclose dubious projects. The government and the Diet also should prevent bureaucrats from including projects that do not bring direct benefits to disaster-hit communities in their requests related to the fiscal 2013 disaster reconstruction budget.

The basic policy for disaster reconstruction adopted by the government in July 2011 includes provisions that bureaucrats can take advantage of to utilize budget money for projects not directly related to the disaster areas. It says in part that the true reconstruction of the disaster-hit areas will be impossible without the resuscitation of the Japanese economy. This provision can be interpreted very liberally. The policy in fact allows the use of budget money for projects in locations that have close connections to areas directly affected by the disasters, and for disaster-prevention projects in locations outside the 3/11 disaster zones.

Nonetheless, the government and the Diet should sincerely respond to complaints from people in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures who were directly affected by the 3/11 disasters. For example, it is reported that more than 60 percent of associations of medium-size and small business owners in the disaster areas that requested aid to revive their companies had their requests turned down due to a shortage of funds.

The absurdity of this situation is revealed by the dubious projects funded out of the reconstruction budget. They include efforts to cope with activities of the anti-whaling Sea Shepherd organization (¥2.3 billion), quake-proofing work for 12 buildings of the National Tax Agency (¥1.2 billion), job training-related expenditure for prisons in Hokkaido and Saitama Prefecture (¥30 million), the purchase of six C130 transport planes for the Maritime Self-Defense Force and two C2 transport planes for the Air Self-Defense Force (¥15 billion and ¥25 billion, respectively), and training for ASDF fighter pilots in the United States (¥1.44 billion).

Despite the questionable nature of these projects, in an extremely partisan move the Democratic Party of Japan recently boycotted a Lower House Audit and Oversight of Administration Committee session to delve into the budget mismanagement. An Upper House committee held a session on Thursday.

The reconstruction budget is expected to amount to ¥19 trillion in a five-year period from fiscal 2011. It will include ¥10.5 trillion from a surcharge on income and residents' taxes, which will continue to be imposed for 10 to 25 years. The commonsense principle that use of the reconstruction budget should be limited to funding projects in the disaster-hit areas must be strictly followed.

Is the NRA compatible with transparency?

October 22, 2012

NRA must ensure transparency

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/ed20121022a1.html>

More than a month has passed since the Nuclear Regulatory Authority was inaugurated on Sept. 19. The NRA started in a deplorable manner. In a political maneuver, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda used a provision of the relevant law and appointed the five commission members without Diet approval.

Given the suspicions the public harbors toward the NRA due to the way in which its members were appointed, it is imperative it strictly oversee matters related to nuclear power generation free from the influence of politicians, government ministries and agencies, and the power industry. But the staffing of the NRA's secretariat, the Nuclear Regulatory Agency — which is composed of up to 473 officials and workers — raises concerns because many of its high-ranking officials used to work for government ministries and agencies that promoted nuclear power.

The agency's chief to cope with emergencies at nuclear power plants was formerly a councillor at the ministry of trade and industry. While he was head of the nuclear policy section of the ministry's Natural Resources and Energy Agency in 2004, he calculated the cost of underground disposal of spent nuclear fuel, but then denied the existence of the calculation before the Diet. For this he was disciplined.

The agency's deputy head is from the Environment Agency, which pushed nuclear power generation as a means of combating global warming. The agency head and the agency's chief for the safety of local areas near nuclear power plants in the event of a disaster were selected from the Metropolitan Police Department because it is hoped that they will be adept at crisis management.

Of the three councillors at the agency, one worked for the atomic energy bureau of the now-defunct Science and Technology Agency, another served as head of a section of the Natural Resources and Energy Agency, whose task was to insist that nuclear power plants were safe in lawsuits filed by local residents, and still another was with the trade and industry ministry's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency and dealt with the Fukushima nuclear crisis as safety chief. In June 2012, the last official apologized in a news conference for the government's failure to distribute maps displaying the dispersion of radioactive substances to evacuating residents.

Given the **NRA's vital tasks**, which include writing new post-Fukushima standards for nuclear power plants, examining suspected geological faults near or inside nuclear power plants sites, working out safety measures for local residents in the event of a severe nuclear accident, and judging whether to allow nuclear plants to remain in operation for an additional 20 years once they have reached the end of their standard 40-year operational life, it must ensure its operation and decisions are transparent.

The NRA on Sept. 26 excluded reporters from the Japan Communist Party newspaper Akahata from its news conference on the grounds that it is a party organ and its reporting has a specific bias. It later changed its reason for excluding Akahata, and then eventually decided on Oct. 2 to accept Akahata. This kind of behavior only deepens suspicions about its integrity.

" A wrong sense of security"

October 24, 2012

Japanese government radiation monitoring posts not showing reality: Greenpeace

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121024b7.html>

Kyodo

Greenpeace said Tuesday a survey it carried out has found that many of the official radiation monitoring posts set up after the Fukushima nuclear crisis provide lower readings than nearby locations and the environmental group is urging the government to disseminate more accurate data to the public.

Greenpeace said its survey, conducted from Tuesday to Friday of last week in the city of Fukushima, showed that 30 of the 40 government-set monitoring posts recorded lower radiation levels than the environmental group found in spots just 5 to 40 meters away.

One monitoring post in a park showed less than one-twelfth the radiation levels seen in nearby areas in the same park, it said.

The differences may be a result of land at the monitoring posts being decontaminated when they were set up, Greenpeace said. Concrete and metal plates on the monitoring posts' bases are also believed to be screening the instruments from radiation.

"The government should not offer a wrong sense of security to citizens," a Greenpeace official said.

Give the money to the people who need it

October 26, 2012

Misuse of disaster 'reconstruction' money runs rampant

Expert finds 25% going toward projects that won't benefit Tohoku

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121026f1.html>

By MIZUHO AOKI and REIJI YOSHIDA

Staff writer

A year and a half after the Tohoku region was devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake and monster tsunami, shocking revelations are deepening the sorrow and frustration of the survivors and throwing a harsh light on the government and the Diet.

Still standing: Municipal employees in Minamisanriku, Miyagi Prefecture, used this tower, seen last month, to broadcast evacuation orders as monster tsunami swept in and engulfed the town on March 11, 2011.



To help hundreds of thousands of people mainly in Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima prefectures, the government has allocated as much as **¥19 trillion** for "reconstruction," asking taxpayers to bear the extra burden to support the disaster victims and help them reconstruct their local infrastructure.

But much of the disaster recovery money has been allocated for projects that have little to do with the disaster victims, media reports have revealed.

These projects include ¥500 million for road construction work in Okinawa, ¥330 million for repairs to the National Stadium in Tokyo's Yoyogi district and ¥10.7 billion in subsidies for a government-linked nuclear power research organization, much of which will be used to study nuclear fusion.

The Justice Ministry meanwhile secured about ¥30 million to purchase power shovels for prisons in Hokkaido and Saitama prefectures, and the fisheries ministry was given ¥2.3 billion for countermeasures against the Sea Shepherd antiwhaling group.

Yoshimitsu Shiozaki, a professor at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto who is an expert on reconstruction of disaster areas, has examined the third supplementary budget for fiscal 2011, which included ¥9.2 trillion for 488 "reconstruction" projects.

He found that about ¥2.45 trillion, or a quarter of the total, was allocated for projects outside Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, or for national projects he concluded are unlikely to directly benefit anyone in the three hardest-hit prefectures.

"Legally speaking, there are no problems with these projects. Similar things happened after the (1995) Great Hanshin Earthquake, when reconstruction funds were used for other purposes," Shiozaki said. "But this time (the funds) are being used in a more deceptive way."

Of the ¥19 trillion earmarked for reconstruction, the government will come up with ¥10.5 trillion by keeping higher rates for income, corporate and residential taxes by up to 25 years.

"Taxpayers accepted the tax hikes because (they thought) the money would be used for helping disaster victims. And disaster victims were thanking them," Upper House member Kuniko Tanioka of the parliamentary group Midori no Kaze said during a recent Audit Committee session to scrutinize reconstruction spending.

"But it has turned out that (the funds) have been used for (projects) they never imagined. . . . It has dampened the disaster victims' will to rebuild their lives," she said.

Under a budget guideline originally proposed by the Democratic Party of Japan-led administration in May 2011, the government would have been allowed to use reconstruction funds only for projects directly related to the stricken areas.

But later, responding to demands from opposition lawmakers, the ruling parties agreed to revise the guideline so the ¥19 trillion will also be used to "reinvigorate Japan," leaving geographical boundaries unclear and widening the scope of use for the "reconstruction" funds.

The budget guideline also called for "disaster prevention" measures across the country based on lessons from the Tohoku tragedy.

This has allowed, for example, the government to spend ¥12 billion to strengthen the quake resistance of various government buildings outside the Tohoku prefectures.

Takayoshi Igarashi, a professor at Hosei University and an expert on public works spending, said bureaucrats by nature try to use up all the money available as there is no incentive for them to save taxpayer funds.

"That's a fundamental characteristic of bureaucrats. It is the Diet that should check how money is used, but the Diet hasn't put any effort into it," Igarashi said.

During the 2009 Lower House election campaign, the DPJ scored well with voters by pledging to thoroughly scrutinize government spending and drastically cut waste, public works projects in particular. As it turned out, the DPJ defeated the Liberal Democratic Party, which had been long criticized for its government budgets bloated with pork-barrel public works spending.

"But this time, the DPJ behaved the same as the LDP. So the feeling of disappointment among the public is now much bigger" than it would have been under an LDP-led administration, Igarashi said.

The fisheries ministry argues that the budget to counter Sea Shepherd will eventually benefit areas in and around the city of Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, where about 1,200 people work in whaling-related industries.

The Justice Ministry has insisted that buying power shovels for the Hokkaido and Saitama prisons will eventually benefit the disaster-hit areas because the machines will be used to train prisoners for future jobs and thus help ease the shortage of such workers in the Tohoku region.

Meanwhile, Tohoku coastal towns severely hit by last year's tsunami are still suffering from money shortages as well as manpower, according to Shiozaki, who has analyzed how reconstruction funds were used after the Hanshin quake.

Such facts should be remembered when discussing allocation of the reconstruction budget, he said.

Municipalities that lost many of their officials are **too short on manpower** to handle the massive amount of work necessary to recover from the disasters, he said.

Shiozaki also said many residents who lost their jobs and homes are financially struggling, making the task of rebuilding their lives even harder.

Under the law to help disaster victims' restore their livelihoods, the government is supposed to provide up to ¥3 million in cash to each household that lost a home in the March 11 disasters.

That amount is far from enough to rebuild a house, Shiozaki pointed out.

"If that amount was doubled, more people would be able to think of ways to reconstruct their lives," he said.

"Up until now, less than ¥300 billion has been distributed under the system. So even if (the government) were to double the amount paid, it would only be ¥600 billion, which is nothing compared with ¥19 trillion," Shiozaki said.

He stressed that Diet members as well as bureaucrats actually need to go to disaster sites and **come up with ways not only to cut wasteful spending but also to direct money where it is most needed.**

"They can't study ways to provide funding for places truly in need merely by reviewing documents," he said. **Lawmakers and officials "must go to the devastated areas.** Problems are occurring in the disaster zone, not in Kasumigaseki," the government center in Tokyo.

Now that it is facing harsh criticism, the administration has pledged to review reconstruction spending and says it will hammer out new approaches in early November.

Yutaka Harada, an economics professor at Waseda University, said **the best and cheapest way to reconstruct the disaster areas is to hand cash directly to the victims.**

"In that way, a ¥4 trillion budget would be enough," he said. "Everybody says it would create a moral hazard, but the ¥19 trillion reconstruction budget is already a moral hazard."

More on misuse of disaster money

October 28, 2012

Noda meets with Iwate gov. on funds

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T121027001982.htm>

MORIOKA (Jiji Press)--Facing mounting criticism that government funds for postdisaster reconstruction have been used for projects outside affected areas, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda stressed he will give the highest funding priority to those areas.

Meeting Saturday with Iwate Gov. Takuya Tasso in Morioka, Noda expressed his willingness to review allocation of the funds earmarked after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami by examining how the money is actually used.

He is determined to deal with the budget allocation problem "under the policy of placing top priority on disaster-hit areas," Noda said.

In reply, Tasso said, "Reconstruction [of the disaster areas] will lead to the revival of Japan as a whole." At the meeting, Noda explained new government measures to push forward reconstruction efforts, such as "group subsidies" to be provided from fiscal 2012 budget reserves to help damaged small and mid-sized companies restart operations.

NRA corrects own projections

October 30, 2012

Errors found in projections for spread of radiation in severe accidents

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121030p2g00m0dm012000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Japan's nuclear regulatory authority apologized Monday after finding errors in its recently announced projections for the spread of radiation from reactors nationwide in the event of severe accidents.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority corrected the projections to show that the city of Nagaoka, rather than Uonuma, both in Niigata Prefecture, would be the most distant point from Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant where the amount of radiation released a week after an accident could reach 100 millisieverts, the level where evacuation is recommended.

The authority initially said the amount of radiation could reach that level in locations around 40 kilometers from the plant, reaching Uonuma, about 40.2 km away from the plant.

The NRA also revised the projections for Japan Atomic Power Co.'s Tokai Daini plant in Ibaraki Prefecture and Tsuruga plant in Fukui Prefecture, Hokuriku Electric Power Co.'s Shika plant in Ishikawa Prefecture, Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Genkai plant in Saga Prefecture and Sendai plant in Kagoshima Prefecture.

An official of the NRA secretariat said many of the mistakes had occurred during the conversion of weather data received from each utility for use in a computer program.

The NRA detected the mistakes after being notified by Hokuriku Electric, the official said.

The regulatory body announced radiation projections for 16 atomic plants on Wednesday to provide references for local governments to expand areas that should be subject to special preparations against nuclear disasters following the meltdowns at Tokyo Electric's Fukushima Daiichi complex last year.

The simulation showed the distances at which doses could reach 100 millisieverts a week after severe accidents at the plants like the one at the Fukushima Daiichi complex last year.

The International Atomic Energy Agency calls for evacuation when effective doses exceed 100 millisieverts in the first seven days of an emergency exposure situation.

Another mass complaint

November 2, 2012

Second mass complaint coming over Fukushima disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201211020069>

November 02, 2012

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA—More than 10,000 people from across Japan are seeking criminal charges against officials of Japan's government and the utility that operates the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, after a similar mass complaint this summer accused 33 officials of causing death and injury through negligence.

Prosecutors in Fukushima Prefecture are currently examining the earlier complaint, filed in June by 1,324 people who were residents of the prefecture at the time of the accident in March 2011.

Complainants behind the new case plan to file it with the Fukushima District Public Prosecutors Office on Nov. 15. The group numbers about 10,850 individuals, from Hokkaido in the north to Okinawa in the south.

The group is led by Ruiko Muto, 59, who traveled around the country seeking support.

Complainants argued that a broadly backed complaint would show that the general public is seeking criminal accountability for those who promoted nuclear power—and hold them responsible for damage from the disaster and for exposing victims to radiation.

The first complaint named 33 individuals, including 15 current and former officials of Tokyo Electric Power Co., the company that operates the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

It said they should be charged with professional negligence resulting in death and injury because they failed to take safety measures and furthermore released wrong information.

Prosecutors have had TEPCO submit video footage of teleconferences conducted between the head office and the Fukushima plant in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami.

They are expected to question concerned individuals before deciding whether to issue indictments.

Prosecutors have asked complainants to submit documents relating to people who died during the evacuation.

In addition to those documents, complainants plan to submit medical certificates for evacuees who were diagnosed as suffering mental trauma as a result of their ordeal.

They have argued that victims suffered "injuries" from radiation exposure. But it is thought to be difficult in law to establish a causal relationship between those purported injuries and the nuclear accident.

Conflicts of interest?

Sunday, Nov. 4, 2012

Officials drafting new regulations raked in millions

Nuke industry funded NRC's safety experts

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121104a1.html>

Kyodo

Four of the six members on a government panel drafting new nuclear safety regulations each received between ¥3 million and over ¥27 million in payments, donations and grants from entities in the atomic energy industry in the last three to four years, the Nuclear Regulation Authority said.

But after disclosing the data Friday, the new nuclear watchdog's secretariat said all four members "were selected in line with regulations, and there should thus be no problem" over their appointment.

Critics, however, cited the risk of their judgment being swayed by power companies and other nuclear-related bodies, and of the possibility that new safety regulations could be watered down.

The NRA requires experts involved in drafting safety standards for nuclear plants and other matters to disclose their remuneration and other payments received, but it has no provision to disqualify them if previously withheld information comes to light.

Of the four members, Akira Yamaguchi, a professor at Osaka University's graduate school, and Akio Yamamoto, a Nagoya University professor, each received payments in excess of ¥500,000 annually from entities including Nuclear Engineering Ltd., an affiliate of Kansai Electric Power Co.

In addition, Yamamoto received more than ¥27 million in donations and research grants from Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd., which manufactures equipment for nuclear reactors, while Yamaguchi raked in a total of ¥10.1 million from Japan Atomic Power Co., a constructor and operator of atomic plants, and from other nuclear-related parties.

Meanwhile, University of Tsukuba professor Yutaka Abe was paid a combined ¥5 million by a variety of bodies, including a research laboratory affiliated with Tokyo Electric Power Co., and Tomoyuki Sugiyama, a researcher at the state-run Japan Atomic Energy Agency, was awarded roughly ¥3 million in total from Nuclear Fuel Industries Ltd.

The only two panel members who did not receive any funds from entities in the nuclear power industry are Norio Watanabe, a researcher at the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, and Meiji University associate professor Tadahiro Katsuta.

Discrimination against journalists

article available also in Japanese and in French on the RSF site

<http://en.rsf.org/japon-journalists-barred-from-anti-06-11-2012,43640.html>

Journalists barred from anti-nuclear protest coverage

Published on Tuesday 6 November 2012. Updated on Thursday 8 November 2012.

Reporters Without Borders declares its support for a legal demand to the Tokyo regional court by three freelance journalists seeking access to an official press club building that would allow them to cover anti-nuclear demonstration.

Yu Terasawa, Michiyoshi Hatakeyama and Yuichi Sato filed their demand on 31 October. They have been trying since June to enter the building of the Kisha club of the National Diet (parliament). The building offers the perfect vantage point for coverage of anti-nuclear demonstrations held every Friday in front of the prime minister's residence, directly across the street. Club director Toshiyuki Saga has prohibited the freelancers from entering.

“This obstruction of freelancers’ work is arbitrary and illegal under Japanese law and violates the fundamental principle of freedom of the press,” Reporters Without Borders said. “The court will not provide legal cover for obstruction of access, especially given that the request for legal action comes from journalists themselves.”

Freelance journalists play an essential role in ensuring diversity in news coverage, the press freedom organization noted, calling that diversity essential to a democracy. The Kisha clubs not only embody a system of unfair privileges but systematically display contempt for an entire part of the media community, the organization said.

The three journalists who went to court belong to a freelancers’ liaison group created in October of last year to fight for freelancers’ access to press conferences held by the government and TEPCO, the electric utility. The freelancers have tried to film the weekly anti-nuclear demonstrations.

Before making their legal move, the journalists wrote on three occasions to club director Saga, a former journalist with Kyodo News. The letters, dated 17 July, 16 August and 10 October, have gone unanswered.

But Saga, in a video released on YouTube on 13 October, expressed hostility to the freelancers who had come to cover the protests.

On 2 November, Saga refused to answer questions from a Reporters Without Borders correspondent. Freelance journalists are routinely discriminated against in Japan. Officials typically attempt to justify this policy on a variety of grounds: lack of space, lack of time, extra cost. Notably, these constraints apply only to freelancers – not to journalists employed by media companies.

Nuclear policy remains an extremely sensitive issue in Japan. Freelance journalist Minoru Tanaka has suffered systematic legal harassment since last May. He has been accused of libel as a result of his investigation of the disaster at the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear plant.

Reporters Without Borders has opposed for years the censorship exercised by the Kisha clubs and the danger to press freedom that they represent.

Are the news about Fufushima (self-)censored?

Sunday, Nov. 11, 2012

Cleaning up: Workers at a school sports field in Hirono, outside the Fukushima nuclear exclusion zone, prepare bags of radiation-contaminated earth for shipment to a dumping ground. AP



MEDIA MIX

Local media are too vague on Fukushima radiation risk

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/fd20121111pb.html>

By PHILIP BRASOR

Earlier this year, NHK rebroadcast a documentary it made in the late 1980s about the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear reactor accident. It showed how the Soviet Union and European countries tested people for effects of radiation throughout the region. Appended to the doc was a discussion with experts who compared the accident with the one that happened at the Fukushima No. 1 reactor in 2011, implying that Fukushima wasn't as dire as Chernobyl but stopping short of saying it was nothing to worry about. As long as radiation levels and residents' health were continually monitored, the situation could be managed.

Still, the documentary left a chilling impression, if only for its repeated use of the phrase "ashes of death" (*shi no hai*). Though the commentary was meant to be reassuring in that Fukushima was presented as being less dangerous than Chernobyl, where radioactive ash actually fell from the sky, the language conveyed the feeling that any nuclear accident is potentially deadly and the farther it is from your backyard the more dramatic you can be in describing it.

It follows that you should be less dramatic in your own neighborhood. Remember how after the Fukushima accident then-Minister of Economy Trade and Industry Yoshio Hachiro was pilloried for calling the evacuated area "cities of death"? Even now you have to be cautious about making any public pronouncements regarding the safety situation in the affected regions.

There is a group of self-appointed social-media police who audit related information coming from the press for anything that might cause anxiety. Their main target is the foreign media, which, in line with the above-mentioned credo about backyards, are seen to be carelessly "sensational" in their coverage. This group denies it is trying to censor the news. It only demands the press be "responsible," but the end result is much the same as far as the affected people are concerned. The argument this group advances, that there is still no scientific consensus about the long-term effects of radiation on the human body, has no traction with the residents of Fukushima. If there is the slightest possibility that even low-level exposure is harmful, they want to know.

On Nov. 1 the mayor of Minamisoma in Fukushima Prefecture, Katsunobu Sakurai, who became world famous after posting a YouTube video calling for help shortly after the accident, spoke to reporters at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan and blasted the government, business community and media for acting as if the accident were a tragedy the country has already gotten over. Sakurai was talking about the push to restart nuclear power plants, which requires that the Fukushima story be closed, but he was also suggesting that cleanup cannot proceed smoothly until everyone recognizes it as something that is not only necessary for people in the contaminated areas, but vital to the interests of Japan.

The domestic media has been vague about what the cleanup (*josen*) entails, except to say that irradiated waste is being shipped to other localities that don't want it. Again, it was foreign media that first explained

the difficulties involved. Last February the New York Times and CBS News, to name just two, ran stories that described how no one carrying out the cleanup at the time knew what they were doing.

Several weeks ago, NHK broadcast a new documentary that detailed the effort so far. In fact, it focused on Minamisoma, which lies just outside the evacuation area but in the path of the radiation drift from the crippled reactors. Though residents weren't forced to evacuate, many did, especially if they had children, and they were impatient to commence with cleanup operations, which started in a piecemeal fashion a year ago. Immediately, the residents realized the problems they faced, not just in terms of physical work — it takes one hour to clean 10 sq. meters — but in terms of measuring achievement. Their target radiation level of 0.23 microsieverts/hour turned out to be elusive. After cleaning, some areas were below the target while others were above it, and these levels kept shifting with time. "You can't remove radiation just by cleaning once," said Tatsuhiko Kodama of the University of Tokyo, who was advising residents. "You need at least three cycles to understand where radiation is concentrated."

The 0.23 level is important because the government will subsidize cleanup when radiation exceeds it but not when it drops below. Some families want to get their levels even lower, so they clean their properties themselves, going as far as destroying gardens and trees, even though the effectiveness isn't clear. What's more, contaminated water, soil and vegetation have nowhere to go. The current policy involves moving materials to temporary storage sites while the government works on locating and building a final permanent site, but so far localities chosen for the temporary sites have resisted. Most of the contaminated materials are being stored on the properties from which they were removed.

Meanwhile, costs are skyrocketing, and these localities realize that government guidelines dictating payments don't apply to the real situation on the ground. As one resident put it, they are "fumbling toward a solution" on their own while the government does nothing. Some localities have come up with their own solutions, but if they use different means than those sanctioned they won't be reimbursed.

The ramifications of this confusion can be seen in last week's Asahi Shimbun scoop about companies hired to do cleanup work that have not passed on special allowances the government contributed for workers. Some subcontractors said they never received the allowances from contractors while others passed it on but lowered wages accordingly. In its February article the New York Times reported that commercial interests were exploiting the confusion for their own gain — which isn't to say that the Asahi is behind the curve, only that when it comes to stories as controversial as this one, better late than never.

Decisions made in advance at "secret meetings"

November 14, 2012

Fukushima held 'secret meetings' on format of health surveys

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121114p2a00m0na012000c.html>

The Fukushima Prefectural Government held "secret meetings" to make key decisions on how to conduct health surveys on local residents in the wake of the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, prior to exploratory panel meetings on the issue, it has been learned.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government released the minutes of the "secret meetings," which it called "preparatory meetings," under a freedom-of-information request filed by the Mainichi Shimbun. When the Fukushima Prefectural Government conducted an internal investigation in October, it said the meetings were "forums for advance briefings on materials." But **the minutes of the meetings confirm that important policies and even the scope of subsequent discussions at exploratory panel meetings were decided in advance at the meetings.**

The Fukushima Prefectural Government told the Mainichi Shimbun in September that it "did not draw up the minutes of preparatory meetings." But the minutes were released after the Mainichi Shimbun demanded under a freedom-of-information request in October that the prefectural government release all minutes of its preparatory meetings.

A Fukushima Prefectural Government representative said the minutes had been regarded as "memos."

"They were compiled as memos, and they were not drawn up as minutes based on confirmed remarks by attendees," the representative said. The prefectural government said minutes of the second and eighth preparatory meetings held on June 12, 2011 and Sept. 11, 2012, respectively, did not exist.

According to the minutes released by the prefectural government, the meeting held on July 17, 2011 in preparation for the third exploratory panel meeting on July 24, 2011 lasted for about 3 1/2 hours -- roughly 1 1/2 hours longer than the exploratory meeting itself. Regarding the age at which people could qualify for thyroid gland examinations, Fukushima Medical University Vice President Shunichi Yamashita, who chairs the exploratory panel, told the secret meeting, "We will make a decision at this meeting." After hearing the opinions of other panel members, Yamashita said, "We will set it at age 18, as the committee has recommended."

There was no objection from other panel members, and at the subsequent full-fledged exploratory panel meeting, another professor from Fukushima Medical University explained, "We will set the qualifying age at 18 or younger." The prefectural government started to conduct thyroid gland examinations in October 2011.

The fifth secret meeting, held on Jan. 25, 2012, dealt with the issue of conducting a survey on local residents' estimated external radiation exposure. The prefectural government had planned to set a certain

criterion for subjecting people to health checks by the end of fiscal 2011. Some panel members objected to the idea, with one of them saying, "It is difficult to draw the line." To this, Yamashita responded, "It's better for us to arm ourselves with a theoretical backing. We won't discuss the issue this time. A final decision will be made after the end of this fiscal year."

At the exploratory panel meeting held on the same day, no one made a reference to a criterion for health checks on external radiation exposure. The criterion has not been decided yet.

The prefectural government described the preparatory meetings as forums for briefings on topics of discussion. The results of its internal investigation, released on Oct. 9, stated, "There were no coordination of views and induction of discussions, but **there was conduct that could provoke suspicion.**"

Fukushima disaster not just TEPCO's responsibility

November 12, 2012

Editorial: TEPCO's request for more funds a payback for gov't dodging responsibility

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20121112p2a00m0na014000c.html>

In a new management plan compiled by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant is seeking additional assistance from the government. TEPCO's previous restoration plan was only just drawn up in May. That it has already been reassessed shows that the government is paying sorely for having left its own responsibility ambiguous.

In addition to providing relief to victims of the nuclear disaster, TEPCO, which has a one-third market share in Japan, has a responsibility to take on a leading role in reforming the utility system.

The government should make its responsibility for the nuclear disaster explicit, and sincere efforts should be made by TEPCO to alleviate burdens shouldered by the public before a provision of additional assistance to TEPCO is approved.

To pay for victim compensation, TEPCO is receiving a maximum 5 trillion yen from the government through the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund, which will be paid back every year from the company's profits. Ostensibly, the public is ultimately meant to shoulder none of the burden.

However, TEPCO is now seeking direct assistance -- which, if approved, will not require repayment -- citing the possibility that compensation, including decontamination costs, may balloon to around 10 trillion yen. The request must not be approved without thorough evaluation, but the decision to make the request was one reached by the external board members selected by the government.

If TEPCO were to become a body existing just for the purpose of repaying debts, it would suffer from talent drain and other phenomena that would weaken the company. It would have to prioritize generating profits to pay off its loans, which would prevent it from taking initiative in reforming the utility system. The current setup, in which all responsibility for compensation is left up to TEPCO, appears to have run into a brick wall.

The promotion of nuclear power was a government policy. **TEPCO bears a heavy responsibility for causing the disaster, but the government bears a responsibility for having given its stamp of approval on the safety of the company's reactors. The government needs to stop carrying out half-measures in an attempt to leave the question of its own responsibility for that unanswered.**

Thus far, the government has gone without bearing any responsibility for compensation, because no provision in the Act on Compensation for Nuclear Damage forces it to do so. It was the lack of an alternative body to provide compensation to victims that comprised the main argument against TEPCO's legal liquidation. In that case, the Act on Compensation for Nuclear Damage must be revised to clearly assign responsibility to both TEPCO and the government before the government can grant additional assistance to the utility.

If the government is going to approve the reactivation of halted nuclear reactors for the time being -- despite putting forth a new energy policy of independence from nuclear power by the 2030s -- a revision of the Act on Compensation for Nuclear Damage is indispensable in preparing for the chance that victims of another nuclear disaster will need relief.

Direct assistance funded by taxes means a direct burden on the public. To gain the understanding of the public, the government must sort through the problems of its past nuclear policy through deliberations on law reform. The public is bound to object to pumping taxes into TEPCO without holding its creditors, such as shareholders and major banks, accountable. The pros and cons must be thoroughly debated in the process of rethinking nuclear policy.

In its new management plan, TEPCO has mapped out ways to contribute more to Fukushima's reconstruction, proposed further streamlining, and promoted management reform that would take it

toward a holding company system. These are all a matter of course if TEPCO is to receive further government assistance, and we hope to see them put into practice.

More excuses over secrecy

November 19, 2012

Fukushima health survey committee chair apologizes over secret meetings

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121119p2a00m0na017000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- The chair of a committee overseeing a prefectural health survey issued an apology Nov. 18 after revelations the body had held secret "preparation" gatherings to harmonize members' opinions ahead of official meetings.

"I have caused a great deal of trouble to committee members, and I sincerely apologize," said Chairman Shunichi Yamashita at the body's first meeting since the secret consultations were discovered, adding, "I hope to make all meetings properly public from now on."

The committee headed by Fukushima Medical University Vice President Yamashita was created by the prefecture to conduct a health survey of its residents in response to the ongoing disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and analyze its results.

The prefecture has revealed it will revise the committee's platform such that all the body's meetings must be open to the public and the minutes be recorded.

The head of the prefecture's health and welfare division will furthermore be removed from the committee and replaced with the head of the medical association of Futaba County -- where the stricken nuclear plant is located -- and the deputy chief of the prefectural clinical psychologists association.

According to the prefecture, the committee did not hold a "preparation" meeting before the Nov. 18 open session.

"Our committee was formed in the confusion just after the (March 2011) disasters, so I think it couldn't be helped that we have not performed perfectly," Yamashita told reporters at a news conference after the Nov. 18 committee meeting. When asked if he would take the blame for the secret gatherings, Yamashita stated, "My future in this position is up to the prefecture."

In related news, health survey results reported at the committee meeting revealed that possible thyroid cancer had been detected in one girl aged at least 16 in the prefecture, and that a second test was required.

Revelations - Urine tests or not?

November 20, 2012

Fukushima releases full expert panel minutes on internal radiation exposure

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121120p2a00m0na009000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- The Fukushima Prefectural Government on Nov. 19 revealed the full minutes of an expert panel meeting on internal radiation exposure following revelations that significant portions of a previous release had been deleted.

The original minutes, released in response to freedom-of-information requests from local residents, excised sections revealing the prefecture was reluctant to accept a central government proposal to conduct urine sample testing as part of a health survey following the March 2011 meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. When the omission was discovered, experts lashed out at the prefectural government.

"They apparently didn't want to reveal that they wanted to avoid conducting urine tests in an effort to underestimate the damage to residents' health," said Katsuma Yagasaki, professor emeritus at the University of the Ryukyus. Urine sample testing can detect even minor internal radiation exposure.

The urine sample debate is included in the newly released full minutes covering a closed-door exploratory committee meeting held on June 18, 2011. At the meeting, experts and other participants discussed possible examinations of about 28,000 residents of Namie, Iitate and Kawamata's Yamakiya district in Fukushima Prefecture for internal radiation exposure.

According to the full minutes, senior Cabinet Office officials who attended the meeting as observers said urine testing should be used as a main tool to check internal radiation exposure, as opposed to whole body counters (WBCs). The prefectural government, however, was reluctant to do so, saying, "We can't turn around and decide on urine testing because everybody is calling for WBCs."

In the end, the prefecture examined less than 200 local residents using both urine testing and WBCs in late June 2011, and stated that it had not detected levels of radiation that could affect human health. The

prefecture has since continued to use WBCs to examine some local residents for internal radiation exposure, but has shown persistent reluctance to take urine samples.

It had already been revealed that proper minutes of the committee's first, second and third panel meetings had not been compiled before residents requested their disclosures under the freedom-of-information act. Instead, minutes were hastily patched together based on notes taken by prefectural government staff and released. In an internal investigation, the results of which were released in October, the prefectural government admitted that part of the minutes had been left out because the process was "handled improperly, and the minutes were drawn up without some staff memos."

According to the prefecture, despite the fact that notes of the proceedings existed, it left out some of those notes when assembling the minutes of the meetings in response to the freedom-of-information requests. Keiichi Sasa, head of the health management research office at the prefectural government, said, "The original minutes were here, but I don't know who omitted the missing sections (from the release version) and for what purposes."

Not a good start

November 22, 2012

Faulty fallout forecasts' firm industry-linked

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121122x2.html>

Kyodo

A consulting firm linked to the nuclear industry produced erroneous projections for the spread of radiation from reactors in the event of meltdowns, sources said Wednesday.

The revelation casts doubt on the ability of the Nuclear Regulation Authority to serve as a watchdog, as it outsourced the projection work to the consultancy through the Japan Nuclear Energy Safety Organization, which originally made a contract for the project and merely released the forecasts.

The projections were created by CSA of Japan Co. According to a credit research firm, CSAJ is a member of the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum nuclear industry body and does business with JNES and a subsidiary of Tohoku Electric Power Co.

The radiation spread projection work was outsourced to the consulting firm for ¥9.77 million by JNES, which took on the project from the predecessor of the NRA in March, the sources said.

The predecessor Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency set the deadline for the projection work at the end of May, but that was delayed until shortly before Oct. 24, when the NRA released its first projections for the spread of radiation from reactors in the case of a meltdown crisis like the one at Fukushima No. 1.

JNES subcontracted the project to CSAJ due to a lack of manpower, it said. But the sources doubted this, as only one worker at the consultancy was told to enter data into a simulation program the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission created, the sources said.

The data used for the forecasts, including wind directions, were provided by utilities that operate nuclear plants, they said.

NRA spokesman Hideka Morimoto apologized for errors as the projections were for evacuation plans.

UN not so optimistic

November 26, 2012

UN HR expert criticizes Fukushima response

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20121126_28.html

A UN human rights expert says the Japanese government should do more to protect the rights of those affected by the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

UN Special Rapporteur Anand Grover was speaking to reporters on Monday in Tokyo. Grover had been in the disaster-stricken northeast since last Thursday. He was studying whether the rights and the health of evacuees and others affected by the accident are being properly protected.

Grover criticized the Japanese government for not adequately responding to the accident in terms of protecting the people it affected. He said an example would be the government's not immediately disclosing forecast data from the SPEEDI system, which charts the spread of radioactive substances.

He also criticized the government for not conducting long-term follow-up medical checkups on those working to decommission the damaged reactors.

Grover said the needs of pregnant woman, children, the elderly and other socially disadvantaged people are not fully reflected in the decision-making process for decontamination and other issues. He said he will urge Japan to improve the situation.

The UN Human Rights Council will soon submit to the Japanese government the results of Grover's visit. A final report will be submitted to the Council in June of next year.

U.N. envoy: Japan should do more for nuke victims

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121126p2g00m0dm064000c.html>

TOKYO (AP) -- A United Nations rights investigator has said Japan hasn't fully served the health needs of residents and workers affected by the nuclear crisis and address their concerns.

Anand Grover, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health, said Monday that Japan has over-emphasized optimistic views of radiation risks and conducted limited health checks after a meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear power plant caused by an earthquake and tsunami in 2011.

Many plant workers on short-term contracts have no access to permanent health check.

Grover wrapped up his 11-day survey in Fukushima and other areas. He also cited residents' complaints about the lack of access to their own health-check results.

Japan's government has been criticized for coverups and delays in disclosing key radiation information, causing deep-rooted public distrust.

Of the importance of trust

Editorial: Trust more than anything important for governance

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20121126p2a00m0na001000c.html>

As political parties' rush to prepare for the general election, former Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) announced his decision not to contest the election, citing his refusal to commit to the party's policy line -- a requirement in receiving party endorsement.

There's a tragic gap between the exit of Hatoyama, who has come to symbolize the DPJ administration's meandering leadership record, and the national excitement three years ago over the changeover in government, of which he was at the center. At least this time, Hatoyama made good on his word to retire from politics, a promise he once made and broke when stepping down from his post as prime minister.

So what was the biggest mistake that Hatoyama made as prime minister? The confusion he caused over the relocation of U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma was undoubtedly a fatal error. However, it must be said that Hatoyama's failure to immediately establish the legal framework necessary to realize politician-led policymaking was just as costly.

In the upcoming lower house election, Japan's system of governance itself has come under question. The DPJ strayed off course from its attempt to break away from bureaucracy-centered politics, and a political gridlock persisted under a "twisted" Diet. Calls to revamp the Diet's fundamental structure, including the possible adoption of unicameralism, emerged, and there are signs of a revived push for the introduction of a popular vote for prime minister. As such, a debate over the nation's governing structure possess elements that could lead to pressure for constitutional revision. What kind of framework is conducive to a smooth political process? It is time to stare the reality of systemic fatigue in the face, and press forth with the debate.

To do so, a review of the DPJ administration of the past three years is crucial. To curb bureaucratic meddling in politics, the DPJ first entrusted decision making in each ministry to the "seimu sanyaku," or the three posts of minister, senior vice minister, and parliamentary secretary appointed from among legislators. Administrative vice minister meetings were abolished, and the Government Revitalization Unit's waste-cutting commission attracted widespread attention. Meanwhile, the creation of a framework -- including the legislation of the National Policy Unit (NPU), which would ideally serve as the command center for politician-led decision making, and a large-scale increase in senior vice ministers and parliamentary secretaries -- was left on the back burner.

As a result, in many ministries the "seimu sanyaku" were overburdened with administrative work that should have been left to bureaucrats, while the laying down of policy direction and accountability were abandoned. It's undeniable that communication between politicians and bureaucrats fell into disarray, and distrust and fear of rocking the boat spread.

In contrast, the Naoto Kan and Yoshihiko Noda administrations were characterized more by an increased tendency to leave significant decision-making to bureaucrats. The diversion of reconstruction funds that recently caused a public uproar was the result of the central bureaucracy taking advantage of the administration and jockeying for a bigger share of the budget.

The question of redefining the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats remains wholly unresolved. Reducing red tape and allowing more flexibility in bureaucratic appointments would be the first step. A bill to centralize the personnel management of all senior ministry and agency officials by establishing a Cabinet personnel affairs bureau was submitted three times by the coalition Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)-New Komeito government and the DPJ government but has been met with the unfortunate fate of being scrapped. Postponement of pressing concerns such as this is no longer acceptable.

Learning from the lessons of the last three years, politicians must search for a system that will make full functional use of bureaucrats; it goes without saying that bureaucrat bashing must be avoided. Many issues await reform, including the budget-drafting process and the disclosure of public information.

The DPJ has upheld regional sovereignty reform as being on the same level of importance as politician-led decision making in achieving its goal of breaking with bureaucracy-centered politics. This is based on the idea that through decentralization and increased restriction on the role of central government offices, regional areas around the country will regain vitality, leaving more of the national government's manpower for other issues such as foreign diplomacy and defense, and economic policy.

The Act on the Forum for Deliberation between National and Local Governments was passed in 2011, pushing into motion the abolition and review of regulations that had until then allowed central government offices to restrict the administration of local municipalities. Regional administration has achieved increased freedom, and it is inappropriate to one-sidedly judge regional sovereignty reform as little more than an empty slogan.

Little headway was made, however, regarding items that faced fierce resistance from central government offices, such as the transfer of local branches of central government agencies to regional municipalities. Because debate had been pushed forward without a clear vision of the future distribution of roles between the central and regional governments, opinions were split even within regional municipalities.

In the next election, parties such as the LDP, the New Komeito and the Japan Restoration Party (JRP) are seeking debate on possible "doshusei" regional administrative reform -- reorganizing prefectural governments into larger local bodies. The system is indeed an attractive option in boldly assigning power to regional blocks and promoting decentralization.

However, in considering regional administrative reform, it is important to indicate a clear vision of the distribution of roles and authority between central and regional governments, as well as financial resource allocation. The fact that there was once a push for a centralized form of "doshu" administration must be examined. If "doshu" administration is to be introduced to facilitate decentralization, it's only logical to take a proactive stance toward the preliminary step of transferring local branches of central government agencies to regional municipalities.

As a step toward adopting the "doshu" system, the JRP is advocating that consumption tax be levied at the regional level, and the abolition of local tax grants. How does the party believe the burden should be shared between central and regional governments, at a time when social security costs are only expected

to rise? If the party suggests that local taxes levied under current prefectural and municipal demarcations be used for fiscal management, it must explain how it will gain the approval of residents to do so.

The public's distrust toward politics was surely aggravated with the collapse of the DPJ's 2009 election manifesto, created without an adequate assessment of government coffers. It is of course important to come up with a governing structure, but politics does not function if the public cannot trust the political parties and the politicians that comprise the governing structure.

Constant alignment and realignment, in which politicians suddenly switch parties and compromise their fundamental policies shortly before an election, will only invite more distrust from voters. We would like to point out, once again, that recovered confidence in politics constitutes the most extensive foundation for governance.

Dependance on nuke money continues

November 26, 2012

Sentaku Magazine

Municipal nuclear addiction

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/ea20121126a1.html>

Municipalities hosting nuclear power plants throughout Japan have received large amounts of central government subsidies, donations from utilities and lucrative business contracts.

Now, 1½ years after the Fukushima nuclear disasters, those municipalities realize how much their finances depend on the nuclear power-induced money.

"They're like drug addicts cut off from supplies," said a member of the assembly of Niigata Prefecture, which hosts Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant on the Sea of Japan coast. All the reactors at the plant remain shut down after its No. 5 and 6 reactors went offline earlier this year.

After the Fukushima nuclear power plant meltdowns in March 2011, the government refused to give the go-ahead for restarting reactors at other plants throughout Japan that had gone offline for regular

inspections, until it approved reactivating two reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi plant in Fukui Prefecture in July.

"I was scared to death when the Fukushima accident happened, but now I am thankful that the plant resumed operations," said a resident of the town of Oi who works for a subcontractor to the power station. "I think that most of the local people here feel the same way."

Many newspaper reporters and TV crew rushed to Oi — along with anti-nuclear power activists — when the town was at the center of nationwide attention over the government's decision to reactivate the reactors. The man says he did not feel like talking to media crews, who he thought were trying to paint a stereotype picture of the local residents worried about the dangers of reactivating the plant.

There are indeed gaps among local residents and businesses on how they benefit financially from hosting the nuclear plants.

Host prefectures and municipalities receive central government grants based on laws designed to promote development of power generation facilities.

These subsidies are heavily distributed while siting research and construction are going on, but are gradually reduced once the plants starts operation. After that, only the local residents who work at the plant and related businesses continue to get the rewards.

"People who do not benefit from the plant are a minority here. Still, it's true that some residents who don't directly get the money were unhappy about the restart," said an Oi town assemblyman.

Media reports played up the voices of residents who spoke up in opposition to the restart. But it was "never a consensus of the local residents" to oppose the plant restart, the assemblyman said.

People in other host municipalities have mixed feelings toward the restart of the Oi plant.

"A growing number of residents ask me when the plant here will be restarted," says a politician from Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, where Japan Atomic Power Co. has a power station and Japan Atomic Energy Agency operates the Monju fast-breeder reactor, which constitutes the core of the nation's nuclear fuel cycle policy.

A reporter with a local newspaper says "special financial consideration" has been given to the Tsugaru area as part of the effort to achieve the nuclear fuel cycle, which he called "a pie in the sky" to begin with. **Money kept flowing in generously from the nuclear community even after Monju was kept mostly offline following a serious sodium coolant leak in 1995.**

The city of Tsuruga has so far received a total of over ¥100 billion in "official" grants. In addition, another ¥10 billion has been provided to the city coffers in the name of "anonymous donations."

Such funds are then used to benefit local businesses in the form of public works projects contracts. One construction industry insider in Fukui Prefecture explains that **bid-rigging is still rampant in such projects in municipalities hosting nuclear plants, resulting in higher costs.**

For example, the municipal government paid well in excess of ¥100 million for a road improvement project, but the sum would have been more than 20 percent less if the same work had been undertaken in other cities, he said.

There will be additional construction orders from a utility after a nuclear plant starts operations — at costs mostly above the industry average, according to a source familiar with the construction industry in the Kansai region. Some of the money will likely go from construction firms to local politicians, the source said.

Kansai Electric Power Co., which operates three nuclear power plants in Fukui Prefecture, is a private company and may not see a problem in paying whatever price is bid for its construction work. But under relevant laws, utilities are allowed to pass all of such costs on to electricity bills charged on consumers.

Even among host municipalities, there are differences in attitudes depending on the extent to which they rely on financial assistance and benefits linked to nuclear energy. In February, Kashiwazaki Mayor Hiroshi Aida expressed his support for a policy to reduce and eventually eliminate the nation's dependence on nuclear energy, but his counterpart at Kariwa said his village cannot survive without the nuclear power station.

While they both host Tepco's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, nuclear plant-related subsidies or donations from the utility account for 14 percent of Kashiwazaki's annual budget and as high as 30 percent of Kariwa's.

An insider in the construction industry in Kashiwazaki says that **local politicians and contractors continue to hunt for new sources of nuclear power-related income even after the Fukushima plant**

disasters. Even though it is now next to impossible to hope for construction of new nuclear plants, they are looking into the possibility of building facilities for temporary storage of spent nuclear fuel from nuclear power plants around the country, or a storage site for contaminated materials from Fukushima, he points out.

Another example of a local community dependent on money related to nuclear facilities is in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, formerly a poverty-stricken village where most of its 11,000 residents relied on agriculture and fisheries for their livelihood. The village is now called one of Japan's wealthiest municipalities.

Nippon Nuclear Fuel Ltd., which plays the central role in the nation's nuclear fuel cycle project, has its headquarters in Rokkasho and accounts for ¥6 billion of the estimated ¥6.8 billion in local tax revenue for fiscal 2012. Rokkasho's general account budget for the year is ¥13 billion — double the amount of a village in Kumamoto Prefecture with roughly the same population.

If the government's plan to phase out nuclear power in Japan is to be implemented, the whole concept of a nuclear fuel cycle in this country would collapse, which in turn would deal a serious blow to Rokkasho's fiscal foundation.

Alarmed by such a prospect, the village assembly in September unanimously adopted a resolution demanding that if the nuclear fuel cycle program were to be stopped, all spent fuels that had been shipped to the reprocessing facility in Rokkasho be moved out of the village immediately. It was an outright threat to both the central government and the power companies.

Spent fuel storage pools at nuclear plants throughout the country are filled almost to capacity, and would overflow if the fuel rods at Rokkasho were returned to the power plants where they originated. This would make it impossible to restart any of the nuclear plants in Japan.

A journalist who covers nuclear power issues for a major newspaper notes that Rokkasho's special status among host municipalities gives it enormous leverage.

"It's like a drug addict engaging in robbery to get the money to buy more narcotics," the journalist said.

The episode shows that the system in which money flows from the nuclear community into host municipalities remains intact, and unless the link is cut off, those municipalities will continue to rely on the nuclear industry.

This is an abridged translation of an article from the November issue of Sentaku, a monthly magazine covering Japanese political, social and economic scenes.

US Committee to draw lessons from 3/11

November 27, 2012

TEPCO failed to take enough safety measures before Fukushima disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121127p2g00m0dm033000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- A senior official of Tokyo Electric Power Co. said Monday at a U.S. panel meeting in Tokyo that the company failed to take sufficient safety measures before last year's disaster at its Fukushima nuclear complex, fearing that taking such measures could "fuel the anxiety" of local people.

On the first day of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences' committee meeting through Wednesday, Akira Kawano, general manager of Tokyo Electric's Nuclear International Relations and Strategy Group, said the company "was concerned that safety measures, if taken, might rather fuel the anxiety of local people."

Kawano also said the nuclear crisis was caused because multiple protection measures at the complex were "not enough to fend off the tsunami that was beyond earlier assumptions."

Kiyoshi Kurokawa, who headed a Japanese Diet-appointed panel to investigate the Fukushima disaster, cited findings of his panel and told the U.S. committee those in responsible positions assumed nuclear power plant accidents would not occur.

The committee is tasked by the U.S. Congress to compile a report by the spring of 2014 to draw lessons from the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima plant crippled by the March 2011 earthquake and subsequent tsunami.

The committee's members will visit the Fukushima Daiichi complex on Friday.

How to waste public money

November 29, 2012

Gov't-funded nuclear body outsourced projects worth 23 mil. yen to sum up accident reports

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121129p2a00m0na003000c.html>

The government-funded Japan Nuclear Energy Safety Organization (JNES) outsourced four projects worth about 23 million yen to summarize reports on the Fukushima nuclear accident that had been compiled separately by the government, Diet and private investigation committees, it has been learned.

The JNES explained that it had done so due to a "manpower shortage," but the revelation would likely call into **question whether there was in fact a need for the government-funded nuclear organization to spend such a large amount of money to summarize reports that had already been released and publicized.**

Of the four companies that received the orders from the JNES, two are **Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd.**, which produces nuclear plants, and an affiliated company. The JNES's budget is about 20 billion yen, and most of it comes from grants for management expenses from the central government. Therefore, the revelation shed light on the fact that government subsidies were funneled to companies in the nuclear industry, which is regulated by the government.

Three companies, including Energis Co., Mitsubishi Heavy Industries' affiliate firm in Kobe, Hyogo Prefecture, received orders for three projects -- worth about 2.9 million yen each -- to summarize reports compiled by the government, Diet and private investigation committees. In June this year, the JNES was asked by the Cabinet Secretariat's Office for the Preparation of Nuclear Safety Regulatory Organization Reform to lecture on the content of the nuclear investigation panel reports at a training session for nuclear regulatory agency staff. Then in July, the JNES placed orders for the projects to summarize the investigation panel reports on a no-bid contract basis.

The remaining project was on research on the behavior of local evacuees at the time of the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Under competitive bidding organized by the JNES for the project, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries won the order in July after proposing to sort out the content of the investigation panel reports in chronological order and evaluate them. The order was worth about 14.17 million yen.

Chuo University professor Shuya Nomura, who had served as a member of the Diet investigation committee, said it was clearly a waste to spend over 20 million yen for the summary of the reports. The

general public would never accept that, he said. If there was anything not understandable in the reports, they should have asked investigation committee members, he added.

TEPCO's safety cultured blamed- again

November 29, 2012

'Something wrong' in TEPCO's safety culture: regulatory body chief

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121129p2g00m0dm035000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The chief of Japan's nuclear regulatory authority on Wednesday suggested that Tokyo Electric Power Co. needs to improve its safety culture if it wants to resume its idled reactors, touching on a series of problems seen before the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi complex last year.

Referring to deformed sections of spent fuel rods at TEPCO's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata Prefecture and the revelation in 2002 of the utility's coverup of defects, Shunichi Tanaka told a press conference, "To tell the truth, I think there may be something wrong (with this utility)."

"People on site, with their enthusiasm, knowledge and ability, should serve as a defense that prevents accidents and problems from occurring. But I wonder whether that function is working properly," he said, stressing the need for a change if the utility wants to "keep operating nuclear plants."

TEPCO operates the Fukushima Daiichi and Daini plants, in addition to the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, none of which are currently online. TEPCO is aiming to restart reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant from April next year.

Earlier in the day, Tanaka ordered the secretariat of the Nuclear Regulation Authority to conduct hearings on the "determination" of TEPCO's management personnel to address the string of problems.

"I know TEPCO's management team is in an extremely difficult situation because it has to deal with the nuclear accident, but I cannot overlook this matter," Tanaka said during a meeting of nuclear regulatory authority members.

More about UN criticism of gov't handling of 3/11 victims

Nuke victim aid falls short: U.N. envoy

AP

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121128a9.html>

A United Nations rights investigator says the government hasn't done enough to protect the health of residents and workers affected by the Fukushima nuclear accident.

Anand Grover, U.N. special rapporteur on the right to health, said Monday the government has adopted overly optimistic views of radiation risks and has conducted only limited health checks after the partial meltdowns at three of the reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

Several investigations, including one conducted by a Diet-appointed panel, have criticized the government for alleged coverups and delays in disclosing key information, causing evacuees to be unnecessarily exposed to radiation. That has also caused deep-rooted public distrust of the government and the nuclear industry.

Although he welcomed ongoing health checks of affected residents, Grover said they are too narrow in scope because they are only intended to cover Fukushima's 2 million people, and that only children are being given thyroid tests, even though the impact of radiation went far beyond Fukushima's borders. He said the health survey should cover "all radiation-affected zones" stretching across much of northeastern Honshu. So far, only one-quarter of Fukushima's population has been covered.

Many nuclear plant workers on short-term contracts have no access to permanent health checks, and many residents are complaining that they have not been allowed access to their own health check results, Grover said.

"The scope of the survey is unfortunately narrow as they draw on the limited lessons from the Chernobyl accident and ignore epidemiological studies that point to cancer as well as other diseases in low-dosage radiation," Grover said. "Chernobyl is not a good example, whose study in the first three years was a blackout. So we don't have data."

He said the government's use of a radiation threshold of 20 millisieverts per year — an annual cap set for nuclear industry workers that is more than 10 times the three-year limit for ordinary citizens — in determining off-limits areas around the plant conveys a misleading message that doses up to that level are safe. The government has emphasized that message by saying in official publications, school booklets and

in conferences that there is no clear evidence of a direct risk of cancer if a person is exposed to radiation doses of up to five times that level.

He said in Chernobyl the obligatory resettlement threshold limit was just one-quarter of Japan's.

There are some studies that say radiation exposures of up to 100 millisieverts per year show no clear evidence of higher cancer risks, he said. "But that is controversial. And there are a lot of studies which indicate otherwise. The government need not say which is right. The government has to err on the side of caution and be inclusive," he said.

Doctors at Fukushima Medical University say the estimated radiation exposure from the crisis was much smaller than from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster, and that an increased risk of thyroid cancer among children is unlikely. In September, they found thyroid cancer in a teenage girl — the first case in checkups following the Fukushima crisis.

But Shinichi Suzuki, a thyroid expert at the university, said he believes it is too early for radiation from Fukushima to have been responsible because it took about four years before the first cases of thyroid cancer began appearing among children after the Chernobyl accident.

Grover also said the government should work harder to include residents in decision-making, monitoring and implementation of measures that affect their health.

"I personally think experts only know part of the real situation. Communities must be involved," he said. Grover wrapped up an 11-day survey in Fukushima and other areas Monday after submitting a draft interim report of his findings to the government. A final report is to be released in June.

UN Special Rapporteur on Fukushima

<http://www.beyondnuclear.org/home/2012/11/26/un-special-report-on-fukushima-criticizes-handling-of-radiat.html>

UN special report on Fukushima criticizes handling of radiation catastrophe, suggests positive steps forward

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=DeWz2Xj8jH0UN

Anand Grover, the United Nations *Special Rapporteur* reports on Fukushima, some highlights:

- potassium iodine was not handled properly.
- government did not evacuate properly or communicate radiation doses and implications to the public.
- government neglected hotspots and used 20msv/year limit implying this was safe which is not.
- radiation monitoring stations did not adequately reflect exposure data. Therefore all validated data, alot being collected by private individuals, should be made public.
- provide holistic and comprehensive treatment for ALL radiation effected zones and include wider health consequences than the current health survey.
- err on side of caution and monitor health outcomes for an extensive period of time.
- allow individuals access to their health data and that of their children.
- initiate long-term monitoring of sub-contract workers at the ruined plants.
- evacuation centers did not provide adequate facilities for women with children and the disabled and elderly. Separation of families due to inadequate evacuation procedures has caused unnecessary anguish.
- government needs to strengthened food contamination monitoring.
- adopt an action plan with clear timeline to reduce contamination to 1msv per year.
- restore subsidies to all evacuees so they can make proper decisions about whether to return or leave.
- government ensure that TEPCO is held financially accountable and that taxpayers are not.
- ensure participation of effected people, particularly vulnerable groups during all parts of decision-making process, including health services and decontamination. This is not currently being done.
- implement the “act on protection and support for children, and other victims of the Tepco disaster” which was enacted in June, 2012. This act provides a framework for those affected by the disaster and provides opportunity to enlist affected people in decision-making.

Update on November 28, 2012 by admin

<image: <http://www.beyondnuclear.org/universal/images/transparent.png>>

The position of *UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health* was created in this century. This interim report on the Fukushima disaster appears to represent the first time an investigation has linked health impacts of industrial radiation from a nuclear catastrophe to human rights -- in this case the right to health for both children and adults. A final report will be issued in June of 2013. Stay tuned to Beyond Nuclear for updates. See the UN press release. [NECN.com](http://www.necn.com)

TEPCO releases previously withheld footage

December 1, 2012

Fukushima plant chief defied TEPCO headquarters to protect workers

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201212010043>

By NAOYA KON/ Staff Writer

Exasperated by his superiors, the manager of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant rejected orders to send workers back into the crippled plant a week after the disaster struck.

“My people have been working day and night for eight straight days,” Masao Yoshida barked at officials of Tokyo Electric Power Co.’s head office in Tokyo during a teleconference on March 18, 2011. “And they’ve been going to the site a number of times. They pour water, make checks and add oil periodically. I cannot make them be exposed to even more radiation.”

TEPCO, the operator of the plant, allowed journalists on Nov. 30 to view the video footage of its in-house teleconference following the disaster.

Like earlier footage released by the utility, the latest clips underscored the chaos and confusion at the plant and TEPCO headquarters after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused the triple meltdown.

“All workers are approaching 200 (millisieverts) in exposure or have even topped 200,” Yoshida said. “I cannot tell them to go and connect wires under high radiation.”

Yoshida had asked for an increase in manpower since the accident began. His frustrations over TEPCO’s lack of progress in providing additional support boiled over in the teleconference with the head office.

“If we do the work under a plan with no feasibility, it will end in failure. We cannot do it unless we have thorough help,” he said.

Sakae Muto, an executive vice president at the Tokyo office, could not provide a specific plan for extra help.

“We are now seeking people from a wide range, including former employees, and are planning to figure out the necessary manpower by tomorrow morning,” Muto said. “We will prepare to send those people to you as soon as possible.”

Yoshida stepped down as the plant’s chief for health reasons in December 2011. Muto also resigned.
By NAOYA KON/ Staff Writer

We'll die if it explodes': Gov't ignored Fukushima plant manager's plea

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121201p2a00m0na008000c.html>

The government prioritized spraying water from helicopters at the tsunami-hit Fukushima nuclear plant after a high-level political decision, spurning the plant manager's request that water be promptly sprayed from fire engines, footage of a teleconference of the plant operator shows.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, released to the media on Nov. 30 the video footage of **about 336 hours of meetings that had been previously been withheld.**

The footage shows teleconferences held between TEPCO headquarters and workers at the plant, as well as with a local accident task force and at other locations between March 16 and 23 and between March 30 and April 6, 2011.

In the meetings, executives and employees talked about a response to the nuclear disaster, such as how water should be poured into a pool holding spent nuclear fuel in the power station's No. 3 reactor building and whether to discharge water contaminated with radioactive substances. It also records the voice of a politician who was at the company headquarters.

In August, the utility had released footage of about 150 hours of TEPCO teleconferences between sometime immediately after the March 11 accident and March 15 last year.

The newly released footage shows that then plant manager Masao Yoshida protested at TEPCO headquarters on March 16 for failing to issue any clear order to spray water into the No. 4 pool for spent nuclear fuel although it was feared that water levels would decline considerably.

"We'll die if it explodes," Yoshida said.

Goshi Hosono, then aide to the prime minister, tried to calm down Yoshida saying, "We'll continue efforts to reduce such risks as much as possible."

Hosono then asked Yoshida whether the plant manager and other workers wanted water to be sprayed from the ground.

"We'd like to do so promptly," Yoshida replied, insisting that water be sprayed from fire engines.

In the end, however, Hosono rejected Yoshida's request, and told him that the government would spray water from Self-Defense Forces (SDF) helicopters. "We made the decision after consulting with Prime Minister Naoto Kan and others in an emergency meeting," Hosono told Yoshida.

At 9:48 a.m. on March 17, SDF helicopters began to drop water onto the plant's No. 3 reactor building. The footage shows employees at TEPCO wavered between hope and despair when they watched the SDF operations on television.

"Good. It hit the target. One more time," one employee said.

"The water hasn't reached the target," he said shortly afterwards. "It's just like a mist."

Plant workers appeared irritated at the headquarters' slow response to the buildup of radioactive water on the premises of the power station.

"There's no time to create a new water tank. Dealing with water is an urgent task," Yoshida said in one of the teleconferences, hinting at the **need to release water contaminated with low levels of radioactive substances into the sea.**

TEPCO went ahead with the release of such tainted water into the sea on April 4, drawing fire from the public.

Of the 336 hours of footage, TEPCO only picked up parts recording discussions on the release of radioactive water into the sea and other matters, edited them into about 110 minutes of footage and uploaded the video to its website (<http://photo.tepco.co.jp>) after altering sections that would otherwise identify individual employees.

Violations of labour standards at Fukushima

December 5, 2012

'Labor violations rife' at Fukushima N-plant

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T121204004443.htm>

Jiji Press

Many of those who worked at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant after it was crippled by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami may have been there under illegal labor conditions, a TEPCO survey revealed Monday.

Such conditions may have applied to nearly half of the employees of subcontractors to companies dealing with work at the plant after the crisis began.

According to the survey, 47.9 percent of such workers said the companies directing them at the plant were different from those that paid their wages. This could indicate disguised subcontracts in violation of the employment security law.

About 36 percent of such workers had not been given written or verbal explanations about their employment terms although the Labor Standards Law requires employers to issue documents setting out employment terms

December 4, 2012

Rampant illegal hiring practices suspected at Fukushima nuke plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121204p2a00m0na024000c.html>

Nearly half of all subcontract workers at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant received work assignments from companies that were different from those that actually hired them, a revelation that could shed light on rampant illegal hiring practices, according to a survey conducted by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO).

The results of the survey released on Dec. 3 show that nearly one-third of subcontract workers at the Fukushima nuclear plant did not receive any written documents on working conditions from their employers. "Deceptive work contracts" are banned under the Employment Security Act. At the same time, the Labor Standards Act requires employers to state working conditions clearly in writing. The Agency for Natural Resources and Energy in the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry instructed TEPCO verbally to improve hiring practices on Nov. 3.

The survey was conducted on 3,974 people working for companies that were hired by 27 prime contractors from Sept. 20 to Oct. 18, and 3,186 workers, or 80.2 percent of them, responded to the poll.

The survey asked 2,423 workers, excluding managers, whether they received work assignments at workplaces from the same companies as those from which they actually received their pay. Some 1,173 of

them, or 48 percent, said "yes," while 1,160 of them, or 47.9 percent, said "no." The results suggest the possibility that nearly half of the subcontract workers were hired under "deceptive work contracts."

Asked about what they were forced or instructed by their employers to do, 158 workers said they had been told by their employers to "work on the spot as instructed by other companies." The survey shows 125 workers being instructed by their employers to "write down the name of a different company in documents to be submitted to prime contractors or TEPCO."

It also shows that 1,146 workers, or 36 percent of all respondents, did not receive any written documents on working conditions such as the nature of their work, workplaces and wages from their employers. Furthermore, 198 workers, or 6.2 percent, did not even receive verbal explanations from their employers.

On hourly wages, 71.8 percent of the workers received at least 837 yen, 2.8 percent of the workers received at least 658 yen but less than 837 yen, 1 percent received between 645 yen and 657 yen and 1.1 percent of them received less than 645 yen.

Masayuki Ono, a TEPCO official, said, "We realize that there are conditions that need to be improved."

Active faults - 50,000 years in 1987 - 400,000 years now

December 7, 2012

Dangerous fault alleged 25 years ago at Shika nuclear plant site

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121207p2g00m0dm074000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Experts had said there was a dangerous fault at the planned site of the Shika nuclear plant in Ishikawa Prefecture in 1987, well before a similar suspicion arose earlier this year, according to government documents given Friday.

The previous claim had been left unaddressed until the government stated in July that a fault beneath the first reactor of the two-reactor nuclear plant was active and dangerous, triggering a detailed survey by the plant's operator, Hokuriku Electric Power Co.

In Japan, nuclear reactors are not allowed to be built on any site that includes an active fault.

If survey determines that the fault is active, the power utility could be forced to decommission the reactor, currently offline, and reconsider its safety check standards for nuclear plant sites.

In an interim survey report given to the Nuclear Regulation Authority on Friday, Hokuriku Electric said it found no data indicating the fault underneath the reactor is active. Its final survey report is planned to come by the end of June.

The documents released by the NRA said that experts serving as advisers to the government checked the site and found a shear alleged to have been caused by an active fault in May-June 1987, before the construction of the reactor began in 1988.

A Hokuriku Electric official said the shear was then concluded to have been caused by tidal erosion and posed no problem.

The shear, which was found in a layer that was 120,000 to 130,000 years old, might have failed to attract attention because safety check standards in 1987 had defined a dangerous fault as having been active up to 50,000 years ago.

The standards were revised in 2006 to define it as having done so up to 130,000 years ago. **A dangerous fault is now defined as having been active up to 400,000 years ago.**

Monju reactor - Somebody didn't do their jobs properly

December 6, 2012

Violations of safety regulations found at Monju reactor

- Previous Article New expressway will have to accommodate burning reed bed
- Next Article Japan scientists took utility money

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201212060044

By JIN NISHIKAWA/ Staff Writer

The Japan Atomic Energy Agency failed to take proper procedures, including confirming safety, when it postponed inspections for nearly 10,000 pieces of equipment at the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor, an industry watchdog said.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority said Dec. 5 that the agency extended inspection intervals at the reactor in Fukui Prefecture in violation of the safety program based on the Nuclear Reactor Regulation Law.

The NRA will soon order the agency to investigate the cause and compile measures to prevent a recurrence.

Under the safety program, if inspection intervals for equipment are to be extended, the inspection plans must be revised after confirmation that the extensions will not compromise safety.

A total of 40,000 pieces of equipment at the Monju reactor are subject to inspections. However, the Japan Atomic Energy Agency did not revise its inspection plans for 9,679 items since July 2010.

For 1,551 of these items, including key equipment to detect neutrons in the reactor, the agency did not confirm safety or set the next inspection dates, according to the NRA and other sources.

By JIN NISHIKAWA/ Staff Write

Follow-up panel

December 7, 2012

Response to Fukushima accident probe faces check

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20121207_28.html

A panel has begun checking whether Japan's government is following the advice of 3 investigative commissions that probed the Fukushima nuclear accident.

The 15-member follow-up panel consists of experts and academics who sat on the government, Diet and private commissions that investigated last year's accident.

Private commission chief Koichi Kitazawa was appointed on Friday to head the panel. At its first meeting, he told members that they should check whether the government's new Nuclear Regulation Authority is truly functioning as an independent body.

The watchdog was launched in September to improve safety supervision at nuclear plants.

One member said the panel should verify the government's follow-up measures with the understanding that the Fukushima accident isn't over.

The 3 investigative commissions have pointed out flaws in the government's crisis management, disaster preparedness and nuclear safety regulations.

The follow-up panel is due to interview the Nuclear Regulation Authority officials. It will write an interim report by next March.

Conflict of interest (again) and twisted views about radiation risk

December 6, 2012

Japan scientists took utility money

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201212060087>

Influential Japanese scientists who help set national radiation exposure limits have for years had trips paid for by the country's nuclear plant operators to attend overseas meetings of the world's top academic group on radiation safety.

The potential conflict of interest is revealed in one sentence buried in a 600-page parliamentary investigation into last year's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disaster and pointed out to The Associated Press by a medical doctor on the 10-person investigation panel.

Some of these same scientists have consistently given optimistic assessments about the health risks of radiation, interviews with the scientists and government documents show. Their pivotal role in setting policy after the March 2011 tsunami and ensuing nuclear meltdowns meant the difference between schoolchildren playing outside or indoors and families staying or evacuating.

One leading scientist, Ohtsura Niwa, acknowledged that the electricity industry pays for flights and hotels to go to meetings of the International Commission on Radiological Protection, and for overseas members visiting Japan. He denied that the funding influences his science, and stressed that he stands behind his view that continuing radiation worries about Fukushima are overblown.

"Those who evacuated just want to believe in the dangers of radiation to justify the action they took," Niwa told the AP in an interview.

The official stance of the International Commission on Radiological Protection is that the health risks from radiation become zero only with zero exposure. But some of the eight Japanese ICRP members do not subscribe to that view, asserting that low dose radiation is harmless or the risks are negligible.

The doctor on the parliamentary panel, Hisako Sakiyama, is outraged about utility funding for Japan's ICRP members. She fears that radiation standards are being set at a lenient level to limit costly evacuations.

“The assertion of the utilities became the rule. That's ethically unacceptable. People's health is at stake," she said. "The view was twisted so it came out as though there is no clear evidence of the risks, or that we simply don't know."

The ICRP, based in Ottawa, Canada, does not take a stand on any nation's policy, leaving that to each government. It is a charity that relies heavily on donations, and members' funding varies by nation. The group brings scientists together to study radiation effects on health and the environment, as well as the impact of disasters such as Chernobyl and Fukushima. In Japan, ICRP members sit on key panels at the prime minister's office and the education ministry that set radiation safety policy.

The Fukushima meltdowns, the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl, brought a higher level of scrutiny to Japan's nuclear industry, revealing close ties between the regulators and the regulated. Last month, some members of a panel that sets nuclear plant safety standards acknowledged they received research and other grant money from utility companies and plant manufacturers. The funding is not illegal in Japan.

Niwa, the only Japanese member to sit on the main ICRP committee, defended utility support for travel expenses, which comes from the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan through another radiation organization. Costs add up, he said, and he has spent tens of thousands of yen (thousands of dollars) of his personal money on ICRP projects and efforts to decontaminate Fukushima. All ICRP members fly economy, except for long flights such as between Argentina and Japan, he said.

The Federation declined comment.

Clouding the debate about radiation risks are the multiple causes of cancer, including diet, smoking and other habits. That's why it is extremely difficult to prove any direct link between an individual's cancer and radiation, or pinpoint where one cause begins and another ends.

The ICRP recommends keeping radiation exposure down to 1 millisievert per year and up to 20 millisieverts in a short-term emergency, a standard that takes into account the lessons of Chernobyl.

"Health risks from annual radiation exposure of 20 millisieverts, the current level for issuance of orders to evacuate an affected area, are quite small particularly when compared against the risks from other carcinogenic factors," the ICRP says.

The risk of getting cancer at 20 millisieverts raises the already existing 25 percent chance by an estimated 0.1 percent, according to French ICRP member Jacques Lochard, who visits Japan often to consult on Fukushima.

While that's low, he says it's not zero, so his view is that you should do all you can to reduce exposure.

Kazuo Sakai, a Japanese ICRP member, said he was interested in debunking that generally accepted view. Known as the "linear no threshold" model of radiation risk, the ICRP-backed position considers radiation harmful even at low doses with no threshold below which exposure is safe.

Sakai called that model a mere "tool," and possibly not scientifically sound.

He said his studies on salamanders and other animal life since the Fukushima disaster have shown no ill effects, including genetic damage, and so humans, exposed to far lower levels of radiation, are safe.

"No serious health effects are expected for regular people," he said.

The parliamentary investigation found that utilities have repeatedly tried to push Japanese ICRP members toward a lenient standard on radiation from as far back as 2007.

Internal records at the Federation of Electric Power Companies obtained by the investigative committee showed officials rejoicing over how their views were getting reflected in ICRP Japan statements.

Even earlier, Sakai received utility money for his research into low-dose radiation during a 1999-2006 tenure at the Central Research Institute of Electric Power Industry, an organization funded by the utilities.

But he said that before his hiring he anticipated pressures to come up with research favorable to the nuclear industry, and he made it clear his science would not be improperly influenced.

Niwa, a professor at Fukushima Medical University, said that residents need to stay in Fukushima if at all possible, partly because they would face discrimination in marriage elsewhere in Japan from what he said were unfounded fears about radiation and genetic defects.

Setting off such fears are medical checks on the thyroids of Fukushima children that found some nodules or growths that are not cancerous but not normal.

No one knows for sure what this means, but Yoshiharu Yonekura, president of the National Institute of Radiological Sciences and an ICRP member, brushes off the worries and says such abnormalities are common.

The risk is such a non-concern in his mind that he says with a smile: "Low-dose radiation may be even good for you."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

New panel to ensure transparency

December 8, 2012

Panel set up to monitor new nuclear watchdog

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121208a5.html>

By KAZUAKI NAGATA

Staff writer

The government set up a panel Friday to monitor whether the nation's new nuclear administrative and regulatory bodies are following the recommendations made by the two committees set up by the state and the Diet that investigated the causes of the Fukushima catastrophe.

The panel will be chaired by **Koichi Kitazawa, who led a team set up by the Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation, better known as the "private sector" Fukushima investigation panel.** The panel is to compile its first report around March after holding several hearings with government officials and regulators from the Nuclear Regulation Authority.

The NRA, a new authority that got off the ground in September, is legally independent but still in its infancy, so the panel will check how the state and NRA are following the recommendations of the Fukushima panels, said Kitazawa, who headed the Japan Science and Technology Agency.

For its **March report**, the panel, which is expected to monitor the government's nuclear regulatory activities for three years, will basically focus on how the new system is working and whether measures to prevent nuclear disasters are actually improving.

The triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant occurred after the March 11, 2011, magnitude 9 megaquake rocked the Tohoku region and set off tsunami up to 15 meters high that slammed into the plant, knocked out all electricity and took out vital reactor cooling systems.

The two panels said the regulatory system was flawed because it lacked independence from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which was tasked for decades with promoting the nuclear safety myth.

The panels also said the country was ill-prepared for the Fukushima crisis because the notion of handling a disaster of that scale, despite the warnings, was totally out of its scope.

Thus, the investigation panels stressed the need for a strongly independent regulator with greater expertise. **Such an authority should actively disclose information to maintain high transparency**, the panels concluded.

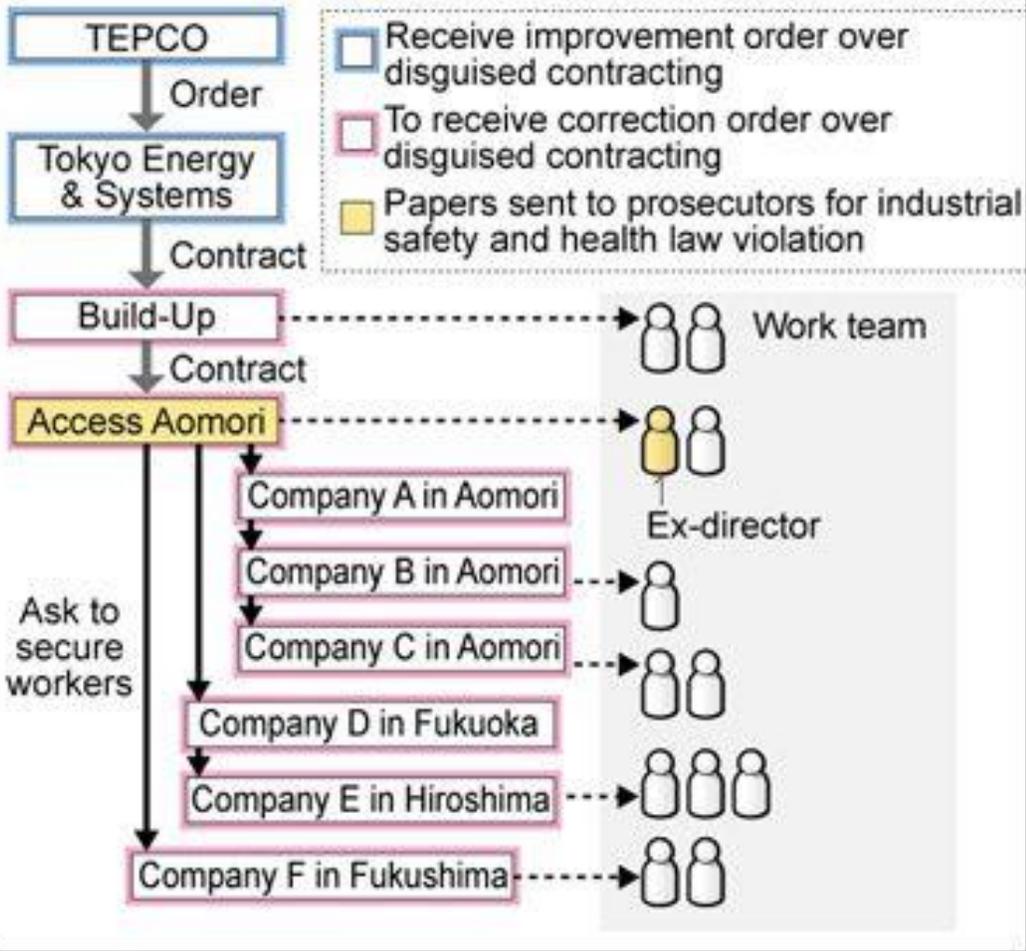
Other recommendations include a drastic review of the government's crisis-management and disaster-prevention systems to prevent a repeat of the disarray that afflicted the chain of command in the early stages of the crisis and hampered the evacuation of residents in harm's way. The new panel launched Friday also includes **Yotaro Hatamura, who headed the state's Fukushima panel, and Kiyoshi Kurokawa, who led the Diet's version**, as well as Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato.

TEPCO at the top of illegal contractors structure

8 companies face order to stop illegal labor practice at Fukushima plant

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201212100065

Companies in radiation dose cover-up at Fukushima plant



December 10, 2012

By TOSHIO TADA/ Staff Writer

The government will order eight companies to end an illegal dispatch arrangement that allowed a subcontractor to instruct workers to labor under dangerous conditions at the stricken Fukushima nuclear plant.

The labor ministry has already called on plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Tokyo Energy & Systems Inc., a TEPCO group company, to enhance monitoring over subcontractors at the plant.

The decision means the ministry has effectively acknowledged that an illegal structure of multilayer contractors threatened the safety of workers. TEPCO has consistently denied any illegal setup.

In the scandal, the president of Access Aomori, a construction company in Aomori Prefecture, ordered workers to cover their dosimeters with lead plates to keep radiation dose readings artificially low during pipe work on Dec. 1, 2011, at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. The workers were not allowed to continue working at a nuclear plant if their dose readings exceeded safety levels.

A criminal investigation is expected against Access Aomori and its president over the practice.

But Access Aomori also violated labor laws by engaging in a practice known as disguised contracting. Although it was a subcontractor, it accepted 10 workers dispatched by other companies and directly gave them instructions for work at the plant.

TEPCO awarded Access Aomori a contract through its parent, Build-Up, a construction company in Fukushima Prefecture. The president of Access Aomori, 55, served as a director at Build-Up.

The labor ministry concluded that the arrangement violated the Employment Security Law as well as the Worker Dispatch Law, which bans dispatching temporary workers to the construction industry.

It plans to order Build-Up, Access Aomori and six other businesses, which are either small or owned by individual operators, to end the practice.

“We knew it was illegal, but we had no other choice to secure profits,” said the manager of one of the six businesses.

It will be the first time for the labor ministry to issue a correction order to more than one company in connection with recovery work at the Fukushima plant.

The ministry effectively recognized the structure of multilayer contractors with TEPCO at the top. It called on TEPCO and Tokyo Energy & Systems to improve the situation because the arrangement makes it unclear who controls the safety of workers.

The ministry also acknowledges that it was difficult for the workers to reject the orders from Access Aomori because of their unstable employment status.

The practice of disguised contracting has come under fire because the employers' responsibility for workers becomes ambiguous and the businesses involved keep the workers' wages low.

In February, the labor ministry said the practice appeared to have spread to recovery work at the Fukushima No. 1 plant and called for improvements.

TEPCO has not made a full-scale investigation, denying violations on grounds that it asked primary contractors to abide by laws and regulations.

But after it received the labor ministry's improvement order, TEPCO said it will ask primary contractors to prevent a recurrence and will conduct on-site inspections to confirm compliance.

A labor standards inspection office in Fukushima Prefecture on Dec. 7 sent papers to the Fukushima District Public Prosecutors Office, accusing Access Aomori and its president of violating the Industrial Safety and Health Law.

According to the labor standards inspection office, the president ordered four workers, including one Access Aomori employee, to cover their dosimeters with 3-millimeter-thick lead plates, which kept dose records 30 percent lower.

By TOSHIO TADA/ Staff Writer

More than 30 years of cover-up

Urasoko fault near Tsuruga nuclear plant underestimated for over 30 years

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121211p2a00m0na022000c.html>

It has been more than 30 years since the Urasoko fault, which lies near the Tsuruga nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture, was first suspected of being active.

"If we had known that there was an active fault on the Tsuruga site, we would never have built nuclear reactors there," Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) commissioner Kunihiko Shimazaki, head of the team of experts who examined the Tsuruga nuclear station, said at a news conference on Dec. 10.

Not only has it been more than three decades since the Urasoko fault was suspected of being active, the central government took two years to acknowledge a crush zone under the Tsuruga plant's No. 2 reactor could move in tandem with the major fault line after that fact had been pointed out.

Nagoya University professor Yasuhiro Suzuki says that suspicions have surfaced again that "unreasonable interpretations of inspection results" had been made repeatedly, resulting in lax safety assessments. A similar pattern is also seen at other nuclear plants, meaning many other reactors may face challenges to reactivation.

The Urasoko fault was unknown at the time construction of the Tsuruga station's No. 1 reactor was approved in 1966, but in the 1970s experts began pointing out the fault could be active. Tsuruga plant operator Japan Atomic Power Co. applied to build the plant's No. 2 reactor in 1979, insisting that the Urasoko fault was not active. Although the central government instructed Japan Atomic Power to conduct additional research and dig a test trench during the screening process, it accepted Japan Atomic Power's assertions and green-lit the No. 2 reactor in 1982.

Showing drawings from additional research at the NRA panel meeting on Dec. 10, Suzuki said, "We can clearly see a fault structure. It is regrettable that such information was not used."

In "Active Faults in Japan: A New Edition," published in 1991, the Urasoko fault was introduced as an active fault. When Japan Atomic Power applied to build a third and fourth reactor at Tsuruga in 2004, however, the utility declared that the Urasoko fault was not active.

In 2005, the now-defunct Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry instructed Japan Atomic Power to conduct additional research. As instructed by the agency and experts, the company dug a trench and found traces of fault movement less than 4,000 years ago. At long last in 2008, the company acknowledged that Urasoko was an active fault.

Experts estimated that the 25-kilometer-long Urasoko fault could cause quakes as large as magnitude 7.2, resulting in ground motion of up to 800 gals -- far higher than the 532 gals projected previously. Japan Atomic Power, however, has insisted that its reactor and other buildings would have no problem surviving such a temblor. In April 2010, NISA concluded that Japan Atomic Power's assertions were reasonable.

Multiple experts disagreed, and issued a warning stating, "Because the Urasoko fault lies extremely close (to the Tsuruga plant), the possibility of crush zones on the plant premises, including those beneath reactor buildings, jolting out of alignment must be taken into account."

Despite this, Japan Atomic Power did not conduct any further on-site checks before the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011. In November 2011, NISA instructed Japan Atomic Power to conduct inspections. During inspections made in April together with experts, suspicions emerged that the crush zone right beneath the No. 2 reactor is an active fault that could move in tandem with the Urasoko fault.

Furthermore, in March this year a team of experts from the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology concluded that the Urasoko fault is in fact at least 35 kilometers long and could trigger 7.4-magnitude earthquakes that release twice the energy previously estimated.

NISA started to conduct inspections of faults on the premises of all nuclear power plants across the country in July this year, and the NRA took over the mission thereafter.

TEPCO's mea culpa

Tepco president admits No. 1 plant workers hired via murky system

AP

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121211x3.html>

The head of Tokyo Electric Power Co. has acknowledged that hundreds of workers at the Fukushima No. 1 plant were mobilized through a murky hiring system.

President Naomi Hirose on Monday attributed the hiring problem to high worker turnover at the highly contaminated work site, adding that the problem became prevalent as Tepco tried desperately to recruit workers willing to take jobs with high risks of radiation exposure.

The plant has been substantially stabilized since it was devastated by the March 2011 quake and tsunami, but full decommissioning is expected to take decades.

Hirose said Tepco is working to fix the hiring problem, which he attributed to an industrywide hierarchical contract system. But he said that **the deep-rooted practice cannot be changed overnight, and that a full overhaul will be difficult.**

"Ideally, it would be best if we reform the contract hiring system and start from there, but it will be extremely time-consuming," he said. "It's a difficult task we cannot do on our own. It will take heavy-duty work. It involves history and business ties, and could even hurt the industry."

In a recent Tepco survey of some 2,400 contract workers, dozens said they were instructed to falsify affiliations, while some complained they never received a written contract. The survey, taken in September and October, showed that about half were being paid by different companies than the ones that hired them — an indication of illegal labor contracts.

Nearly 90 percent said their employers were ranked from second to fourth in the hierarchy of subcontractors. About one-quarter said their employers never notified them of their radiation exposure details.

The hiring problem has intensified since last year's disaster, and some workers have come forward and complained that their salaries have been siphoned off or allowances not given.

Hirose said securing a workforce that can last through decades-long postdisaster operations will be critical to cleanup efforts.

Japan and foreign expertise

December 15, 2012

INSIGHT: Japan largely excludes foreign firms in Fukushima clean-up

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201212150015>

REUTERS

Nearly two years after a massive earthquake and tsunami caused meltdowns at the Fukushima nuclear plant, Japan is failing to keep a pledge to tap global expertise to decommission its crippled reactors, executives at nuclear contractors from the United States and Europe say.

The result, they warn, is that a process expected to take more than 30 years and cost at least \$15 billion could take longer and cost more as contracts are channeled through domestic heavyweights such as nuclear reactor makers Toshiba Corp and Hitachi Ltd, and general contractors such as Taisei Corp.

A review of bidding records by Reuters shows companies from outside Japan have failed to win any of the 21 contracts awarded this year to develop technologies crucial for the unprecedented job of scrapping the four damaged reactors at Fukushima.

"There appears to be a desire to treat this as a science project and reinvent the wheel," Jeffrey Merrifield, senior vice president of U.S. nuclear engineering firm Shaw Group Inc.'s power division told Reuters.

Contracts awarded since January represent only the initial work at Fukushima. But a half-dozen executives at companies with nuclear industry experience raised questions about the Japanese government's and TEPCO's oversight of the process.

Some executives worry that being shut out now risks their ability to tap a growth market, since Japan could scrap dozens of reactors over the coming decades. Most asked not be named for fear of jeopardizing their ability to win future work in Japan.

Takuya Hattori, president of the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum, a group representing the nuclear industry in Japan, said the government has not been responsive to complaints about the bidding process. "They are shutting that criticism out incredibly deftly," said Hattori, a 36-year veteran of Tokyo Electric Power Co Inc., the operator of the Fukushima plant.

A 9.0 earthquake on March 11 triggered a 15-metre tsunami that smashed into the 40-year-old seaside Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, setting off a series of events that caused its reactors to start melting down.

Hydrogen explosions scattered debris across the complex and sent up a plume of radioactive steam that forced the evacuation of more than 80,000 residents near the plant about 240 km (150 miles) northeast of Tokyo.

The repeated failures that dogged the government and TEPCO in the months after the disaster undercut confidence in their response to the disaster and dismayed outside experts, given corporate Japan's reputation for relentless organization.

After that, Japan promised to accept more outside assistance.

COLD SHUTDOWN

The Fukushima plant was declared to be in "cold shutdown" a year ago, a stable phase when water used to cool fuel rods remains below its boiling point. That marked the start of a decommissioning process that could take 40 years.

Under a roadmap drafted by TEPCO, radioactive fuel rods will be removed from Reactor No. 4 starting next November. After that, melted fuel inside three other reactors damaged by meltdowns and hydrogen explosions would be extracted. The work is projected to take more than a decade.

A government oversight panel has estimated it will cost \$15 billion to decommission the reactors, not counting for the costs of disposing of radioactive waste.

But large uncertainties hang over the overall cost of the disaster. TEPCO recently said compensation for evacuated residents and decontamination of areas outside the boundary of the Fukushima plant could double from previous estimates to almost \$125 billion.

Louisiana-based Shaw Group worked on clean-up projects after the Three Mile Island and Chernobyl accidents and in decommissioning eight U.S. commercial reactors.

"There seems to be a real desire to rely on Japanese contractors to do this work," Merrifield said. "You can try and do it all yourself, which takes a lot more time without benefit of prior experience, making a lot of mistakes along the way."

But an executive with a Japanese nuclear firm said that given the long-term nature of the clean-up project, it makes sense to go with firms at home.

"Foreign firms simply sell their product without providing back-up services or maintenance. We can't sign a contract with a company that we can't get in touch with immediately and one that will rush to deal with any problems right away," the executive said.

TRANSPARENCY 'NO. 1 PRIORITY'

The majority of contracts for Fukushima have been awarded directly by TEPCO, which outsources decontamination and debris-clearing to general contractors. Decontamination contracts outside of the plant site are handled by Japan's environment ministry and local governments.

Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has so far allocated about \$11 million to Toshiba Corp, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Hitachi GE Nuclear to fund technology development for the year to March. That includes a project to develop sensing robots that can enter highly radiated areas to pinpoint the site of the meltdown.

"This is a project we are pursuing with taxpayer funds, so we believe it is our No. 1 priority to be transparent," said Kentaro Funaki, director of the ministry's nuclear accident restoration office.

Funaki said METI was pushing to double the bidding period to four weeks and pointed to a recent contract offered by Japanese radiation management firm Atox Co Ltd specifically to foreign contractors as a sign of increased openness.

METI and the heavy manufacturers held workshops in March and April to gather information on foreign technology that could be used at Fukushima.

British Amec PLC, Areva, Westinghouse and the Idaho National Laboratory pitched technologies that can be used to remotely inspect and repair damaged reactors.

Japan's three major nuclear companies say they post notices of bids on their websites.

Hitachi GE Nuclear posts bid notices on its website in both English and Japanese. The company said it was working as quickly as possible to restore and rebuild Fukushima and the short bidding periods were not designed to shut out foreign firms.

Toshiba said it posted contracts on its website, but deletes them after a vendor is selected. Contracts are awarded by an outside panel of experts with the highest score given to technology and cost. Toshiba declined to comment on the lack of foreign involvement in research contracts.

Mitsubishi Heavy recently posted a notice on its website that it would soon invite bids for equipment to investigate the pressure containment vessels at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

"THE DOORS ARE OPEN"

Japan's government and TEPCO have emphasized the importance of international involvement in the Fukushima clean-up. In an interview with Reuters in October, TEPCO president Naomi Hirose said the utility was seeking expertise from all over the world.

To be sure, U.S. and European companies have had some success.

California-based Kurion and French nuclear giant Areva designed the first water purification systems at Fukushima. That was followed by equipment supplied by Toshiba and Shaw that doubled TEPCO's ability to process contaminated water. The latest water purification equipment made by Toshiba and Utah-based Energy Solutions was installed earlier this year.

"I would tell you that if the roles were reversed, Americans would want American firms leading the way," said John Raymont, president and CEO of Kurion. "For companies that have the special know-how that is transferable, the doors are open."

Shaw's Merrifield said his company was no longer working on any projects in Fukushima. Shaw sold its stake in nuclear plant company Westinghouse Electric Co to Toshiba for \$1.6 billion in October.

Many of Japan's 50 nuclear plants are expected to be decommissioned in the coming years. The Japanese government has pledged to eliminate nuclear power from the energy mix by the 2030s and popular opinion is turning against the industry.

"At the end of the day, it's not about just Fukushima," said one executive at an overseas engineering company, who asked not to be named because of the company's business interests in Japan. "You get in now, establish a relationship and build trust and there is a lot of work that you can do."

REUTERS

Vested interests in Fukui Prefecture?

December 15, 2012

Idled reactors' fate holds center stage in nuclear hub Fukui

Verdict on fault holds candidates, hosts hostage

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121215f1.html>

By ERIC JOHNSTON

Staff writer

TSURUGA, Fukui Pref. — On a snowy afternoon just a few days before the general election, local politicians and many residents of Fukui Prefecture were in a state of shock and wondering what the future holds, after a team of nuclear experts declared it is highly likely that a fault under the Tsuruga nuclear plant's reactor 2 is active.

"We're heavily reliant on the atomic energy industry for jobs and for the subsidies it brings. What are we going to do if the power stations aren't reactivated?" asked Ayako Kawamura, 32, a local resident. She is not alone in posing that question. The prefecture hosts 13 commercial atomic energy reactors, as well as the Monju prototype fast-breeder unit. All are located in the middle and southern parts of the prefecture — the largest concentration of nuclear reactors in the world.

As well as the Tsuruga plant, Fukui's nuclear complexes are situated in Mihama, Takahama and Oi, all four of which fall within the prefecture's No. 3 electoral district. Four candidates are running in Sunday's Lower House election, but the real race is between Tsuyoshi Takagi, 56, backed by the Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito, and Isao Matsumiya, 68, who is running on the ruling Democratic Party of Japan's ticket.

Also in the mix and hoping to win at least a proportional representation seat is Takashi Tsukamoto, 38, a Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party) candidate who is also supported by Your Party. The Japanese Communist Party's Masahiko Yamamoto completes the lineup.

Prior to the news of a possible active fault running directly beneath reactor 2 at Tsuruga by the Nuclear Regulation Authority's experts, local media polls showed the LDP's Takagi leading the pack. In the 2009 general election, which saw a voter turnout rate of about 76 percent, he beat DPJ candidate Matsumiya by around 6,000 ballots.

In addition to the two main opposition parties' support, Takagi is backed by virtually all atomic energy-related businesses and pronuclear politicians in the district.

But the realization that not only the Tsuruga reactor 2 but also reactor 1, only a few hundred meters away and 42 years old, may now be shut down for good has Takagi's camp concerned he might be suddenly vulnerable. "We're never going to say we're confident of victory. The DPJ candidate (Matsumiya) continues to present a strong challenge," said Yoshikazu Takenaka, a staffer at Takagi's campaign office. Takagi responded to the NRA's findings by emphasizing that he would push the central government to assist workers at atomic plants who may soon find themselves out of a job.

"We need a policy to maintain employment, even if (Fukui's) nuclear plants are not restarted. The worst thing to do is to keep everything in limbo," he said.

Matsumiya, though considered Takagi's main rival, is surprisingly close to him on the issue of nuclear energy. He agrees with Takagi about the need for an employment policy no matter what the future brings, and like the LDP candidate, he says that he favors restarting reactors if their safety is guaranteed. But

given the NRA's conclusion, Matsumiya, and the local DPJ chapter, have been left wondering about their next move.

Nippon Ishin's Tsukamoto was also unprepared for the news, but declared himself happy nonetheless, calling it a major turning point for Japan's nuclear power policy. A last-minute entrant in the race, Tsukamoto's campaign is based on his party's platform: eventually getting out of nuclear power and into renewable energy, and providing better child care.

But he has kept something of a low profile. A campaign car driving him around the district has Tsuruga's name on it, but the recorded message it broadcasts is that of Nippon Ishin founder and deputy leader Toru Hashimoto. Nippon Ishin officials in Osaka say they'll be happy if Tsukamoto wins a Lower House seat as a proportional representation candidate.

Hashimoto, who also serves as Osaka mayor, visited Tsuruga on Dec. 2 to campaign on Tsukamoto's behalf. It was his first visit to the prefecture since two reactors at the Oi plant were controversially restarted in July, and many pronuclear residents in Fukui were angered by Hashimoto's efforts to stop Oi's reactors 3 and 4 from being put back online.

"To be honest, I hadn't sufficiently studied the problem," Hashimoto said in the city of Fukui, as a way of apology. "I want to scrap nuclear power by the 2030s. But we're in the middle of drawing up a detailed plan to do so, and this process will take two or three more years."

That is of little comfort to residents in the Fukui No. 3 district, for whom nuclear power has meant jobs, public works projects and income for local service industries since the No. 1 reactor at Tsuruga commenced operations in 1970.

According to a June report by the Bank of Japan's Fukui branch, around 3,000 people in total are employed locally by Kansai Electric Power Co., which operates 11 reactors in the prefecture, Japan Atomic Power Co., which has the two Tsuruga units, and the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, which has been trying to complete the Monju unit — the nation's only fast-breeder reactor — since the 1960s, also in Tsuruga.

Though official data are not available, the bank estimated that another 9,000 jobs are generated by affiliated companies in the vicinity of the power plants, and during inspection periods, an additional 1,000 people are temporarily hired as security guards. The report noted that the local hospitality industry in particular relies on these inspection periods to make money.

In fiscal 2012, 10 cities and towns in Fukui received about ¥20 billion in atomic energy subsidies from the central and prefectural governments. Of this, about ¥19 billion went to the four nuclear hubs in the No. 3 district, accounting for 60 percent of Takahama's budget, 58 percent of Oi's, 44 percent of Mihama's and 19 percent of Tsuruga's.

Money is also behind two other nuclear-related election issues: what to do about spent-nuclear fuel pools that are rapidly filling up, and what will become of plans to build two new reactors in Tsuruga.

Projections show the spent-fuel pools of Fukui's reactors will reach maximum capacity within the next five to eight years, if the plants continue to run at the pace seen before the Fukushima meltdowns put the nuclear industry on ice.

In the hope of securing more central government funding for his town, Mihama Mayor Jitaro Yamaguchi said earlier this month that he wants to discuss the possibility of building an interim storage facility for spent fuel from not only the local power station but from the Takahama and Oi plants as well.

Mihama officials have been pursuing such a facility since 2004, when the municipality asked Kepco to survey the area. But the utility, citing a request from Fukui's governor, said it was considering building a storage site outside the prefecture.

Despite a recent Fukui Shimbun poll of local residents showing two-thirds oppose the plan to construct two more units at Tsuruga, candidates in the No. 3 constituency have to contend with local business concerns and must consider the dire implications if the project is scrapped.

A poll by the Tsuruga Chamber of Commerce and Industry last summer of 268 companies indicated construction and manufacturing businesses in particular were pushing hard for the proposed reactors 3 and 4 to be built at the Tsuruga plant, saying the town's economy will continue to deteriorate otherwise. LDP candidate Takagi backs moving forward with the project, while the DPJ's Matsumiya wants further discussions. Tsukamoto of Nippon Ishin is opposed.

But in a district that has relied more heavily than any other in the country on the financial benefits of nuclear power for over four decades, when seismic data argues against restarting a reactor, local residents grow scared.

Whatever their positions, those campaigning in the district must now speak carefully, ever aware that there are many who view the NRA findings not as an opportunity to embrace political change but as a reason to fight it, no matter what the rest of the prefecture, or the rest of the country, may think.

Fukushima gov't tries to block opinions (again)

December 19, 2012

Fukushima gov't tried to kill proposal to store baby teeth for future radiation checks

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121219p2a00m0na016000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- The Fukushima Prefectural Government has tried to kill a proposal by a local assemblyperson to store local children's milk teeth to examine their internal radiation exposure stemming from the Fukushima nuclear disaster, it has been learned.

In September 2011, Fukushima Prefectural Assembly member Junko Yaginuma asked the prefectural government if it should urge local residents to store baby teeth that came out after the March 2011 reactor meltdowns for future analysis of children's strontium-90 exposure. Strontium-90, released in the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster, has biochemical features similar to calcium and can easily accumulate in bones and teeth.

After receiving Yaginuma's query, the prefecture sent an email to members of a committee overseeing a prefectural health survey and asked them to provide plausible reasons to reject the proposal. The prefectural government called the proposal a plant by anti-nuclear groups.

The survey committee has been mired in a string of other problems, including holding advance "secret meetings" to harmonize expert opinions over how to do health checks of local residents in the wake of the meltdowns. **The latest revelation is yet more evidence that the Fukushima Prefectural Government tried to block opinions it considered unfavorable.**

According to sources with knowledge of the issue, an official at the prefecture's health and welfare division -- which serves as the health check committee's secretariat -- sent an email to committee members. In the email, the official said, "Are there any findings or information that suggest that there is not much point in storing baby teeth?" adding, "It is not the assembly person who asked that question, but it appears to be an argument made by anti-nuclear people. So, we don't wish to take up the question."

It is not clear whether the expert committee accepted the prefecture's request. On Oct. 4 last year, however, Yaginuma raised the issue at a plenary session of the prefectural assembly. The then head of the prefecture's health and welfare division responded, "I understand that there are various opinions even among experts over the validity (of storing baby teeth). We would like to explore it while taking into account the circumstances surrounding the scattering of radioactive materials and experts' research and arguments."

The same official has since told the Mainichi Shimbun, "I don't even remember how I answered (Yaginuma's) question. I may have told (an official in charge) to ask experts for opinions, but I haven't heard who and what kind of email they sent." The official in charge said, "I don't remember, and I can't confirm anything about the issue."

Meanwhile Yaginuma stated, "I thought it was a negative answer to my question, but they were doing things like this behind the scenes," referring to the email. "That's an insult to the people of the prefecture," and, "the prefecture, which sustained damage from the nuclear accident, must not do that," she continued.

A dental clinic in Matsudo, Chiba Prefecture, has collected about 200 baby teeth so far and sent them to a research institute in the United States for analysis. Takemasa Fujino, head of the clinic, said, "I can't believe that the Fukushima Prefectural Government is reluctant even to call for (storing baby teeth). It has abandoned its responsibility to protect children."

Katsuma Yagasaki, professor emeritus at University of the Ryukyus, said that research conducted in the U.S. after the 1950s confirmed a correlation between childhood cancer and their internal exposure to strontium-90. He said Fukushima children's baby teeth should be stored so that the danger to their health can be examined in the future.

On Dec. 19, Hiroyuki Kanno, head of the prefecture's health and welfare division, apologized for "having caused a misunderstanding with the people of the prefecture."

NRA says it won't be influenced

December 20, 2012

Nuclear regulatory body nixes any impact from change of gov't

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121220p2g00m0dm033000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Japan's nuclear regulatory authority chief said Wednesday his organization will not be influenced by a change of government following Sunday's general election, which will likely lead Japan to retract a goal to phase out nuclear power in the 2030s.

"Whatever (the government) is going to be, we do not intend to change (nuclear) safety regulations and they will not change," Shuichi Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, said at a press conference.

The LDP, which won the election in a landslide, has termed as "irresponsible" a goal to abandon nuclear power generation included in an energy strategy compiled by the government led by the outgoing Democratic Party of Japan.

Under the LDP-led government, reactors that are deemed safe by the regulatory authority are expected to be allowed to restart.

Tanaka said at press conference that the NRA will probably not start the safety screening process for idled reactors until next July because it needs time to set new safety standards following last year's nuclear disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima Daiichi complex.

"We can't conduct a review even if utilities apply for reactivation as long as (necessary) law is not in place. So it can't be helped that the process will start in July or later," he said.

While the LDP has said in its election promises that it will be decided within three years whether all of the country's reactors can be restarted, Tanaka did not make clear that the authority can finish the screening process in the time frame.

Tanaka said politicians "always give various opinions and (what they say) changes from time to time."

"It would be troublesome if safety regulations were changed (in accordance with the views of such politicians," he added.

The entity was launched in September as a highly independent organization after the Fukushima nuclear crisis raised questions over the closeness of regulators and promoters of atomic power that may have resulted in lax supervision of nuclear facilities.

Forty-eight of the nation's 50 commercial nuclear reactors currently remain offline amid safety concerns. Utilities, meanwhile, are struggling due to increasing fuel costs for boosting thermal power generation to make up for the loss of nuclear power.

TEPCO President Naomi Hirose, in an interview with Kyodo News on Wednesday, expressed hope the controversial energy strategy will be reviewed under the new government.

"Crude oil prices could rise and wars could break out (in the Middle East). There's a need to keep options that can respond to huge waves," he said.

He also reiterated that the new government needs to consider a fresh scheme to assist the utility due to costs for compensation and land decontamination after the nuclear crisis, which he says are too massive for a company to shoulder.

TEPCO was placed under state control earlier this year, receiving an injection of 1 trillion yen in public funds to avoid insolvency.

Credibility of nuclear safety regulation

December 22, 2012

EDITORIAL: Nuclear safety watchdog's quake risk assessments deserve respect

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201212220034>

The Nuclear Regulation Authority has said that the Higashidori nuclear power plant operated by Tohoku Electric Power Co. in Aomori Prefecture sits on faults that are probably active.

The assessment was supported by all members of the NRA expert panel, according to the nuclear safety watchdog.

We cannot help but wonder why experts who examined the same faults before the construction of the nuclear power plant and later didn't realize this.

The panel's opinion came as a fresh reminder that the government's past inspections of plans to build new nuclear power plants were disturbingly slipshod. The actual safety assessments were left totally to the electric utilities planning to build the facilities.

Before examining the faults running under the Higashidori plant, the NRA also checked the faults underneath two other nuclear power plants--Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi plant in Fukui Prefecture and Japan Atomic Power Co.'s Tsuruga plant, also in Fukui Prefecture.

The assessments have all delivered a heavy blow to claims by the electric power companies that the plants are safe.

Some executives within the power industry are complaining that the NRA's commissioners and experts involved in the fault checks are dominated by people in the anti-nuclear camp.

But the experts commissioned to assess the faults are independent researchers selected from a list of candidates recommended by the Japanese Society for Active Fault Studies and other organizations after their relations with utilities were checked for a possible conflict of interest.

The panel's field surveys and assessment meetings were open to the public, and final judgments were made through a transparent process. Both the government and the private sector should heed the panel's conclusions seriously.

The utility and the governor of the prefecture where the plant is located have questioned the "scientific grounds" on which the assessment was made. Behind their criticisms are concerns that the safety warning could put the utility in serious financial trouble and have a huge negative impact on the local economy.

These are certainly important concerns that should be dealt with, but they don't provide justification for modifying the safety assessment by the scientists.

If scientists allow concerns about economic interests to affect their safety assessments in any way, the credibility of nuclear safety regulation will be destroyed.

This is a lesson that must never be lost in light of the earthquake and tsunami disaster last year that triggered meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

If electric utilities and local communities challenge the credibility of the expert assessments concerning faults, the NRA should call on them to prove their arguments in public.

Basically, which side has a stronger case should be determined through exhaustive and purely scientific debate.

The problem is that the appointments of the members of the watchdog have yet to be approved by the Diet due to political conflict and the Lower House election held earlier this month.

Some politicians of the victorious Liberal Democratic Party are arguing that the NRA's commissioners should be selected anew now that the party has returned to power. They say the choices of the members of the body were made by the Democratic Party of Japan before the party fell from power and have not yet been formally approved.

But the NRA's commissioners should not be replaced according to the political motives of a party.

It was the LDP itself that demanded that the NRA be a highly independent agency based on Article 3 of the national government organization law. Unreasonable political intervention in the NRA must not be allowed.

To be sure, the NRA has shown some signs that it still has a lot to learn about the way it carries out its job. It has, for instance, made repeated revisions to its forecasts concerning the spread of radioactive materials in case of severe nuclear accidents. But the blunders have not been sufficiently serious to demand that the commissioners be replaced.

The ruling and opposition parties should work together to make sure that the appointments of the NRA commissioners will be swiftly approved by the Diet during the next session.

There are many safety assessments the body needs to make.

December 22, 2012

Editorial: NRA should re-examine faults, crustal structure below Aomori nuclear plants

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20121222p2a00m0na006000c.html>

An expert team under the government's Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) has concluded that a fault that runs below the premises of Higashidori Nuclear Power Plant on the Shimokita Peninsula in Aomori Prefecture is active. This is the second time that the NRA has recognized that a fault below a nuclear plant is active -- following the Tsuruga Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture -- even though its operator denies that.

The move has demonstrated that the electric power companies that operated the plants did not sufficiently examine the crustal structures around these facilities, and that the government's nuclear power regulator had failed to detect the faults. The move has also raised questions about safety inspections on other nuclear plants.

Tohoku Electric Power Co., the operator of the Higashidori power station, has claimed that the fault below the premises of the facility was created when strata containing clay was swelled by underground water, and was not active. The utility did not take the fault into account in its quake-resistance assessment of the plant.

However, all five members of the expert team have concluded that the fault is active. The members were selected from among experts who had never previously been involved in safety assessments of nuclear plants and who were recommended by academic societies including the Japanese Society for Active Fault Studies. Therefore, the assessment can be lauded as neutral. Past safety assessments, conducted by experts selected mainly by the ministries and agencies concerned, had been criticized as being lenient toward power suppliers.

The NRA is considering methods of judging whether faults around nuclear plants are active in line with new nuclear safety standards, which is necessary because it is extremely difficult to precisely predict local vibrations and the shear of the ground caused by a temblor. It is essential to ascertain the scale and other details of the active fault and reassess how far the plant can withstand a quake in accordance with the new standards. However, such measures alone are far from sufficient.

The active fault that the expert team confirmed also stretches onto the premises of a neighboring nuclear plant that Tokyo Electric Power Co. is building. Furthermore, nuclear power-related facilities are concentrated on the Shimokita Peninsula, including a spent nuclear fuel reprocessing plant and the Oma Nuclear Power Plant. An 84-kilometer-long fault also runs from north to south off the east coast of the peninsula.

Although the operators of nuclear facilities on the peninsula have denied the fault is active, some experts have asserted it is an active fault and pointed to the possibility that it could move in tandem with other faults including those beneath nuclear plants in the area.

Now that the past safety assessment of the Higashidori plant has been called into question, the **NRA should re-examine all faults and the crustal structure of the Shimokita Peninsula as a whole**. Some of the members of the expert team have called for detailed studies of the fault. The NRA should review the system in which safety assessments has been left to the discretion of nuclear plant operators, and play a leading role in re-examining the fault.

What is of great importance is to ensure the independence and transparency of the NRA. To that end, the appointments of top officials of the NRA need to be approved by the Diet.

Three months have passed since the NRA was set up by reorganizing the government's nuclear regulating bodies. Still, procedures for gaining approval of appointments of the body's top officials from the Diet have been postponed under the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ)-led administration. The new administration to be inaugurated by the end of this year should promptly refer the appointments to the Diet for approval.

US sailors sue TEPCO for downplaying radiation risk

December 28, 2012

U.S. sailors sue Tokyo Electric over Fukushima radiation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121228p2g00m0dm022000c.html>

NEW YORK (Kyodo) -- Eight of the U.S. sailors who took part in a relief operation in Japan in the wake of the March 2011 disaster have lodged a damages suit against Tokyo Electric Power Co., saying they were exposed to radiation and suffered injury because the utility misled them about the impact of its crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant.

In the lawsuit filed Dec. 21 with U.S. federal court in San Diego, each plaintiff is seeking \$10 million in compensatory damages. The suit also calls for punitive damages of \$30 million.

The sailors were among the members of the U.S. Navy crew attached to the aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan that was dispatched to off the coast of northeastern Japan for "Operation Tomodachi," right after the region was devastated by a magnitude 9 earthquake and tsunami on March 11. Tomodachi means "friends" in Japanese.

The utility, also known as TEPCO, said this is the first lawsuit against the company filed with an overseas court that concerns its handling of the crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi plant and said, "We would like to withhold any comments since we have not received the lawsuit documents."

The suit lists as the plaintiffs Lindsay Cooper, who served as an aviation boatswain's mate on the flight deck, and seven other sailors as well as a daughter born to one of the sailors in October 2011.

"The defendant, TEPCO, created an increased risk of radiation exposure to the plaintiffs by failing to provide them with warning of the actual increased risk of exposure," the suit said.

Relying on TEPCO's misrepresentations about health and safety, "the U.S. Navy was lulled into a false sense of security" and the crew of the Reagan "believed it was safe to operate within the waters adjacent to the Fukushima plant, according to the suit.

"Solely a result of the defendant's negligence, carelessness and recklessness, the plaintiffs were caused to suffer severe and serious personal injuries to mind and body," it said.

Operation Tomodachi started on March 13, two days after the quake and tsunami struck the Pacific coast of northeastern Japan and mangled the Fukushima plant. The operation delivered supplies and undertook other relief works mobilizing the aircraft carrier and other U.S. military resources and personnel.

Eight U.S. sailors sue Tepco for millions for falsely downplaying Fukushima radiation exposure

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121228a3.html>

Bloomberg

Tokyo Electric Power Co. is being sued for tens of millions of dollars by eight U.S. Navy sailors who claim that they were unwittingly exposed to radiation from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdowns and that Tepco lied about the dangers.

The sailors aboard the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan were involved in the Operation Tomodachi disaster relief operations following the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami that devastated the Tohoku region and led to the nuclear catastrophe, according to their complaint filed in U.S. federal court in San Diego on Dec. 21.

Tepco and the Japanese government conspired to create the false impression that radiation leaking from the Fukushima No. 1 plant didn't pose a threat to the sailors, according to the complaint. As a result, the plaintiffs rushed to areas that were unsafe and too close to the facility, exposing them to radiation, their lawyers said.

The Japanese government was "lying through their teeth about the reactor meltdown" crisis, as it reassured the USS Reagan crew that "everything is under control," the plaintiffs' lawyers said in the complaint. "The plaintiffs must now endure a lifetime of radiation poisoning and suffering."

The sailors are each seeking \$10 million in damages, \$30 million in punitive damages and a judgment requiring the creation of a \$100 million fund to pay for their medical monitoring and treatments.

"We can't comment as we have not received the complaint document yet," Yusuke Kunikage, a Tepco spokesman, said Thursday. "We will consider a response after examining the claim."

In July, the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund took control of Tepco in return for a ¥1 trillion capital injection after the disaster left the utility on the brink of bankruptcy. The utility received ¥1.4 trillion in state funds to compensate those affected by the disaster.

More lies

December 29, 2012

Atomic Energy Commission lied about secret meetings to prime minister's office

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20121229p2a00m0na011000c.html>

The Cabinet Office's Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) submitted falsified reports on the clandestine "study sessions" it hosted for pro-nuclear parties, newly obtained emails have shown.

The new revelations bring into question the responsibility of the Cabinet Office's investigative team, which released a final report on the case in August without any references to the bogus communications.

According to emails obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, at 7:56 a.m. on May 24, then Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura's secretary instructed a Cabinet Office staffer involved in nuclear power policy to compile anticipated questions and answers by 10 a.m. sharp regarding the Mainichi Shimbun's report on the JAEC's clandestine meetings.

In a reply sent to Fujimura's secretary at 9:59 a.m., the staff member denied the Mainichi Shimbun report, which claimed that a document on the nuclear fuel cycle had been altered in alignment with pro-nuclear utilities. At 10:33 a.m., the same staffer sent the materials Fujimura's secretary had requested earlier that morning, along with reassurances that "no explanations or debates (like those that were reported) took place."

Fujimura told a press conference beginning at 11:08 a.m. that the committee document on the nuclear fuel cycle had not been altered, and while it had been distributed to participants in the secret meetings, there had been no explanation or discussion of it. According to sources close to the case, however, at a closed-door meeting held April 24, participants were given the document, were told it was a draft report to the government's Energy and Environment Council, and discussed it.

Earlier reports by the Mainichi Shimbun have revealed that during the meeting, an executive from Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd. -- operator of the Rokkasho Nuclear Reprocessing Plant in Aomori Prefecture -- appealed for support behind a policy that would entail reprocessing of some spent nuclear fuel, with the direct disposal of the remaining spent fuel underground. During a Cabinet Office investigation, one participant from the meetings said, "Comments like the ones that were reported in the media were made."

Some of the emails corroborate allegations that the draft report had been altered. An email sent by a Cabinet Office staffer involved in nuclear power policy on May 4 says, "More comments arrived from the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan (FEPC), and are already reflected (in the draft report)."

Requests by the Mainichi Shimbun to the Cabinet Office's nuclear policy division to release the contents of FEPC's comments and the changes made to the draft report have gone unanswered as of Dec. 28.

The government changed hands from the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) to the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) before a conclusion was reached in a review of JAEC promoted by DPJ administrations. **The three-year terms of chairman Shunsuke Kondo and the four other JAEC members all end by Jan. 5, 2013, but with no successors on the immediate horizon, their terms are to be extended automatically.**

US sailors sue TEPCO (follow-up)

December 30, 2012

U.S. sailors sue Japanese utility over radiation

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201212300020>

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN DIEGO--Eight U.S. sailors are suing the Tokyo utility that operates the Fukushima nuclear power plant, charging that the company lied about the high level of radiation in the area where they were carrying out a humanitarian mission after the tsunami that triggered the reactor crisis.

The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court in San Diego last week against Tokyo Electric Power Co., which is owned by the Japanese government. Plaintiffs include the infant daughter of two of the sailors who was born seven months after the March 2011 disaster.

The sailors served on the San Diego-based aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan, which was carrying out "Operation Tomadachi" ferrying food and water to citizens in the city of Sendai in the wake of the earthquake and tsunami.

The sailors claim the Japanese government repeatedly said there was no danger to the carrier crew "all the while lying through their teeth about the reactor meltdowns" so rescuers would "rush into an unsafe area."

The U.S. Navy, the suit said, relied on information from the Japanese government, which only belatedly admitted that radiation had leaked into the atmosphere from the damaged power plant.

An email seeking response from the utility's corporate office in Tokyo was not immediately returned.

The 37-page suit, which cites numerous reports about the Fukushima crisis and response, said that after discovering the truth of how much radiation they were exposed to, the sailors have undergone extensive medical testing and will be required to undergo periodic examination in the future.

They say they are at risk for developing cancer and a shorter life expectancy, and are undergoing considerable mental anguish as a result.

The sailors are suing for more than \$100 million in damages.

US CMRT radiation data (March- May 2011) ignored

December 31, 2012

U.S. nuke crisis team's Fukushima findings wasted

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121231x3.html>

Kyodo

The United States sent a special nuclear response team to Japan right after the Fukushima meltdown disaster started in March 2011, but Japan was slow to make use of radiation data from the unit, according to U.S. and Japanese government sources.

This dispatch of the Consequence Management Response Team was the first approved for an emergency outside the United States. The CMRT, affiliated with the National Nuclear Security Administration, a semiautonomous agency of the Energy Department, is tasked with dealing with nuclear accidents and terrorism in the U.S. by detecting and analyzing radiation contamination.

The Japanese government, however, did not acknowledge the significance of the team's mission and failed to immediately utilize the initial data it provided for evacuating residents living around Fukushima No. 1.

In recent interviews, U.S. sources involved in making the decision to dispatch the team said that on March 14, 2011, three days after the crisis began, the White House's National Security Council decided to send the CMRT to Fukushima Prefecture at the request of U.S. Forces Japan and the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo.

The CMRT is dispatched to nuclear disaster zones with the Aerial Measuring System, an airborne system using military aircraft to detect gamma rays from altitudes of about 150 to 700 meters and calibrate doses of radiation with the help of highly advanced analytical software.

The AMS technology was first developed in the 1960s in the context of the Cold War when the United States and the Soviet Union conducted atmospheric nuclear tests. Since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, its capability to deal with nuclear terrorism has been enhanced.

The U.S. military and embassy requested the team's dispatch as U.S. forces were engaged in the Operation Tomodachi (Operation Friendship) relief mission in the early weeks after the nuclear disaster, which was triggered by the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The AMS data "helped confirm that there was no significant threat to the health and safety of the people" at U.S. bases in Japan, one U.S. government source said. "So I think that was the primary reason" for the special team's dispatch, the source said.

According to this source, AMS operations concerning Fukushima No. 1 confirmed there was no fire in reactor 4's spent-fuel pool, which senior officials and scientists of the U.S. administration were seriously worried about in the first week of the crisis.

The CMRT, consisting of 33 scientists and engineers, arrived at Yokota Air Base on March 16 from Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas and initiated test flights within 12 hours of arriving, according to an NNSA senior official. The CMRT conducted the first round of AMS operations from March 17 to 19, using two U.S. military aircraft.

The AMS flight operations over Fukushima were conducted around 100 times totaling 525 flight hours until the CMRT left Japan on May 28, 2011, an NNSA official said.

The CMRT provided radiation data from the first round of AMS operations to the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, then Japan's nuclear regulatory body, and to the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry from March 18 to 20 via the Foreign Ministry.

These initial data, however, were not effectively used to make decisions about the early evacuation of residents around the plant, several Japanese sources reiterated recently.

Yukio Edano, then chief Cabinet secretary, said: "We did not get any briefing (about the AMS flights from lower-level officials). At my level, we did not go into any detail (about the operations)."

Unsafe cables may be too expensive to replace

January 1, 2013

Over 10 nuclear plants in Japan have flawed fire-prevention equipment: sources

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130101p2a00m0na004000c.html>

More than 10 nuclear power plants in Japan are plagued by flaws in their fire-prevention equipment, nuclear regulatory sources have revealed, raising the possibility some reactors may be shut down.

Sources close to the secretariat of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), respectively, say that deficient equipment includes flammable electric cables in wiring. They say apparatuses important to safety are also installed close to each other, increasing the risk that fire could spread from one apparatus to the other.

The Agency for Natural Resources and Energy has already launched an investigation into the matter, while the NRA is poised to interview electric company officials in the near future.

METI anticipates that some nuclear reactors may be decommissioned due to the high cost of exchanging cables and repairing equipment. It also expects that reactivation of other plants could be delayed by several years.

Since December 1975, utilities obtaining approval for reactor construction have been required to use flame-resistant cables in important safety equipment and to appropriately space apparatuses to prevent fires from spreading. However, due to the absence of regulations for reactors built before then, the decision on whether to improve such equipment has been left up to each plant operator.

The total number of plants using flawed equipment has not been determined, but the Mainichi Shimbun interviewed power companies across the country and found that cables made of such flammable materials including vinyl and polyethylene are used at 13 out of 50 nuclear reactors. Because the surfaces of those cables are coated with fire-resistant agents using special types of resin, utility officials say they are on par

with flame-resistant cables. However, the NRA secretariat and METI officials dismissed the utilities' claims.

"Even if the fire-resistant agents do not burn, the flammable cables inside would burn," one source told the Mainichi. "Those cables may also be aging and deteriorating. We can't recognize them as being equivalent (to non-flammable cables). Most of the cables are fraught with problems in terms of fire prevention and need to be renewed."

At some plants, it has also emerged that equipment controlling the so-called reactor "safety system," which includes control rods, the core cooling system, and instrument surveillance at the time of a nuclear accident are flawed in terms of fire-prevention measures. Although the principle of "system separation" that allows one failed electric system to be complemented by another one is prioritized in safety systems, at some plants electric cables for two separate systems are installed in close proximity. Cooling water pumps are also set up next to each other, raising the risk of such critical apparatuses catching fire simultaneously. Both the NRA secretariat and METI officials are expecting that such flaws will be found at more than 10 reactors.

The NRA is planning to include both the "system separation" rule and stipulations on the use of flame-resistant cables in new safety standards to be drawn up by July. However, as **each reactor has roughly 1,000 to 2,000 kilometers of cables, including several hundred kilometers which are important to safety**, it will take more than one year and cost a huge amount to renew the cables. Due to the prospect of unrecoverable costs, some reactors may be forced to be decommissioned, the sources said.

Japanese media and nukes

An extract from the book **Fresh Currents**

that helps to understand the uncomfortable position of Japanese media towards nuclear power.

FreshCurrents

Japan's flow from a nuclear past to a renewable future

KYOTO JOURNAL • HEIAN-KYO MEDIA

ERIKO ARITA



Self Restraint and Nuclear Reporting in the Japanese Media

A huge amount of advertising income came from the power companies and the government. For instance, each local newspaper in prefectures hosting nuclear power plants or other nuclear power facilities would carry dozens of electricity ads—often full- or half-page ones—every month.

In 1988, at age 14, I first saw the pictures of atomic bomb victims at Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. I was shocked by the inhumane power of nuclear weapons, and realized they must be abolished. Thus, it was natural for me to later participate in activities against nuclear weapons with Peace Boat, a Tokyo-based nongovernmental organization, where I got a job in the group that organizes round-the-world study tours.

In May 1998, India and Pakistan conducted nuclear tests and the international community became afraid these two traditional antagonists would resort to nuclear weapons. A couple of months later, Peace Boat held photo exhibitions on Japan's atomic bomb victims in India and Pakistan. At the time, few Peace Boat staff members were actively against nuclear power. One said: "I oppose nuclear weapons. But I'm not sure about nuclear power." I thought nuclear power should be considered just as deadly dangerous as nuclear weapons. Yet because I didn't know enough about it, I could not debate the point with him.

This ambivalent attitude towards nuclear power was common among Japanese citizens' groups traditionally opposed to nuclear weapons, even though

radiation from the April 1986 Chernobyl accident had threatened the world. Kazuyoshi Fujita, president of Daichi wo Mamoru Kai, a Chiba-based organic food delivery company and one of the organizers of the 3/11 commemorative in Hibiya Park in Tokyo on March 11, 2012, said there was a notable lack of cooperation back then among groups opposed to nuclear weapons. Although many citizens' groups were shocked by Chernobyl and spoke about the risk of Japan's own nuclear power program, Fujita said, they failed to create a mass movement against it due to conflicts over what amounted to minor differences of opinion.

The majority of mainstream organizations opposed to nuclear weapons like the Japan Confederation of A-and-H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations, the biggest group of Hiroshima and Nagasaki victims, had accepted the idea of the "peaceful use of nuclear power." This was due to the propaganda of the government, the utilities, and other businesses in the nuclear power industry, as well as international opinion on the matter—opinion led by the International Atomic Energy Agency. This attitude of acceptance was also supported by the self-restraint the Japanese mass media exercised when reporting the problems of nuclear power. Thus even after Chernobyl, the Japanese general public had no interest in nuclear power's dangers.

On September 30, 1999, a nuclear accident was caused by negligence at a uranium processing plant in the village of Tokai, Ibaraki Prefecture. Two workers died. I was horrified that this fatal accident had occurred in a "technologically advanced" country, and quit Peace Boat to work as a freelance journalist. In October 1999, I attended a conference in Niigata on nuclear issues hosted by the Tokyo-based Nuclear Free Zone Citizens Network Japan, covering the event for an NHK English radio news program.

One of the speakers was Hideyuki Ban, of Citizens' Nuclear Information Center. CNIC has been practically the only anti-nuclear-power organization studying nuclear power problems. Their reports and conclusions are based on thorough

research by specialists outside the nuclear power lobby. CNIC was established in 1975 by Jinzaburo Takagi, a nuclear physicist who had formerly worked in the nuclear power industry.

Ban said the Tokai accident was a small example of the problems of nuclear power, and that it's impossible to control nuclear power in absolute safety using current technologies. Impressed, I spoke to him after the conference and asked to work as a volunteer at CNIC.

While CNIC has always researched technological and structural problems in the nuclear power industry and governments that back the industry, it has also promoted renewable energy sources as an alternative to atomic power. In December 1999, CNIC organized a conference in Thailand on renewable energy sources and strategies for sustainability. One of the Japanese researchers in attendance was Tetsunari Iida, a pioneer of renewable energies in Japan. Formerly an engineer at Kobe Steel Ltd., Iida had helped design the dry storage casks for spent nuclear fuel at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Today, he is one of Japan's most notable experts on renewable energy, advising government officials and often appearing in the media. But in 1999, Iida was not that popular, especially with the media. I had covered a renewable energy conference for NHK Radio Japan, and later got a job as a part time interviewer and producer of that same program. I had planned a number of interviews, including a series of interviews with people working for radiated victims in Hiroshima, Tahiti and other countries. The program's chief producers and manager approved all my interview plans except one.

The plan they rejected was a series of interviews with various renewable energy experts, including Iida. It was initially accepted at a meeting of full-time producers but rejected at the managerial level. Although I asked the producers why the manager didn't like the plan, they provided no explanation. One possible reason was self-restraint by NHK on covering alternative energy sources that could re-



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place nuclear power, which was promoted as national policy. The public broadcaster, as well as other media, the majority of citizen organizations opposing nuclear weapons, and the general public, all seemed to accept the peaceful use of nuclear power.

In 2000, I quit NHK and joined *The Japan Times*. Fortunately, I enjoyed more freedom to report the problems of nuclear power and advantages of renewable energy sources in the English daily, although I was required by the editors to include the opinions of nuclear power promoters. As one of the first stories of its kind, I wrote a feature in 2001 on a bill obliging power companies to purchase electricity generated from renewable sources.

Work on the bill had begun in 1999. It had the support of a nonpartisan group of 260 lawmakers. It was also backed by Iida's group, as well as many other NGOs and local municipalities. However, the Diet did not enact it. We in Japan had to wait another decade for similar legislation to finally pass in August 2011. But only after Fukushima, and only after the greatest efforts of then Prime Minister Naoto Kan to make the bill a reality.

Yet while I could write stories on renewable

energy issues in *The Japan Times*, I faced strong pressure by the nuclear power industry when writing about atomic energy. In 2008, I interviewed Mycle Schneider, an independent consultant on energy and nuclear policy and an advisor to the French Environmental Minister's Office. Schneider explained that recycling spent nuclear fuel is far more dangerous and expensive than advertised, and that maintaining Japan's policy of recycling fuel to be used at normal nuclear reactors and fast-breeder reactors would impose the huge cost of reprocessing on future electricity consumers.

Schneider presented data from French authorities showing that radioactive waste from power generation using reprocessed spent nuclear fuel costs 83 percent more to dispose of than the cost of disposing spent nuclear fuel from conventional reactors. In the article, I mentioned that, based on Japan's policy of recycling spent nuclear waste, Japan Nuclear Fuels Ltd., a company in the village of Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, planned to turn the plutonium and uranium produced through reprocessing into mixed oxide uranium-plutonium fuel (MOX) for use in conventional nuclear reactors and fast-breeder reactors.

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN MEDIA & THE NUCLEAR INDUSTRY

NHK

Management Issue Committee, Gaiishi Hiraiwa
(is also President of Tokyo Electric Power Co., Inc.)
Editorial Writer, Akira Ogata
(is also Director of Japan Atomic Industrial Forum, Inc.)
Broadcasting Programme Improvement Committee, Chizuko Togaeri
(is also Director of Japan Atomic Energy Relations Organization)
Director, Commissioner for Broadcasting, Takeshi Tanaka
(is also Director of Japan Atomic Energy Relations Organization)

NTV

Owner of Yomiuri Newspaper, Matsutaro Shoriki
(is also Chairman of Japan Atomic Energy Commission)

TBS

PR for Mainichi Newspaper, Yoshisige Ashihara
(is also President of Kansai Electric Power Co., Inc.)

Fuji

President of Sankei Newspaper, Shuzo Inaba
(is also Standing member of Japan Atomic Industrial Forum, Inc.)

TV Asahi

President of Asahi Newspaper, Seiki Watanabe
(is also Director of Japan Atomic Industrial Forum, Inc.)
Chief Editor, Junnosuke Kishida
(is also Councilor of Japan Atomic Energy Commission)

TV Tokyo

President of Nikkei Newspaper, Jiro Enjoji
(is also Vice-President of Japan Atomic Industrial Forum, Inc.)
Board Member of TV Tokyo, Kenichiro Komai
(is also President of Nuclear Material Control Center)

TV Osaka, Kinki Broadcasting

Director, Shoichiro Kobayashi
(is also President of Kansai Electric Power Co.)

Tokai TV

Director Seiichi Tanaka (is also President of Chubu Electric Power Co.)

<http://www.expat-cafe.com/bbs/viewtopic.php?f=24&t=244>

France used to be the leader in fast-breeder reactors, but later turned away from the technology. Electricite de France, a major French utility, closed the Super Phoenix fast-breeder reactor in 1997 and the Phoenix fast-breeder reactor in 2010. Schneider told me that EDF had many safety-related problems with its reactors. "EDF was afraid significant accidents might occur because they had indications of accidents whose cause they could not identify," Schneider said.

In Japan, the Monju plutonium fast-breeder re-

actor in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture was shut down after a sodium leak and fire in 1995. Schneider said the structure of fast-breeder reactors is much more complicated than conventional reactors, and that their facilities have to be operated in perfect harmony, almost impossible using current technology. After the article was published, Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd. telephoned and faxed to *The Japan Times*. JNFL claimed my article had a number of mistakes and was biased against the company. They insisted reprocessing makes radiation of spent nuclear fuel far less dangerous, and that its cost has been fairly and reasonably shared by consumers of different generations.

JNFL phoned several times to complain. As a result, I had to run a correction on two points. One was that power companies have set aside financial reserves since 1981 to cover the cost of reprocessing so that the cost will be shared among past and future electricity users. Another "correction" was that a 2004 estimate by the Japan Atomic Energy Commission showed power generation using reprocessed spent nuclear fuel would cost about 0.5 yen to 0.7 yen per kwh more than conventional nuclear power generation, which would be equivalent to roughly 1 percent of an average household's annual electricity bill.

However, the amount set aside for reprocessing in 2007 was ¥2.9 trillion. According to an estimate by the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan in 2003, a major investor of JNFL, the total cost for the reprocessing will actually be around ¥11 trillion. So, as of 2007, future consumers will be made to pay ¥11 trillion minus the ¥2.9 trillion in current financial reserves—around ¥8.1 trillion. Is that not an immense cost to be imposed on future power consumers, even when split among succeeding generations? I was very much frustrated by that fact compared to JNFL's claims.

Pressure on the media concerning nuclear power problems is quite common, according to Satoshi Kamata, a freelance journalist who has covered the nuclear power industry since the

1970s. Kamata spoke to me about this issue during an interview that was published in *The Japan Times* in September 2011.

“Newspapers have finally begun to report the reality of the nuclear industry. But why didn’t they do so before? Reporters were effectively paralyzed because whenever they wrote articles about such problems, their newspapers declined to publish them.”

Why weren’t the articles published? Kamata said, “I am not completely sure. However, a huge amount of advertising income came from the power companies and the government.

For instance, each local newspaper in prefectures hosting nuclear power plants or other nuclear power facilities would carry dozens of electricity ads—often full- or half-page ones—every month.”

After March 11, 2011, power companies stopped running advertisements in major national newspapers, though I’m not sure about local newspapers in prefectures hosting nuclear power plants. Still, one positive outcome of the Fukushima tragedy is that the media in general have a bit more freedom to report the problems of nuclear power industry and its cozy relationship with the government. But many major newspapers and TV stations continue to restrain their criticism of the “nuclear power village.”

In addition to the news media, television actors and personalities remain silent on nuclear power, with exception of a few brave actors. One is Taro Yamamoto, who first spoke out against nuclear power in April 2011. For taking such a stance, the only major entertainment celebrity in Japan to do so, his role in a TV drama was canceled. Now most TV stations refuse to employ Yamamoto because

ANNUAL AMOUNT SPENT BY JAPANESE UTILITIES ON SALES PROMOTION AND ADVERTISING

Source: Yuryoku Kigyo no Houkoku Sendenshi, 2010; figures rounded to nearest million yen

Company Name	For Sales Promotion	For Advertising
Tokyo Electric Power Co.	23.89 billion	24.35 billion
Chubu Electric Power Co.	6.58 billion	6.82 billion
Kansai Electric Power Co.	5.93 billion	19.8 billion
Chugoku Electric Power Co.	5.03 billion	5.18 billion
Hokuriku Electric Power Co.	1.49 billion	5.71 billion
Tohoku Electric Power Co.	5.17 billion	8.67 billion
Shikoku Electric Power Co.	2.39 billion	3.13 billion
Kyushu Electric Power Co.	11.2 billion	7.98 billion
Hokkaido Electric Power Co.		4.72 billion
Okinawa Electric Power Co.	591 million	515 million
J-Power		1.52 billion

he joined citizen protests calling for abolishing nuclear power and promoting renewable energies.

Despite such pressure on actors and journalists, we must work both to expose nuclear power’s problems and speak out with like-minded citizens. Otherwise, Japan could face another nuclear disaster before it finally closes atomic power stations for good.

Finally, I would like to refer to the last message of the late Jinzaburo Takagi, the prominent nuclear physicist who devoted his life to abolishing nuclear power and who passed away in 2000. Takagi had long voiced his fear of serious nuclear disasters. His message has even greater meaning for the world today.

“I wish from the bottom of my heart that people, who have the intelligence to anticipate history and the will to take bold action to tackle reality, put a full stop to the era of nuclear power.”



20 years monopoly on benefits program

January 3, 2013

Foundation filled with 'nuclear village' officials monopolizes nuclear benefit program

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201301030065

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A foundation that provides high-paying jobs for retired industry ministry officials has held a two-decade monopoly on the program that pays benefits to residents living near nuclear power plants, The Asahi Shimbun has found.

The Center for Development of Power Supply Regions receives contracts from local governments for the work. But the center has outsourced most of the operations to electric power companies, enabling it to secure a profit of around 38 million yen (\$435,000) in fiscal 2010.

The benefit program is part of the grant system under the three laws on electric power sources. The central government provides grants to local governments that host or are located near nuclear-related facilities. The money comes from part of the electricity bills paid by consumers and businesses.

The center has long been in control of the benefit program. But the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011 sparked heavy criticism against the “nuclear village” of pro-nuclear politicians, industry bureaucrats and utilities. The central government ordered prefectural governments to open up the benefit program to other bidders.

“Under the guidance of the central government, the prefectural governments in fiscal 2012 changed the system to one in which the business that undertakes the operation is chosen from a wide range of applicants,” the center said in a statement to The Asahi Shimbun. “As a result, the center has been conducting the work.”

In response to questions from The Asahi Shimbun, 14 prefectural governments involved in the benefit program said they started accepting applications from any business to run the program in fiscal 2012.

They all said the center was the only one that applied.

The center outsources such work as calculating the size of the benefits for individual households and providing the payments, but it remains in charge of making plans and reporting the results to the local governments.

In its 22 years of existence, the center has been engaged in amakudari, the “descent from heaven” practice of retired bureaucrats landing jobs at organizations or companies once under their jurisdiction.

After its foundation in 1990, the center’s first four presidents were former industry ministry officials. The current president, Kinju Atarashi, is former director-general of the Small and Medium Enterprise Agency, an affiliate of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

According to published data, being president of the center is considered a full-time job, with annual compensation of 16.58 million yen.

Makoto Yagi, chairman of the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan and president of Kansai Electric Power Co., is the current chairman of the center.

The names of executives at utilities and companies that build nuclear plants are on the lineup of part-time directors at the center. And 15 of the 46 staff members are temporarily on transfer from utilities.

The benefit program itself has been criticized as a way to offer “bribes” to residents to prevent them from opposing nuclear power facilities in their neighborhoods.

In fiscal 2011, the 14 prefectures provided 7.6 billion yen in benefits to 1.03 million households, according to figures obtained by The Asahi Shimbun.

(This article was written by Satoshi Otani and Takuho Shiraki.)

"Tainted" donations to universities

January 4, 2013

Universities receive 1.7 bil. yen in donations from power industry

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130104p2g00m0dm012000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Eight state-run universities involved in nuclear studies have received donations totaling 1.74 billion yen from utilities and other power industry members in the five years through fiscal 2011, information disclosed upon Kyodo News requests showed Thursday.

As most of the donations were directed to specific researchers, including those participating in the Nuclear Regulation Authority's meeting for setting new standards of nuclear power plant safety, some experts voiced concerns that it could affect the country's regulations.

According to the information disclosed by the universities, the University of Tokyo received the most, with 560 million yen, followed by Tohoku University (417 million yen), Nagoya University (251 million yen) and Kyoto University (212 million yen). The Tokyo Institute of Technology received 104 million yen, Kyushu University 83 million yen, Osaka University 79 million yen and Hokkaido University 38 million yen.

The donated funds were used, among other research-related purposes, to purchase equipment needed in research and to cover researchers' travel expenses when they attended conferences, according to the universities.

The donators included eight utilities, such as Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Japan Atomic Power Co., nuclear reactor makers such as Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. and Hitachi-GE Nuclear Energy Ltd., and other power-related companies and organizations.

Tokyo Electric no longer makes donations following the nuclear crisis at its Fukushima Daiichi power plant in March 2011.

Infringement on workers' rights

January 5, 2013

Kawamata decontamination workers required to sign personal info release

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130105p2a00m0na013000c.html>

KAWAMATA, Fukushima -- Workers hired to do decontamination work in this town have been required by the municipal government to sign a release of their personal information to police, it has emerged.

Workers hired to decontaminate parts of Kawamata designated as evacuation zones following the outbreak of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster are required to submit personal information including their name and blood type, as well as an ID photo. By signing the form, workers agree to allow their employers to hand the information over to police when they deem it necessary.

The Kawamata Municipal Government's nuclear disaster division said the town government composed the release form in late October last year, and urged the five joint ventures serving as prime contractors

for decontamination work to have their workers sign them. Residents' concerns over break-ins and risk minimization were cited as the reasons for the measure, but some privacy experts say the arrangement infringes on personal privacy.

According to Fukushima Prefectural Police, multiple decontamination workers have been arrested on suspicion of stealing from homes whose residents evacuated due to the nuclear crisis.

Safety complaints ignored by Gov't

January 5, 2013

CROOKED CLEANUP: Government mishandled complaints about shoddy cleanup work

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301050037>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Environment Ministry officials failed to act on a flood of complaints from residents in Fukushima Prefecture about companies carrying out shoddy decontamination work.

No effort was even made to record the number or contents of those complaints, in part because staffing shortages made such work difficult, and many of the companies involved were not instructed on how to improve their performance.

The Asahi Shimbun broke a story on Jan. 4 about shoddy decontamination work at three municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture that could constitute violations of contracts signed with the Environment Ministry and infractions of a law that prohibits the dumping of radioactive waste materials.

Following the March 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the Environment Ministry set aside an initial amount of 650 billion yen (\$7.4 billion) for decontamination work.

The ministry established a local office in Fukushima Prefecture to oversee the work, which began last summer and involved cleaning areas within 20 meters of buildings and roads.

Soon after the work began, local residents called to complain that the grass was not being mowed properly and that water used for cleaning had leaked.

Such observations could constitute violations of the work rules the Environment Ministry had established for the construction companies and subcontractors that were contracted to do the work.

However, an official said, "Because there was a continuous stream of phone calls coming in, we were unable to keep records of every call."

In response to questions from Asahi, an official at the Fukushima local office said, "Whenever we received a complaint, we cautioned those doing the work to follow what was written in the contracts."

At the same time, however, officials also admitted that no records were kept of the specific contents of each complaint, the companies involved or the total number of complaints. Companies that were the subject of a large number of complaints were also not singled out for special instructions about improving their work. As a result, officials at the local office said it was impossible to determine what response was made to every individual complaint.

In addition, information about such complaints never reached the Environment Ministry headquarters in Tokyo, which is tasked with overall supervision of the decontamination work.

One high-ranking ministry official said, "We were not even aware that a large number of complaints had come in."

An official at the local Fukushima office said, "Considering that we are using taxpayer money, we have not been able to provide sufficient explanations to local residents or the general public."

The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism has a system for organizing complaints submitted about public works projects and using that information to provide guidance to the companies involved.

However, **the Environment Ministry lacks the know-how to handle large public works projects and its oversight function is inadequate.** The local Fukushima office only has about 200 staff, with most involved mainly in patrolling local areas and helping at meetings where explanations are given to local residents. That meant there were only a few workers on hand to field complaints.

Doubts have also been raised about the quality of the responses by the hotline set up by Environment Ministry headquarters.

A worker who was ordered by the on-site supervisor of a construction company to dump vegetation in Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, called the Environment Ministry and admitted to dumping vegetation at the bottom of a slope. The person who took the call said, "We will pass on the information to the relevant section."

However, orders for such dumping continued for more than a month until work in that area was completed. Under the rules established by the Environment Ministry, the cleared vegetation should have been placed in bags and moved to temporary storage areas.

The worker who blew the whistle said, "Because they didn't ask for my contact number, nothing changed. It was meaningless to have made the call in the first place."

The worker did send in a document late last year that outlined what was observed.

(This article was written by Tamiyuki Kihara and Miki Aoki.)



Workers dump collected debris, such as vegetation and stones, into a river in Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, on Dec. 11. (The Asahi Shimbun)

Distrustful residents

January 9, 2013

Fukushima residents show distrust over lack of explanation about interim storage facility

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130109p2a00m0na005000c.html>

AIZUWAKAMATSU, Fukushima -- The Ministry of the Environment held a briefing session here for residents of a Fukushima Prefecture town hosting a candidate site for an interim storage facility for radiation-contaminated soil, sparking voices of distrust from them over a lack of explanation over the controversial construction plan.

The meeting on Jan. 8 -- the first of its kind held by the ministry -- was attended by some 150 residents from the prefectural town of Okuma who evacuated to Aizuwakamatsu following the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster. Two other prefectural towns have also been listed as candidate sites for the planned facility.

While the residents, all from a district hosting the candidate site, raised questions about reparations for the construction site and surrounding areas and the method to treat radioactive soil, the Environment Ministry officials stopped short of presenting concrete plans and conditions, only saying, "We don't know until we survey the area."

"They're probably going to conduct the survey without explaining anything and force through construction," said a distrustful resident during the meeting.

Regarding the ministry officials' explanation that the tainted soil will be transferred to a final disposal site outside Fukushima Prefecture within 30 years, one skeptical resident said, "No one would take it, as is the case with U.S. military bases in Okinawa. The promise should be legislated so that we can be at ease."

The Environment Ministry is poised to start on-site surveys on candidate sites as early as this month and is planning to hold five more briefing sessions for Okuma residents through Jan. 10 at three locations in the prefecture.

Meanwhile, the Naraha town government notified the ministry on Jan. 8 that a briefing session about an interim storage facility survey for the town's ward mayors would be postponed from Jan. 10, following recent revelations of shoddy decontamination work on radioactive materials in the town and other parts of the prefecture.

"It is an outrageous situation that could destroy the entire plan for our residents' return to the town in two years," said Naraha Town Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto.

Decontamination - Cutting corners

January 8, 2013

Tainted water allowed to run off

Fukushima cleanup crews cut corners

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20130108x1.html>

By MIZUHO AOKI
Staff writer

Two construction joint ventures hired to wash radioactive substances off buildings in two Fukushima Prefecture communities in December allowed the tainted water to run off into street gutters, an Environment Ministry official said Tuesday.

Although not illegal, the conduct of Taisei Corp., Maeda Corp. and other firms involved in the venture illustrates the types of corners that contractors cut in doing cleanup work.

A special law passed for the nuclear disaster makes dumping of contaminated substances into the environment punishable by up to five years in prison or a fine of up to ¥10 million. However, contractors are only asked to collect tainted runoff, with no penalty for failing to do so.

Recent media reports that contractors were possibly illegally dumping radiation-tainted waste into rivers and elsewhere in Fukushima Prefecture prompted the Environment Ministry's Fukushima office for

environmental restoration to question managers of four joint ventures Monday. They were all hired by the government to do decontamination work near the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The ministry investigation turned up the cases of tainted runoff in the village of Iitate and the town of Naraha.

In Iitate, workers washing a post office and its premises allowed some of the contaminated water to run freely into a gutter in the street, said the ministry official, who declined to be named, citing ministry policy.

Though workers blocked the gutter at one end, contaminated water was allowed to flow away in the other direction.

In Naraha, contractors used high-pressure water hoses to decontaminate the roof and walls of a house without taking steps to collect the tainted runoff, he said.

On Monday, a ministry task force ordered the contractors to re-examine their methods for dealing with contaminated waste. The ministry plans to come up with countermeasures by the end of next week, he said.

"We must figure out why this happened, and what is really going on at decontamination sites first," the official said.

As of Monday, 50 ministry officials and hired supervisors were monitoring decontamination work in Naraha, Iitate, Tamura and Kawauchi.

But work is currently halted in some areas in the prefecture due to a lack of temporary storage sites for tainted waste, the official said.

Radiation-tainted water left after decontamination work in 2 Fukushima districts

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130108p2a00m0na010000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- In yet another revelation of shoddy decontamination work in the aftermath of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster, two joint ventures failed to collect radiation-tainted water in two municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture last month, the government has disclosed.

The Ministry of the Environment's local office in the city of Fukushima announced on Jan. 7 that two joint ventures including general contractors that undertook the government-run decontamination project failed to retrieve water generated by decontamination work in the town of Naraha and the village of Iitate in mid-December last year.

The ministry will strive to uncover the whole picture of the situation and step up on-site monitoring and supervision of decontamination work. The finding comes on the heels of a series of revelations of illicit dumping of radioactive waste by subcontractors in nuclear disaster-hit areas.

The latest case emerged after the ministry's Fukushima environmental rehabilitation office interviewed officials of the two joint ventures, who admitted to contract violations such as not recovering contaminated water.

Also on Jan. 7, the ministry decided to set up a headquarters for promoting proper decontamination work in an attempt to strengthen the monitoring of such efforts. While ministry officials had been patrolling more than 10 zones subject to decontamination, ministry officials and patrol assistants will hereafter be deployed to all zones on a regular basis.

Furthermore, the ministry also suggested a review of its complaint processing system after admitting that its Fukushima office had left reports of illicit treatment of radioactive waste unaddressed.

Ministry slow to react

January 10, 2012

CROOKED CLEANUP: Environment Ministry failed to act on Asahi tip-off

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301100070>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Environment Ministry officials in December received details and photographic evidence of shoddy decontamination work in Fukushima Prefecture, but they dithered on taking action by citing “manners” and the need to confirm the information.

New Environment Minister Nobuteru Ishihara has also been slow to react since The Asahi Shimbun ran its first story on the issue on Jan. 4.

Asahi Shimbun reporters, who witnessed slipshod work at 13 locations between Dec. 11 and 18, visited the Fukushima Office for Environmental Restoration, which is responsible for overseeing decontamination work around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, on Dec. 25.

The reporters told a senior representative that general contractors instructed workers to dump potentially contaminated vegetation and not to bother with the proper recovery of water used for cleaning.

The journalists explained about the 13 locations and dates and showed photographs taken at the sites. The office representative said it is a matter of “manners.”

“It appears that workers (dumped vegetation) not out of malice but because they removed more radioactive materials than they had expected,” the representative said.

The same day, Asahi Shimbun reporters met with two senior officials at the Environment Ministry in Tokyo and provided the list of 13 locations.

“We cannot do anything unless we confirm the facts,” Masaaki Kobayashi, director-general of the Environment Management Bureau, said. “We will contact the Fukushima office.”

The ministry also appeared to largely ignore information about the dodgy decontamination work from a person on the front line.

A worker in his 20s who said he was ordered to dump vegetation sent a fax to the Environment Ministry in Tokyo and the Fukushima Office for Environmental Restoration on Dec. 26.

The fax explained what was happening at the work sites and contained his real name and e-mail address. But the man had not received any response as of Jan. 8.

Asahi Shimbun reporters visited the Fukushima Office for Environmental Restoration again on Dec. 26 and showed director Takashi Omura a photograph of a site supervisor kicking fallen leaves into a river in Tamura.

“It is a grave problem if it is true,” Omura said. “I will immediately consult with those in charge.”

However, Omura did not discuss the issue with Environment Ministry officials in Tokyo until Dec. 28, the last business day of 2012 for government workers.

By that day, two general contractors contacted by The Asahi Shimbun had informed Omura's office that water used for cleaning may have not been properly recovered at decontamination sites.

In late afternoon on Dec. 28, Kobayashi said, “I do not know about the situation because I have not received reports from (the Fukushima office).”

Local government leaders in Fukushima Prefecture expressed outrage after reading The Asahi Shimbun's report on Jan. 4. Omura called them and apologized for “causing worries.”

Yoshimi Okunishi, a councilor at the Minister's Secretariat at the Environment Ministry, told reporters in Tokyo that the ministry will investigate whether the report is true.

“Our ministry will not move unless a newspaper article appears,” one employee said.

The ministry did not begin questioning general contractors until Jan. 7, when it set up a task force on the issue headed by Senior Vice Environment Minister Shinji Inoue.

But subcontractors and workers have changed at many decontamination sites since the start of the new year, which could make it difficult for the task force to obtain first-hand information.

On Jan. 9, Inoue visited Tamura, where the site supervisor kicked leaves into the river on Dec. 14. The leaves on the ground were gone, and it was impossible to tell if they were removed by workers or fell into the river and flowed away.

The response of Ishihara, who became environment minister on Dec. 26, has been unclear.

Ishihara and the Environment Ministry also plan to rely on voluntary investigations by general contractors instead of interviewing front-line workers.

“We will not have enough information to make a judgment until we read reports (from the contractors),” Ishihara said.

The ministry expects to receive the reports by Jan. 11 and compile measures on Jan. 18 to prevent a recurrence.

During questioning on Jan. 7, the companies only admitted that water used for cleaning was not properly recovered in two instances in December.

Ishihara did not come to his Environment Ministry office on Jan. 4, the first business day for government workers this year.

When asked what he did on the day, Ishihara said on the night of Jan. 8, “I do not remember.”

The Asahi Shimbun asked the same question through the ministry’s public relations office. A written reply said Ishihara issued instructions to a senior vice minister to confirm facts and respond strictly.

Ishihara did not appear in the Environment Ministry until Jan. 6, when he attended a briefing scheduled from last year. He and other senior ministry officials discussed what to do and decided to set up the task force.

Ministry officials hope to minimize the fallout of the scandal because only general contractors can handle the contracts, which are awarded for each municipality.

The officials have relied on the companies to carry out the decontamination project worth 650 billion yen (\$7.4 billion), an extremely large amount for a ministry project.

Slipshod work can constitute violations of not only government contracts but also a special measures law on dealing with contaminated waste.

If serious offenses are found, the ministry could be forced to exclude a general contractor from the project.

(This article was compiled from reports by Toshio Tada, Tamiyuki Kihara and Miki Aoki.)

NRA just wants to remain independent

January 10, 2013

NHK On the Air: A new start

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/movie/feature201301102112.html>

the NRA intends to avoid all kinds of pressure to make only “scientific” decisions. They want to work without interference...

All is well, at least for some

January 11, 2013

Japan Atomic Power posts record profits with all its reactors offline

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301110084>

By SHIN MATSUURA/ Staff Writer

Japan Atomic Power Co. posted record net profits for the first half of the current fiscal year, despite all of its reactors being taken offline following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The company, which supplies five regional electric utilities with power generated at its nuclear power plants, logged 20.9 billion yen (\$238 million) in consolidated net profits in the April-September period in 2012, according to its half-year financial report submitted late last year to a regional office of the Finance Ministry.

It was able to post a profit despite generating no electricity because it was paid a combined 76 billion yen in "basic fees" by Tokyo Electric Power Co., which owns the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, Kansai Electric Power Co. and three other utilities.

The unlisted Japan Atomic Power receives these basic fees based on its contracts with the utilities. The company says its contracts are renewed every year and that it receives the payments even if it supplies no electricity to them.

According to the report, the company logged 76.2 billion yen in group sales, a year-on-year drop of 10 percent. Most of those revenues came from basic fees paid by the utilities.

Group net profits shot up because there were no costs from generating power as all three of its reactors were idled.

The company is expected to set a record in the current fiscal year ending in March if it does not suffer any major losses, surpassing its highest full-year group net profits of about 3.2 billion yen in fiscal 2008.

But posting profits without supplying power could rouse public ire because utilities pass these fees on to their customers.

The utilities include basic fees, along with other expenses to generate and transmit electricity, such as fuel and payroll costs, when they calculate electricity rates for general households.

Japan Atomic Power defended its receipt of basic fees, however, saying it is based on its contracts.

"They are paid to finance our expenses to maintain and manage our plants," a public relations official said. TEPCO, too, justified the payment.

"We have jointly developed Japan Atomic Power's reactors," said an official at TEPCO's publicity department. "We are in a long-term contract with the company to purchase its power and therefore pay basic fees, whether power is generated or not."

TEPCO included the payment of its basic fees in the electricity rates it raised last September.

Kansai Electric also included basic fees in its application for a rate increase, which is now under review by an industry ministry panel of experts.

TEPCO paid the most in basic fees at 27.7 billion yen, followed by Kansai Electric, which paid 16.2 billion yen. Chubu Electric Power Co. paid 14.6 billion yen, Hokuriku Electric Power Co. paid 10.2 billion yen, and Tohoku Electric Power Co. paid 6.8 billion yen.

It is difficult, however, to predict when Japan Atomic Power will be able to resume supplying power to its clients despite its contracts with them.

Following the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, all of the nation's remaining 50 reactors were taken offline for safety checks, and so far, only two reactors at Kansai Electric's Oi plant in Fukui Prefecture have been put back into service.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority, a new industry watchdog set up last year, is set to make a fresh review of each of the reactors after compiling new safety guidelines by summer.

Japan Atomic Power, based in Tokyo, was established in 1957 as a company specializing in nuclear power generation, with most of its investment poured in from the nuclear power industry.

Its single-reactor Tokai plant in Ibaraki Prefecture went into service in 1966 as the nation's first commercial reactor. The reactor is in the process of being mothballed.

Japan Atomic Power faces bleak prospects for the rest of its reactors--two at the Tsuruga plant in Fukui Prefecture and one at the Tokai No. 2 plant in Ibaraki Prefecture, with a combined capacity of 2.62 gigawatts.

The No. 1 reactor at the Tsuruga plant went online in 1970.

It is more than 40 years old, the life span after which a reactor is set to be decommissioned in principle under the law concerning nuclear reactors.

The No. 2 reactor could be instructed to be decommissioned because the NRA concluded that a seismic fault directly below the building housing the reactor is likely active. Under the government's guidelines for quake resistance of nuclear facilities, a reactor is not permitted to be built above an active fault.

The outlook for restarting the Tokai No. 2 plant also appears dismal due to local opposition.

Japan Atomic Power and its group companies have a total work force of 2,294.

Officials with TEPCO and Kansai Electric have served as presidents of the company.

Tsunehisa Katsumata, former president and chairman of TEPCO, serves as an external director of Japan Atomic Power.

Companies deny violations

January 16, 2013

CROOKED CLEANUP: Ministry to investigate after companies admit only 3 violations in Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301160062>

By TAMIYUKI KIHARA/ Staff Writer

The Environment Ministry decided to conduct its own investigation into the shoddy decontamination work around the stricken Fukushima nuclear plant, unsatisfied with the probes by companies believed responsible for the scandal.

“We will punish those involved in malicious cases,” Senior Vice Environment Minister Shinji Inoue told a news conference on Jan. 15. “We are moving to interview the workers.”

The ministry plans to release its investigation results on Jan. 18.

The ministry had instructed four general contractors that won lucrative contracts to decontaminate areas of Fukushima Prefecture to investigate Asahi Shimbun reports that workers were dumping potentially radioactive soil, water and debris into the environment instead of properly storing them for disposal.

Some workers said they were instructed by their supervisors to speed up the decontamination process by ignoring the Environment Ministry’s rules.

The Asahi Shimbun and other parties reported 14 cases of suspected violations of the ministry’s rules. The ministry also said it has received information on about 30 other cases.

The companies admitted to shoddy work in only three cases.

The general contractors’ surveys were based mainly on talks with the supervisors of work sites. Many decontamination workers who felt guilty about carrying out orders to do the sloppy work said they were never interviewed by the construction companies.

One worker said the company investigation involved the cleanup crew standing in front of the supervisor and asked to raise their hand if they had been ordered to dump debris in the environment. The worker said he and his colleagues were reluctant to tell the truth in front of their boss.

“The Environment Ministry has to look into the matter on its own,” said a senior official of Tamura, a city being decontaminated near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The companies did acknowledge that workers allowed water used for cleaning to flow into the environment in both Naraha and Iitate. They also said workers cleaned off their boots in a river in Tamura.

But they denied violations in the other cases, including one in which Asahi Shimbun reporters took photos of a person believed to be a supervisor kicking fallen leaves into a river. They also denied infractions in a case in which Asahi Shimbun reporters videotaped decontamination workers cleaning a rake and other equipment in a river.

A consortium including Maeda Corp. is responsible for decontamination work in Naraha, while a group led by Taisei Corp. is overseeing work in Iitate and companies led by Kajima Corp. are undertaking the cleanup in Tamura.

The central government plans to spend 650 billion yen (\$7.4 billion) for the decontamination project.

Keep on probing

January 16, 2013

2 more cases of sloppy decontamination work uncovered in Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130116p2a00m0na006000c.html>

A probe into sloppy decontamination work following the Fukushima nuclear disaster has discovered two fresh cases of improper disposal, Environment Ministry officials revealed on Jan. 15.

Contaminated water from workers' boots was released into the environment in the latest cases, following two previous incidents, according to the Ministry of the Environment (MOE). A taskforce headed by Senior Vice Minister of the Environment Shinji Inoue that aims to improve decontamination procedures will announce more details on Jan. 18 as well as how it will deal with the problems.

The findings come after the MOE had instructed seven general contractors handling decontamination work in eight municipalities to conduct investigations after receiving word that some workers were illegally disposing of removed soil and leaves in places such as rivers. By Jan. 11, the MOE had received a report from the contractors.

The newly discovered cases are said to have occurred in Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, during work undertaken by a joint-venture company consisting of Kajima Corp, Sumitomo Mitsui and Hitachi Plant Technologies. Following reports that workers had washed mud off their boots into ditches, the company conducted an internal investigation, which confirmed the suspicions, but that the mud's radiation levels were within limits.

There had also been reports that after decontamination work, two workers had washed off their boots and other equipment into a river. The company admitted that this had occurred early on in its operation, but said that no incidents have been reported recently.

Previously, two other cases of sloppy decontamination work by a different joint-venture company were found to have occurred when contaminated water was left behind in Naraha and Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture.

2.4 trillion yen to promote nukes

January 17, 2013

9 utilities spent 2.4 trillion yen to sell public on nuke power

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301170013>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Nine of Japan's electric utilities spent a combined 2.4 trillion yen (\$27.6 billion) to sponsor TV programs and run ads in print media over four decades to promote nuclear power and underscore the safety of their plants, The Asahi Shimbun has found.

The lavish campaign apparently helped utilities to expand their influence on media outlets and allowed them to hold considerable sway in objecting to negative reporting on nuclear power.

The utilities' PR spending began to soar in the late 1970s and, in 1986, topped twice the level registered around the 1979 Three Mile Island nuclear accident in the United States, according to the investigation by The Asahi Shimbun. In 1986, the Chernobyl disaster occurred in what is now Ukraine.

The utilities are regional monopolies, meaning they have no competitors in the areas they serve.

But in fiscal 2005 through 2007, the combined annual spending by the utilities on PR topped about 100 billion yen, on par with the ad expenses of a leading automaker or electronics manufacturer.

An employee with an advertising agency that handled the promotion of nuclear power said electric power companies generously spread their PR money around.

"The nuclear industry paid exceedingly more to advertise than other industries did," the employee said. "It was meant to get media organizations to support nuclear power."

A public relations official at Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), which owns the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, denied that the utility engaged in a high level of ad spending or pressured news outlets for favorable coverage.

"Our PR spending is not huge, compared with other companies," the official said. "We have never exerted pressure on news organizations concerning their coverage."

The exorbitant spending is potentially contentious because utilities had been allowed to calculate electricity rates by listing the expenditures as part of expenses to generate and transmit electricity, such as fuel and payroll costs.

In addition, utilities could also include expected profits as total costs before they applied to the government for approval of an electricity rate hike.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, however, decided in March 2012 not to authorize ad expenses as part of costs unless they are considered absolutely necessary under the new rules.

Advertising expenses consist of expenditures to sponsor TV and radio programs and run ads in print media, including advocacy ads, as well as to run PR facilities.

In some cases, utilities spent some of the PR funds to wine and dine members of media outlets. They also ran ads in the mouthpiece publication of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, which has long promoted nuclear power, and sponsored popular TV news shows.

The Asahi Shimbun examined utilities' financial reports, in which advertising costs are posted, from fiscal 1970 to fiscal 2011, which ended in March 2012.

In fiscal 1970, Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Mihama plant in Fukui Prefecture became the first nuclear power station to be brought into service by a leading operator, and more nuclear plant construction projects were under way in the late 1970s.

The nine regional utilities together spent 2.42 trillion yen on ad campaigns over the 42-year period from fiscal 1970.

The utilities expended a combined 20 billion yen a year on their PR efforts until the Three Mile Island accident. Then, the spending doubled to top 40 billion yen following the Chernobyl disaster and continued to soar in the early 1990s.

Hiroyoshi Sunakawa, associate professor of media theory at Rikkyo University, said the surge reflects utilities' intention to try to expand their influences on news organizations.

"It is easy to see that by spending a large sum on ads, utilities tried to keep a close eye on media organization's negative reporting on nuclear power plants," he said.

Sunakawa said utilities are obliged to explain to the public about ad spending because the costs were factored into their electricity rates. He also urged media outlets to examine if they considered it "taboo" to negatively report on nuclear power.

The investigation found that TEPCO spent more than any other utility, with 644.5 billion yen over the 42-year period. It was followed by Kansai Electric, which shelled out 483 billion yen.

Tohoku Electric Power Co., Chubu Electric Power Co. and Kyushu Electric Power Co. posted expenses somewhere between 250 billion yen and 270 billion yen, respectively. Of the nation's 10 regional utilities, only Okinawa Electric Power Co. in Okinawa Prefecture does not own a nuclear power plant.

In April 2011, TEPCO released details of its ad spending for fiscal 2010, the first time it has done so.

The utility spent 7 billion yen to sponsor TV and radio programs, 4.6 billion yen on ads for print media and 4.3 billion yen to operate PR facilities.

In September 2012, household electricity rates were hiked in the area that TEPCO serves.

Criticism of media organizations flooded Twitter after the nuclear disaster occurred at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in March 2011.

“Media organizations have become a member of the ‘nuclear village’ after the nuclear industry shelled out huge sums for ads,” a user tweeted.

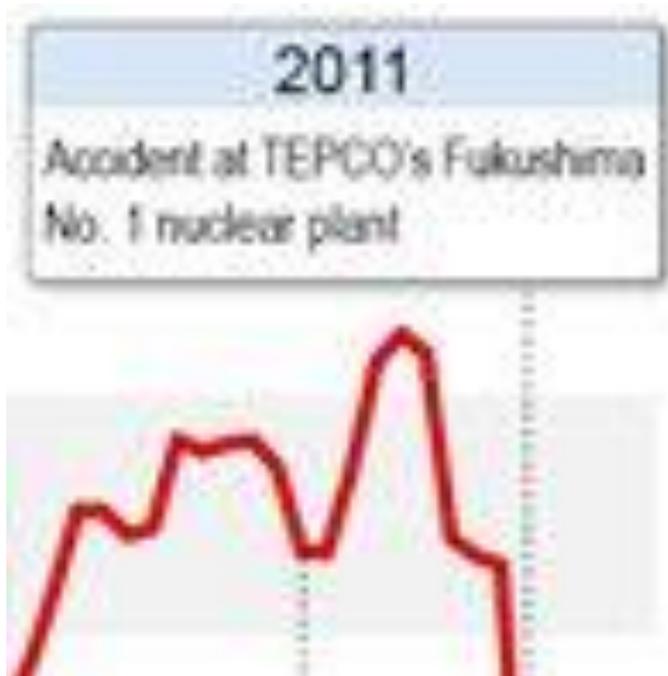
In November 2011, Tatsuo Hatta, visiting professor of economics at Gakushuin University, echoed the criticism at a meeting of a panel of experts with the industry ministry tasked to prepare a review of the electricity rate system.

“With advertising money, media organizations became dependent on utilities for revenue and found it hard to criticize nuclear power,” said Hatta, a member of the panel.

The late Tatsuru Suzuki, former head of the publicity department at the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan, reportedly told a meeting of presidents of utilities that promoting nuclear energy costs a lot of money.

“It is expensive to promote nuclear power,” Suzuki was quoted as saying in his book. “You should think of it as part of construction costs, not just publicity expenses.”

(This article was written by Atsushi Komori, senior staff writer, and Akemi Harada.)



More photos and videos to document shoddy work

January 17, 2013

CROOKED CLEANUP: Photos, videos show contractors lied in decontamination reports

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301170063>

See also the video :

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ly0W2D95_Z0

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Photos and videos taken by The Asahi Shimbun show that general contractors lied in their reports about shoddy decontamination work around the Fukushima nuclear plant.

The companies, which received lucrative contracts for the project, admitted to slipshod work in three cases. But it is clear that many other violations of the Environment Ministry's rules have occurred.

The Asahi Shimbun carried a set of three photos on the front page of its morning edition on Jan. 4, when it broke the story about workers dumping potentially contaminated water and debris into the environment. The photos show a man repeatedly kicking fallen leaves into a river in Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, on Dec. 14. A pink line on his helmet indicates he is a site supervisor.

In its report submitted to the Environment Ministry, a group of companies responsible for decontaminating Tamura, including general contractor Kajima Corp., denied such acts.

According to the report, the supervisor acknowledged he was the person in the photos. But he said he was recovering a rake that had fallen in the river and never kicked leaves into the water.

The report contained two photos: one showing a rake that Kajima's group said was retrieved from the river; the other showing company officials inspecting the site and re-enacting how the rake was recovered.

But The Asahi Shimbun captured the supervisor's actions in a series of 27 photos. Those taken before and after the three photos carried in the newspaper show a rake had never fallen into the river and the supervisor moved to another site immediately after kicking the leaves into the river.

The photos were taken just after 11 a.m. The Asahi Shimbun reporter who took the photos observed the site until the day's work ended around 4 p.m. The supervisor never recovered a rake.

Kajima's group said the rake had slid down a slope into the river. But the slope was covered with thick branches and foliage, making it impossible for a rake to slide down.

A Kajima representative told The Asahi Shimbun on Jan. 16 that the group's report is based on what the supervisor told its officials, and that the company believes his account.

A photo carried in the city news section of The Asahi Shimbun's Jan. 4 morning edition shows a man in white work clothes cleaning the balcony of a home in Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, on Dec. 17.

The man was using a pressurized sprayer, and potentially contaminated water spread around the balcony. The use of pressurized sprayers is limited to gutters and other areas. And the water used in such cleaning must be properly collected.

In its report submitted to the Environment Ministry, a group of companies responsible for cleaning Naraha, including Maeda Corp., admitted that a pressurized sprayer was used in cleaning the balcony and that water spread around it.

The report also said a pressurized sprayer was not used to clean the roof.

But a video taken by an Asahi Shimbun reporter shows a man in black work clothes using a pressurized sprayer on the roof immediately after the man in white finished cleaning the balcony.

The photo carried on the Jan. 4 edition did not show a worker cleaning the roof.

The Environment Ministry's work rules clearly state that roofs must be wiped by hand or brushes to remove radioactive materials, but they do not include a provision for balconies.

A supervisor at one subcontractor said Maeda's group probably thought it could contain the damage by admitting the use of a pressurized sprayer only on the balcony, not on the roof.

A Maeda representative told The Asahi Shimbun on Jan. 16 that the report describes what the company found through its investigations.

A story in the city news section of The Asahi Shimbun's Jan. 4 morning edition describes an incident involving workers using a pressurized sprayer to clean a parking lot of a post office in Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, on Dec. 18.

The story says an Asahi Shimbun reporter told one of the workers that the water was flowing into a gutter without being recovered. The worker said he could not comment because he was not a supervisor.

The conversations were recorded in a video. The reporter pointed to the gutter and said, "Here it is." The worker stammered and left the site quietly.

In its report to the Environment Ministry, a group of companies responsible for cleaning Iitate, including Taisei Corp., said workers were not told that water was flowing into the gutter.

The report said a worker was asked when the work would end, and he said he could not answer because he was a security guard. The report said none of the workers was aware that water was flowing out.

A Taisei representative told The Asahi Shimbun that the company believes the report is correct.

(This article was compiled from reports by Tamiyuki Kihara and Miki Aoki.)

* * *

COMMENTARY: Ministry must listen directly to front-line workers

The Environment Ministry has received reports from The Asahi Shimbun and others about 14 cases of shoddy decontamination work in Fukushima Prefecture. General contractors admitted to only three of those cases.

The slipshod work caught in photos and videos by The Asahi Shimbun is just the tip of the iceberg. The contractors failed to conduct thorough investigations--even in the cases that have been reported.

The ministry plans to release the results of its own investigations on Jan. 18. But if it continues to rely on the words of the contractors, the actual situation will never become clear.

A team of Asahi Shimbun reporters covering the issue has called on the ministry and contractors to look into what happened at the cleanup sites, particularly at those that were photographed and recorded. Separately, more than 30 decontamination workers told The Asahi Shimbun that they had cut corners. There is no doubt that violations of the ministry's rules are rampant. Contractors have refused to admit improper practices, merely closing their eyes to the inconvenient truth. An audio recording was taken when workers in Naraha dumped potentially contaminated leaves and branches on the instructions of a supervisor from a general contractor. But the company said it could not confirm that such instructions had been given. One worker said he and his co-workers were told to raise their hand in front of the supervisor if they received such orders from him. He said they were reluctant to speak out in such a situation. Investigations entirely dependent on contractors have reached their limits. The Environment Ministry has received information on more than 30 cases of slipshod work. If the ministry releases the results of insufficient investigations, public distrust of the government will only grow, making it difficult for the ministry to justify spending huge sums of taxpayer money on decontamination projects. The ministry must listen directly to as many front-line workers as possible in addition to confirming violations reported by media organizations. It may seek cooperation from the infrastructure ministry, which has overseen the work of general contractors, and the labor ministry, which is experienced in workplace inspections. The Environment Ministry should not release the results of its investigations on Jan. 18 if it needs more time. (This article was written by Toshio Tada.)

Investigation continues

January 18, 2013

CROOKED CLEANUP: Government confirms 5 cases of shoddy decontamination work

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301180075>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The Environment Ministry on Jan. 18 said that there have been five cases of shoddy decontamination work around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and has punished the general contractors involved in the cleanup effort.

In the five instances, three general contractors were ordered to take corrective actions, the ministry said on Jan. 18 in its report on the investigation into the central government-commissioned work, following reports of the suspected such dumping of potentially radioactive debris. Two other contractors were given guidance on following proper procedures.

The ministry also announced that countermeasures would be taken for preventing illegal dumping in the future.

With some parts of the report saying, "There was insufficient evidence to prove it," the ministry plans to continue its investigation.

"It is important to continue to investigate, inspect and improve decontamination work," Environment Minister Nobuteru Ishihara said in a press conference on Jan. 18.

The ministry also admitted to having problems in dealing with reports about shoddy decontamination work being done.

The ministry task force to promote proper decontamination work met on Jan. 18 and came up with measures to avoid a repeat of illegal dumping practices.

Shinji Inoue, senior vice environment minister who heads the task force, announced the measures, including quadrupling the number of field supervisors and imposing stricter punishments on chief contractors commissioned to do the decontamination work if they violate the rules.

According to the ministry, there were 19 suspected cases of inappropriate decontamination work. Of those, the ministry judged that there were five inappropriate cases, including three instances attributed to four general contractors and two newly investigated cases, including one where workers dumped collected grass and debris into a river.

The ministry has instructed contractors involved in three of the most blatant cases to improve their work procedures.

In one of the three instances, a worker in Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, was observed by an Asahi Shimbun reporter using a pressurized sprayer to clean the veranda of a private home, with water splashing the walls of neighboring structures and not being properly collected.

* * *

Please check related stories at (<http://ajw.asahi.com/tag/Crooked%20Cleanup>).

Lies and more lies

January 19, 2013

Probe reveals 45% of cleanup subcontractors violated labor laws

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301190050>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Nearly half of the 242 companies involved in decontamination work in Fukushima Prefecture were found to have violated labor laws in 219 instances, the labor ministry said Jan. 18.

The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare said 45 percent of the companies fell into this category.

The findings show that many of the cleanup workers were thrust into inadequate work environments, fueling argument that was part of the reason slipshod decontamination work proliferated in many sites, as was reported by the media.

The labor standards inspection offices in Fukushima Prefecture reported 34 cases in which radiation levels were not measured prior to the start of cleanup work, despite a requirement under the Industrial Safety and Health Law to do so.

The offices investigated the conditions under which those workers toiled from April to December last year.

They found that in eight incidences, hazard pay, which comes from public funds, was not paid to workers.

There were 11 cases in which subcontractors did not specify wages and other details of working conditions to workers, a violation of the Labor Standards Law.

In many cases, workers were not paid their wages or did not have a health checkup.

The offices said they have instructed violators to take corrective actions and that they reported on the nonpayment of hazardous pay to workers to the Environment Ministry, which is overseeing decontamination operations.

Most of the offenders are smaller subcontractors that are commissioned by general contractors.

Among them are a number of small companies that scrambled to jump on the bandwagon after the government earmarked a huge budget for cleanup efforts.

A tendency to ignore the spirit of the law was particularly marked among subcontractors, experts said. Meanwhile, the Environment Ministry stopped short of recognizing two-thirds of the 19 suspected cases of slipshod cleanup work around the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The ministry said in its report on Jan. 18 that it certified five instances as shoddy and disciplined the general contractors responsible.

But it said it found no fault with two cases.

For the rest, the ministry did not reach a conclusion on whether or not general contractors undertaking decontamination work did a substandard job. It cited vigorous denials over the allegations.

However, the ministry acknowledged it had been slow to react, despite being alerted by thousands of telephone calls and e-mails citing suspicious cleanup efforts.

“Since the ministry is not a law enforcement body, there are limitations to the way we look into cases,” Shinji Inoue, senior vice environment minister, said Jan. 18. “We acknowledge that our investigation, coupled with time constraints, has not been adequate.”

The ministry said it will continue to investigate if those tip-offs are well-founded and open a new investigation if additional information on suspected cases is reported.

The ministry began its investigation after The Asahi Shimbun reported on suspected dumping of potentially radioactive debris in the central government-commissioned work.

Problem with utilities' awareness of own responsibility for nuke safety

January 20, 2013

Power suppliers, individuals should be responsible for ensuring safety of nuclear plants

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130120p2a00m0na003000c.html>

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) that regained control of the government following its landslide victory in the Dec. 16 House of Representatives election is set to overturn the previous administration's policy of ending Japan's reliance on nuclear power.

"Nuclear power reactors that will be built in the future are completely different from the old ones installed 40 years ago or those at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant where an accident occurred," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said in a TV program late last year.

His remarks could be interpreted as suggesting that his government is ready to approve the construction of new nuclear reactors on the grounds that they are safe.

It is true that aging nuclear reactors have higher risks, but one cannot help but wonder whether new reactors are absolutely safe.

In December last year, three people -- U.S., French and British nationals -- were appointed as international advisers to the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) and attended a meeting in Japan. The advice they gave as representatives of these countries that rely heavily on atomic power is noteworthy.

Andre-Claude Lacoste, former chairman of the French Nuclear Safety Authority, said he was shocked at the Japanese industry's attitude toward the safety of nuclear power. Specifically, the fact that officials of power suppliers simply repeated that they had strictly abided by relevant regulations came as a shock to him.

He pointed out that Japanese utilities' belief that it is all right as long as they simply follow the rules is dangerous.

The responsibility of the electric power industry for the safety of nuclear power plants tends to be obscured in Japan, where private companies have operated nuclear plants to supply a significant ratio of electric power in accordance with the government's energy policy. Under international standards, however, power suppliers are fully responsible for ensuring the safety of the nuclear plants they operate, as stipulated by the 10-point safety rules enforced by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

In Japan, the awareness of utilities' responsibility for nuclear safety is lacking even after the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011. There is no point in replacing nuclear reactors with the most advanced ones unless such awareness is changed.

Richard Meserve, former chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, said the Three Mile Island nuclear disaster in 1979 drastically changed the established view in the United States that the most important thing in nuclear plants was their design. This idea led to the belief that nuclear reactors are safe as long as they are new.

In the United States, nuclear plant operators have formed the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations (INPO), in which member companies evaluate each other's safety measures. The president of the company whose nuclear safety measures are ranked lowest in the INPO's annual meeting is required to submit and explain improvement measures. In other words, INPO members take advantage of their concerns that they could be embarrassed in front of their fellow members to enhance safety measures.

Japanese power suppliers founded a similar organization called the Japan Nuclear Technology Institute, but the body was reorganized into a new entity last year after failing to fulfill its role. The new

organization claims it is aiming to be the Japanese version of the INPO, but has failed to show its specific plan to achieve this goal.

Moreover, individual responsibility for the safety of nuclear plants is far more obscure in Japan than in other countries.

Mike Weightman, head of the U.K. Nuclear Directorate, proposed that the managers of atomic power stations be required to sign documents pledging that their facilities are absolutely safe as a precondition for reactivating idled nuclear reactors. If so, the managers cannot evade their responsibility for any accidents at their plant by claiming that they were strictly abiding by safety regulations.

The three experts agree that what matters is a culture of safety among nuclear plant operators. The LDP is partly responsible for failing to rectify -- and even contributing to flaws in the industry's safety culture as it was in power for decades.

After listening to advice from the three, NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka suggested that idled nuclear reactors should not be reactivated unless the responsibility for safety among power suppliers and individual employees is clarified.

"The safety of nuclear plants in Japan is dissatisfactory in light of the need for individual employees in charge at power suppliers to fulfill their responsibilities to consider the matter and for their management to support their efforts. This is my personal view, but operations at idled nuclear reactors may not be allowed to be resumed unless the nation has confidence in their safety," he said. (By Yuri Aono, Expert Senior Writer)

Customers charged to cover nuke payouts

January 21, 2013

Nuclear plant operators payout amount revealed

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20130121_11.html

NHK has learned that **nuclear power plant operators in Japan have charged users about 90 million dollars a year to cover payouts to local authorities hosting their facilities.**

NHK interviewed 9 power companies about their annual payments since 2008 to prefectures and municipalities hosting nuclear power plants.

The payments have been covered by utilities fees users pay to electric companies. But the details of just how much users are shouldering the cost of such payouts had not been revealed.

The survey has found the annual amount that Kansai Electric Power Company had been charging users to cover the cost was about 40 million dollar, with Tokyo Electric charging about 22 million dollars.

Kyushu Electric charged about 10 million dollars; Chugoku about 8 million; and Chubu about 4 million.

The central government last year said that it does not consider such donations as an expense, and that it will not allow utilities to charge users to cover them.

Following the government decision, Kansai and Tokyo Electric Companies removed the amounts from their calculations of electric fees last year. Other companies are considering following their suit.

Osaka University Professor Tatsuo Hatta says utilities may be able to find other ways for such payouts. He is calling for further transparency

More cases of "amakudari"

January 21, 2013

2 key industry ministry bureaucrats landed lucrative jobs after retirement

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301210093>

By ATSUSHI KOMORI/ Senior Staff Writer

Two industry ministry officials who played a central role in Japan's nuclear policy at the time of the Fukushima disaster went on to land senior positions at major financial institutions after they retired from public life.

The practice of retired bureaucrats ending up in jobs at organizations or companies that were often once under their jurisdiction is called "amakudari," which translates as "descent from heaven," and has come under severe criticism due to fears it fosters collusion between bureaucrats and private companies.

Kazuo Matsunaga, 60, was formerly vice minister of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, and Tetsuhiro Hosono, 60, served as director-general of the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy.

They held these key posts during the reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant triggered by the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake, which spawned towering tsunami that devastated coastlines of northeastern Japan.

Their re-employment will likely ignite controversy, because even now, more than 150,000 people affected by the disaster have not been able to return to their homes because of high radiation levels and other reasons.

Matsunaga became an adviser at Sompo Japan Insurance Inc. on March 15 last year, and Hosono assumed his new position as an adviser of Mizuho Corporate Bank on May 14, 2012.

Sompo Japan Insurance and Mizuho Corporate Bank have not disclosed the compensation packages for the two men. But generally, amakudari posts are very lucrative.

Matsunaga and Hosono were replaced by then industry minister Banri Kaieda in summer 2011 “to breathe fresh air into the ministry.”

Due to the fact they retired below the official retirement age, Matsunaga and Hosono received more than 10 million yen (\$110,000) more in allowances than that given to those who voluntarily quit their posts.

As for why Matsunaga and Hosono were able to find re-employment, a Sompo Japan Insurance official said, “We hope to get advice on response measures to policy issues,” while an official of Mizuho Corporate Bank said, “We want (Hosono) to advise on general management matters.”

What special allowance?

Contractors fail to pay decontamination workers

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20130120_25.html

NHK has learned that some contractors failed to pay a special allowance to workers who remove radioactive fallout from the Fukushima nuclear accident.

The government pays the risk allowance of 110 dollars per day on top of the daily wage to people who work in places with relatively high levels of radiation.

The government has commissioned major construction companies to carry out the decontamination. But the actual work is performed by their subcontractors.

NHK found that 2 subcontractors hired to work in Tamura City, Fukushima Prefecture, did not pay the allowance.

Several workers say when they started their jobs in mid-2012, they were told they would receive 110 dollars a day with free accommodation and meals. They say their employers did not mention the special allowance.

The workers say that between November and December the subcontractors presented them with a new document about their working conditions.

The allowance was paid on paper, but the daily wage was cut to 67 dollars. Accommodation and meal expenses were deducted from the payment. The workers say the amount they received did not change.

The subcontractors reportedly asked the workers to sign the document as if it were the original one. The employers reportedly admitted that it was a fake.

The workers say their employers apparently tried to conceal the non-payment of the risk allowance.

The 2 subcontractors admitted to NHK that they failed to pay the allowance. But they declined to answer whether they made the new document.

The labor ministry and the Environment Ministry have been looking into the alleged non-payment since November after receiving a tip-off.

The labor ministry says it has found 8 cases of non-payment.

Breach of trust

January 22, 2013

Editorial: Inappropriate decontamination work betrays disaster victims

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130121p2a00m0na005000c.html>

Cases of sloppy government-run decontamination work in areas affected by the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster -- such as letting water used to wash radioactive materials off structures run off into ditches -- have emerged. According to an Environment Ministry report released on Jan. 18, there have been at least five such cases. The ministry has instructed contractors involved in three of the cases to make improvements.

The ministry said there were no instances of malice that violated the Act on Special Measures concerning the Handling of Pollution by Radioactive Materials. However, what did take place is undoubtedly a breach of trust of the local residents who are longing to return to their homes as soon as possible. Ministry officials are set to reinforce on-site oversight and supervision, and have indicated government intentions to cancel contracts in the case of such sloppy work in the future. Such measures should promptly be implemented.

All those involved must keep in mind that if inappropriate decontamination work takes place repeatedly, people's confidence in decontamination work will wane, pushing Fukushima's recovery even further off into the future.

Government-run decontamination is being undertaken in special decontamination zones, spanning 11 municipalities across the prefecture, whose residents are still in evacuation. Under current plans, decontamination where radiation levels are 50 millisieverts or lower per year -- for residences, farmland, roads, and forests within about 20 meters from residential areas -- is set to be completed by the end of fiscal 2013.

Such large-scale decontamination is unprecedented worldwide. In nine municipalities for which decontamination plans have been worked out, more than 20,000 hectares of land are subject to decontamination. The cost will be staggering; in just four municipalities including Tamura, for which the Environment Ministry has already commissioned decontamination work for the current fiscal year, the cost comes out to approximately 34 billion yen.

Although an advance decontamination model project confirmed the effectiveness of the work to a certain extent, differences between the model and actual decontamination conditions mean that the national government, contractors and workers are all fumbling through the process, according to officials at an Environment Ministry division in charge of proper implementation of decontamination methods.

One decontamination worker previously told the Mainichi Shimbun, "In reality, decontamination hasn't been very effective. From our point of view, it's a waste of tax funds." Residents have been ordered to evacuate from areas where decontamination work is being conducted, which means they cannot keep an eye on what's taking place. It's likely there have been more than five cases of inappropriate decontamination.

To prevent a reoccurrence, it will be necessary not only to reinforce oversight, but to think about the pain of the people who have been driven from their homes.

Some residents harbor deep-seated distrust toward the effectiveness of decontamination efforts injected with massive funds, and are calling instead for more support for evacuees and toward relocation.

In response to such voices, the government must **secure transparency** regarding the progress of decontamination efforts, while also gathering in-depth data on radiation levels based on location and methods to understand the efficacy and limitations of decontamination work. Forest decontamination, which has yet to be started for the most part, is another major challenge we must confront.

TEPCO still cover its tracks after almost 2 years

Videos show crisis at Fukushima nuclear plant 2 weeks after tsunami

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301240077>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Confusion spread, tempers flared and disaster loomed at two reactors of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, nearly two weeks after the crisis started in March 2011, footage of the plant operator's teleconferences showed.

At issue were whether to vent the No. 1 reactor after its internal pressure neared the limit and how to keep the temperature in the No. 5 reactor under 100 degrees.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. on Jan. 23 released to reporters 312 hours of videos of teleconferences between March 23 and 30 and April 6 and 12, 2011.

At 11:20 a.m. on March 23, 2011, Masao Yoshida, then chief of the Fukushima No. 1 plant, asked the Tokyo head office to confirm procedures for venting a containment vessel.

"It will be an extremely major issue, and we need to coordinate with the head office," Yoshida said.

At that time, pressure at the No. 1 reactor was climbing to the maximum level the reactor was designed to withstand. The pressure did not fall until the night of March 24.

At 8:58 p.m. on March 23, another serious problem was revealed when a report said temperature could rise again in the No. 5 reactor. The temperature had fallen below 100 degrees three days earlier.

A cooling system stopped working when its power was being switched from a temporary-use diesel generator to a permanent outside source.

"Something may be wrong with a motor or a power source of a pump," an official said. "We are trying to determine the cause."

If such temperatures rise above 100 degrees, the pressure and water levels in the reactor must be re-adjusted.

Yoshida was furious because he had not received the report immediately.

"This is a very, very important issue," Yoshida said. "If there is something abnormal, tell us without delay. It is the most basic of basic actions."

At a meeting in the morning of March 24, another report said the No. 5 reactor would be repaired by noon. But the repairs were not completed until past 4 p.m.

"The pump rotated at 4:14 p.m.," an official said. "Water temperature remains low at 99 degrees."

The videos also showed that TEPCO officials failed to take effective measures for two weeks after receiving a report that highly radioactive water could be flowing into an ordinary drain at the plant.

Plant officials reported to the Tokyo head office on March 25 that water was apparently flowing out of the No. 2 reactor building via a hatch for large equipment.

Officials detected radiation levels of 40 millisieverts per hour, four times higher than surrounding areas. But traces of water were again found at the same location 13 days later. They appeared to show that water went through the hatch and fell into the drain.

The water had almost all evaporated, but radiation levels were 50 millisieverts per hour.

A plant official said the space under the hatch's door would be sealed with concrete or through other measures the following day.

In the videos released on Jan. 23, TEPCO beeped out audio in 1,133 cases and blurred images in 347 cases.

The videos released by TEPCO so far cover the initial one month after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami crippled the nuclear plant on March 11, 2011.

TEPCO said it is considering whether to release videos for the following period.
(This article was compiled from reports by Takashi Sugimoto and Toshihiro Okuyama.)

Just wait for the snow to melt

January 25, 2013

Heavy snow forcing some illegal layoffs of decontamination workers

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301250084>

Heavier seasonal snowfall than usual is disrupting cleanup and decontamination efforts around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, forcing some subcontractors to illegally lay off workers while the work is suspended.

The labor ministry says it will investigate the practice of laying off these workers without proper notice or payment of wages.

In mid-January, most of Fukushima Prefecture experienced severe snowfall. Fukushima city recorded 18 centimeters of snow on Jan. 14 and the accumulation measured 41 cm five days later, according to the Fukushima Local Meteorological Observatory. The average snow depth around mid-January is 5 cm.

The Environment Ministry started decontamination efforts in four municipalities last summer and hopes the work for this fiscal year, worth 34.2 billion yen (\$378 million), will be concluded by the end of March. But the schedule could be delayed due to the weather.

The Environment Ministry and local governments said most of the work has been disrupted in Tamura city, Iitate village and Kawauchi village among the four municipalities. In Naraha town, a relatively small amount of snow recorded there only forced the disruption of four days of work, officials said.

The ministry and local governments said workers continue hauling bags of potentially radioactive soil, branches and leaves collected through decontamination work, but it is difficult for crews to clear the snow and collect more debris in the mountains. Residential areas have many places where snow has frozen and turned to ice, and water used for cleaning would also collect and freeze.

A full resumption of operations is projected to begin in March or even later, depending on the weather.

Under the harsh winter conditions, some subcontractors have already let workers go.

The Labor Standards Law stipulates that employers must inform employees of their dismissal at least 30 days in advance or must pay them the equivalent of at least 30 days of their average wages.

However, the companies--which cannot receive enough payments to cover the labor costs from their general contractors while the operations are suspended--violated the law. And they are believed to be planning to rehire the workers when the cleanup and decontamination effort is restarted.

A worker in his 60s said when he submitted his request for payment on Jan. 21, he was told that his employment would be discontinued because no work could be done due to the snow. He said the firm told him it would recruit workers again, after the snow melts. He said about 60 people lost their jobs without any compensation.

In the case of another worker in his 50s, he said the manager at the subcontractor told dozens of employees on Jan. 21 that their work would conclude at the end of the month, and the firm wanted them to return when the operation resumes in March. He said there was nothing said on 30 days of wages to be paid.

The Environment Ministry isn't saying much on the worker complaints.

"We are closely watching the effects of the snow, but we have yet to acknowledge there is a wage problem," a ministry official said.

The general contractors involved in the decontamination work said they do not comment on individual cases.

(This article was written by Toshio Tada and Miki Aoki.)

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Beware ! 60,000 potential terrorists in Japanese plants

January 27, 2013

Background checks planned for N-workers

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130126003221.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

The Nuclear Regulation Authority will strengthen counterterrorism measures at the nation's nuclear facilities and will seek mandatory background checks for workers at such facilities to that end, according to informed sources.

The authority will launch an expert study panel next month tasked with suggesting improvements in security at nuclear facilities.

Under the NRA's plan, people applying to work at nuclear facilities would be required to undergo background checks for such things as criminal records to prevent possible collaboration with terrorists.

Japan is the only developed country with nuclear power plants that has not established a counterterrorism program to protect its nuclear facilities, the sources said.

The NRA plans to prepare a rough draft of its nuclear counterterrorism plans in time for the Nuclear Security Summit to be held in the Netherlands in March next year.

Risks at the nation's nuclear facilities include radiation leaks if they should be attacked and theft of nuclear materials and technology that could be diverted to the production of nuclear weapons.

There are also concerns that employees with access to classified information such as locations of facilities could pose a security risk.

Background checks have been in place for workers at nuclear facilities in Europe and the United States for more than 10 years.

Those checks cover such things as criminal records, debts and alcohol or drug dependence. The checks are carefully analyzed to determine if the applicant's problems could be exploited by terrorists.

The NRA's expert panel plans to discuss concrete measures for the counterterrorism system, including the division of roles between the government and operators of facilities.

In Japan, the government and operators of nuclear facilities have been reluctant to put such a system in place partly out of concerns over invasion of privacy. Presently, applicants only have to produce a driver's license or other specified forms of identification.

The outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on March 11, 2011, highlighted the dangers of not having a more rigorous system in place when 10 employees working to bring the crisis under control at the plant went missing. [??????]

The International Atomic Energy Agency recommended background checks for nuclear workers in all countries in 1999 and 2011.

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Information control needed

By Sho Funakoshi / Yomiuri Shimbun Staff Writer

The Japanese government once considered adopting background checks for employees at nuclear facilities after the 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States. However, the plan was shelved due to fear of criticism that the checks would constitute invasion of privacy.

However, the recent Algeria hostage crisis showed that taking measures to prevent insiders from abetting terrorism is imperative.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority, which is scrutinizing safety standards at nuclear facilities with lessons learned from the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in mind, should urgently close security holes to meet international standards.

However, the NRA faces a difficult task.

According to a survey by the Japan Nuclear Energy Safety Organization, more than 60,000 workers enter radiation control areas near nuclear reactors nationwide every year.

It is essential to make a system that facilitates the collection and storage of background information. In the United States, collected information is digitized into a database for use in subsequent investigations.

It is also critically important to ensure the security of personal information such as criminal records and applicants' debts.

Protecting information against cyberterrorism at public offices is also important, as are measures against use of the information unrelated to terrorism by business operators who may want to justify layoffs or use it for other purposes.

TEPCO's unreasonable request to Gov't

January 26, 2013

Tokyo Gov. Inose balks at TEPCO demand for hefty cancellation charge

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130126p2g00m0dm003000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Gov. Naoki Inose balked Friday at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s demand that the local government pay a hefty charge to cancel its contract to sell the utility electricity generated by government-owned facilities.

Inose indicated that the metropolitan government, which intends to select a buyer through competitive bidding, is not planning to pay a sum of around 5.18 billion yen requested by TEPCO.

The company is seeking the amount to cover the costs it will incur in switching to a different supplier as well as for having to dip into reserves set aside from electricity sales for renovating power-generating facilities, according to the government.

A TEPCO official said of the cancellation charge, "It's necessary for the metropolitan government to shoulder it in order not to impact our users."

At a news conference, Inose likened TEPCO's action to "a bar ripping off a customer" and said it was "not reasonable."

In October, the metropolitan government revised an ordinance to enable it to sell power generated by its hydro power stations to power suppliers other than TEPCO. Before the revision, the government notified TEPCO about its intention to cancel the contract -- valid until 2019 -- at the end of this March.

The government is planning to start preparing for a competitive bid to search for a new buyer by the end of this month. "We can hold a bid without TEPCO's consent," a government official said. "We would like to conduct negotiations concurrently for the cancellation."

The metropolitan government has three hydro power stations and generated around 1 billion yen in revenue for power sales to TEPCO in fiscal 2011.

Before the ordinance change, TEPCO was the only entity to which the government could sell power.

A total of 26 local governments including Tokyo operated power generation facilities at 296 locations and produced a maximum 2,460 megawatt of power as of April 2010, according to the Public Electric Utility Enterpriser's Forum.

Secret cable - Fukushima disaster as a series in the Asahi

January 28, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP (1): U.S. frustrated with Japan's initial response to Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301280006>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Editor's note: This is the first part of a series that has run in the past under the overall title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the differences between Japan and the United States in dealing with the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Between late on March 14, 2011, and early the next morning, a top secret diplomatic cable arrived at the Foreign Ministry.

Sent three days after the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the document detailed the major concerns that Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, had voiced to Japan's ambassador to the United States, Ichiro Fujisaki. At the time, the Japanese government had still not decided to use Self-Defense Force helicopters to dump water into the crippled nuclear plant.

Fujisaki, 65, sent the cable electronically under the highest level of confidentiality. Information included on the cable indicated which government agencies had the necessary clearance to read it and how long the

document was to be kept. When it was printed, watermarks on the document identified the government agency it was intended for as well as the document number.

Because civil servants can face criminal charges for disclosing state secrets, no government source would publicly admit the cable existed.

Even after Fujisaki stepped down as ambassador in November last year, he denied the existence of such a cable when questioned by The Asahi Shimbun. And although Naoto Kan as prime minister at the time would have seen the cable, he said, "I do not remember" when asked about it.

However, a number of individuals who actually read the cable confirmed the contents of the document, which outlined the general frustration the United States felt over the inaction of the Japanese government. Mullen frequently visited the White House for direct meetings with U.S. President Barack Obama. The cable depicts Mullen as raising serious doubts about how Japan was dealing with the situation because the overall view in Washington was that the response to the accident was being left in the hands of Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the Fukushima plant.

On the morning of March 14, 2011, an explosion occurred at the No. 3 reactor following a similar explosion days earlier at the No. 1 reactor. In the afternoon, core pressure at the No. 2 reactor also began to rise as its cooling functions deteriorated.

However, Mullen's major concern was with the situation at the No. 4 reactor. He is reported as saying that the SDF should be used to cool the reactors.

"The U.S. military believes the No. 4 reactor is in danger. It feels every step should be taken to cool the reactor, including using the SDF," the cable said.

The No. 4 reactor had 1,535 nuclear fuel rods in its storage pool, a much greater number than the other three reactors. A meltdown would occur once the pool was empty of water, releasing huge volumes of radiation into the atmosphere and affecting not just Fukushima, but potentially all of Japan.

"The United States has made various preparations to deal with the nuclear accident. The president is also very concerned," the cable went on to say.

By invoking the White House, Mullen impressed upon Japanese Embassy officials that not just the U.S. military but the entire U.S. government was worried about how the situation was developing.

The Foreign Ministry distributed the cable to Kan and other central government ministries, with limits on who could access it.

A few hours after the cable reached Tokyo, at about 6 a.m. on March 15, Mullen's fear--an explosion at the No. 4 reactor--materialized. The pressure gauge at the No. 2 reactor also showed abnormal readings.

At 7 a.m., a situation arose which the U.S. military is still keeping quiet about.

At Yokosuka Naval Base, which lies about 300 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, alarms went off indicating an increase in radiation levels. All women and children on the base were immediately ordered to evacuate.

Because the U.S. Navy has nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, it has strict safety standards for radiation levels. The alarm was likely triggered by radiation that had reached the base from Fukushima.

U.S. government officials who were notified became very concerned because of the possibility that the Yokosuka Naval Base, considered of major strategic importance in East Asia, would become inoperable if the situation at the Fukushima plant worsened.

Such developments, coupled with Japan's failure to indicate it was dealing seriously with the situation, led Washington to take matters into its own hands.

(This article was written by Hiroyoshi Itabashi and Hidefumi Nogami.)

Asahi - follow-up: Japan and US worlds apart

January 30, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP (2): U.S. officials feared for loved ones still in Japan

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301300006>

By HIDEFUMI NOGAMI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the second part of a series that has run in the past under the overall title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the differences between Japan and the United States in dealing with the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

One day after the top-secret diplomatic cable was sent from the Japanese Embassy in Washington to the Foreign Ministry, at 1:30 a.m. on March 16, 2011, U.S. Eastern Standard Time, a teleconference was hosted by the U.S. State Department. It was the afternoon of March 16 in Japan.

Among the 60 or so participants were officials of U.S. federal government departments, including the Defense Department, as well as the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo.

The theme of the meeting was the safety of U.S. troops and citizens living in Japan.

The meeting was held as events in the No. 1 to No. 3 reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant were spiraling out of control and as a report surfaced that Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the plant, had asked that its workers be allowed to evacuate and, in effect, abandon the No. 4 reactor.

Because the storage pool at the No. 4 reactor contained a large number of nuclear fuel rods, everyone taking part in the conference realized they faced issues that called for serious discussions.

The conference was chaired by Kurt Campbell, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs. A high-ranking military officer began the discussions by pointing out that there was no guarantee there was no danger involved in the Fukushima situation.

The view of the commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet was also expressed by an associate who said no officer wanted a subordinate exposed to radiation.

The previous day, the U.S. Navy distributed a memo to the U.S. State and Defense departments that outlined its forecast for how the accident would evolve. The memo said there was a danger of Tokyo being contaminated with highly radioactive materials if the storage pool at the No. 4 reactor emptied of water and the nuclear fuel began a reaction.

The U.S. Navy had strict safety standards for radiation as well as a deep well of knowledge. That background gave the Navy's memo additional weight.

As the discussion continued, one phrase was repeatedly uttered, "While we can."

Everyone who used it realized that time was of the essence and that whatever could be done should be carried out quickly before further disaster developed.

Agreement was reached on one measure that could be implemented--immediately evacuating all U.S. citizens living near Tokyo, including members of the U.S. military.

The sense of crisis held by those in Washington was magnified by their view that the Japanese government was not taking decisive action. Participants in the teleconference representing the U.S. Embassy as well as the

U.S. military based in Japan were especially aware of the dangers facing their loved ones who were still in Japan.

The meeting demonstrated the huge gap that existed between the Japanese government, which only considered the Fukushima nuclear accident as an internal TEPCO matter, and the U.S. government, which had reached the conclusion that there was the possibility of a major disaster that could spread to a global scale.

By HIDEFUMI NOGAMI/ Staff Writer

Amateurish indeed

January 29, 2013

Amateur doctor

Posted by **Mochizuki**

<http://fukushima-diary.com/2013/01/column-amateur-doctor/>

Tepco tried to open a hole to look inside of the torus room of reactor2.

Torus room is where S/C is located. S/C is the coolant facility of nuclear reactor shaped like a donut.

They assume Reactor2 had S/C damaged after 311, so it is important to look into torus room.

Fractured nuclear fuel might be in it.

After all, Tepco failed in it. They commented, "Pipes and gratings were in the way, where they shouldn't have been. It's different from the map." (cf, [Unanticipated] Tepco failed in investigating the torus room of reactor2 "Different from the map" [Link])

The map was probably made in 60s or 70s. Tepco hasn't even announced when it was made.

Anyway, it turned out that Tepco doesn't even understand the inside of the reactors.

Nuclear was called "dream technology". Still some people believe so. and since 311, Tepco has been commenting everything was under control, they have the clearest grasp of the situation.

Actually they do not know anything.

Tepco is like a driver. They have the basic technic to drive but they don't know the mechanism of engine, they don't know how to dismantle it.

It is estimated that decommissioning of Fukushima plant takes more 38 years. This is an estimate of the government so it may take even longer.

Probably Tepco should not be in charge of decommissioning. They don't even know the details of the inside of the torus room. Financially and technically, it is obvious that Tepco can't handle it.

Since the very beginning of 311, it has been obvious that Tepco can't handle everything only by themselves.

It seems like they have to hide something so they are not forward in asking for more international help.

The destiny of the entire world is in the hand of the amateur driver, Tepco.

US angry at Japanese (lack of) reaction

February 1, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP (3): Japanese ambassador felt something not right before State Department meeting

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302010004>

By HIDEFUMI NOGAMI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the third part of a series that has run in the past under the overall title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the differences between Japan and the United States in dealing with the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

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The consensus that was developing in the teleconference that began at 1:30 a.m. on March 16, 2011, U.S. Eastern Standard Time, demonstrated the extent to which the U.S. government was willing to take a bold step because it called for immediately evacuating all U.S. citizens living in Japan, including members of the U.S. military.

That would, of course, mean that Washington was prepared for a situation in which the U.S. military had no presence in Japan.

However, the evacuation of the military would require a decision by U.S. President Barack Obama. Because the teleconference ended at 2:30 a.m. on March 16, there was still some time before the White House would begin making any move.

A special team was assembled at the State Department and various scenarios drawn up for any possible evacuation.

It was already the afternoon of March 16 in Japan.

About 90,000 Americans live in and around the Tokyo area. If an estimate of only a few hours was made for the time it would take for radioactive materials to reach the atmosphere above Tokyo, it would be extremely difficult to evacuate all of those Americans.

As a first step, two private passenger jets each were chartered at Haneda and Narita airports.

That was a time when Self-Defense Forces helicopters were trying to dump water on the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant to cool down overheating reactors. However, high radiation levels led to a scrapping of the plan on March 16. The decision had been made to make another attempt on March 17.

As dawn broke in Washington, calculations from a supercomputer reached the desk of Kurt Campbell, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission and Energy Department had calculated the possible spread of radioactive materials based on weather information. The result of the calculation was that even in a worst-case scenario, Tokyo would likely be spared from any radioactive fallout.

After discussing the matter with White House officials, Campbell reached the conclusion that the calculations meant an immediate evacuation from Tokyo was no longer necessary.

Instead, the U.S. government came up with its own proposal for how to respond to the Fukushima nuclear accident.

One measure would be to issue an evacuation advisory to all U.S. citizens living within a 50-mile (80-kilometer) radius of the Fukushima plant. The other was to allow family members of U.S. government workers to voluntarily evacuate from Japan.

Those measures were put together while referring to procedures that would be followed should a similar accident occur in the United States as well as based on the opinions of experts. The evacuation area was much wider than the 20-kilometer radius implemented by the Japanese government.

Campbell decided to inform Japanese officials about the U.S. decision. He also felt there was something else he had to pass on--the **"anger" felt toward the Japanese government.**

At about 8 a.m. on March 16 in Washington, Japanese Ambassador Ichiro Fujisaki was called by Campbell to come to his office. Fujisaki headed toward the State Department with three embassy officials.

At the entrance to the State Department, staff members were waiting to hold open the elevator door. "There is something different about the mood here today," Fujisaki whispered.

The Japanese officials were kept waiting for a while in front of Campbell's office.

Profiteering in disaster areas

February 1, 2013

Police struggle to prevent gangsters from profiting in disaster areas

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302010083>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Police are trying to prevent gangsters from profiting on the many rebuilding projects in the Tohoku region, but the huge demand for workers is making it difficult to keep yakuza out of the disaster areas. A number of gang-related arrests have been made, and workers and companies are being checked for ties to crime syndicates. Yet officials suspect mob involvement is rife in areas still recovering from the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster.

"Gangs are capitalizing on the post-quake labor shortage," an official of the Iwate prefectural police said. Miyagi prefectural police say they have been flooded with inquiries from local governments on whether businesses planning to take part in disaster-related public works projects are connected to gangs.

The number of such inquires has doubled since the disasters struck on March 11, 2011, due to the sharp increase in public works projects.

Many businesses from outside Miyagi Prefecture have approached the Miyagi prefectural government seeking involvement in the reconstruction projects.

Miyagi police, at the request of prefectural government officials, researched the companies and identified some with gang ties. Those companies were not hired by the prefectural government.

However, a police official said the yakuza-related companies that police can identify are "just the tip of the iceberg."

Police suspect that crime syndicates are even pretending to expel members so that they can be sent to the disaster areas disguised as honest volunteer workers.

The gangs' members can befriend residents, seek information on money-making schemes and set up a foothold for their organizations to conduct business, according to police.

At least two gangsters were arrested in 2011 on suspicion of sending laborers to construction sites in Iwate Prefecture. The Worker Dispatch Law prohibits the use of staffing services for construction projects.

One of the suspects is a senior member of a gang affiliated with the Sumiyoshi-kai crime syndicate. He was arrested in July in connection with temporary housing construction projects in Otsuchi.

The other suspect is a member of a gang affiliated with the Yamaguchi-gumi. He was arrested in October over a project to repair a quake-damaged commercial facility in Kitakami.

The laborers in those two cases allegedly received only part of their wages, indicating that the gangsters had siphoned off the remainder, according to police sources.

Gangs are also targeting projects related to the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

On Jan. 31, a senior member of a gang affiliated with the Sumiyoshi-kai was arrested on suspicion of sending laborers to a decontamination project in Date, Fukushima Prefecture, in November.

It was the first arrest of a gangster over suspected involvement in a project to remove radioactive substances in areas around the Fukushima plant.

The suspect did not have a license for staffing services. He was also arrested earlier in January on suspicion of sending laborers to construction projects.

“We check lists of laborers to see whether they have ties with anti-social forces,” a Date official said, using the euphemism for crime syndicates. “But it requires too much effort to find out who dispatched those laborers.”

An official of a company based in Fukushima city and involved in decontamination work expressed concerns that gang-tied laborers could sneak into its work force because businesses are all shorthanded

January 31, 2013

Gangster illegally hired workers for decontamination projects

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301310080>

By KENJI OGATA/ Senior Staff Writer

Criminal organizations are cashing in on the disaster that shook Japan nearly two years ago by sinking their claws into all aspects of recovery operations to skim off handsome profits.

Police have just turned up an instance of a gang member brazenly providing laborers to help clean up contaminated areas in Fukushima Prefecture, and pocketing part of their wages.

The Yamagata prefectural police said 40-year-old Yoshinori Arai broke the law because he did not have a license to dispatch day laborers.

Police said Arai, a resident of Higashine, Yamagata Prefecture, is a top member of a yakuza gang affiliated with leading crime syndicate Sumiyoshi-Kai. He was arrested Jan. 31.

According to an investigative source, Arai dispatched three day laborers to a Yamagata Prefecture subcontractor doing decontamination work in Date on 10 occasions in November. Their tasks included weeding.

It also emerged that the workers took home only half of less than 20,000 yen (\$220) in salary a day-- suggesting that the difference was pocketed by Arai and his mob associates.

Arai was taken into custody earlier this month for a similar offense. Police said he dispatched two laborers to assist in the construction of temporary housing.

“The recovery operations involve a lot of money, so they are a godsend for gangs that have trouble making money due to a police crackdown on gang activities,” a gang insider said.

The man said these groups have been involved in the demolition of buildings and the disposal of waste in devastated areas. He also said some of them have been working as bouncers for restaurants and bars in the Tohoku region by offering lower rates than those demanded by local gangs.

Law enforcement authorities have been on alert against organized crime groups cashing in on recovery operations after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake that spawned towering tsunami and triggered the nuclear disaster.

Police have detected 37 cases so far, but this is the first arrest over a gang member's suspected involvement in decontamination work.

Exchange of pleasantries

February 2, 2013

Senior NRA official axed over data leak

Secretariat exec slipped Tsuruga report to Japan Atomic Power

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/02/02/national/senior-nra-official-axed-over-data-leak/#.UQ0r1vL1tEs>

Nuclear regulator sacked for leaking information to nuclear operator

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130202p2g00m0dm013000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority said Friday that it sacked a senior official of its secretariat for having an inappropriate exchange with officials of a nuclear power plant operator, noting that his action could have undermined the newly-launched organization's transparency and neutrality. According to the NRA, the 54-year-old official, Tetsuo Nayuki, handed over to Japan Atomic Power Co. on Jan. 22 a draft assessment report on geologic faults running beneath the firm's nuclear complex in western Japan, just about a week before the draft was scheduled to be made public by an NRA-appointed panel. The NRA said that the leaked information was not necessarily confidential because it was a summary of discussions that had been open to public, but the incident is still a blow to the NRA, which was launched in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster to restore public confidence in regulations.

"It is extremely regrettable that a senior official did such a thing. It was a thoughtless act, because we should be careful especially when having contacts with parties subject to regulations and should be transparent in the exchanges," NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka was quoted as saying by spokesman Hideka Morimoto.

The NRA, launched in September last year, was endowed with greater independence than the former nuclear safety agency in a bid to prevent close relations developing between regulators and promoters of atomic power, something said to have caused safety issues to be neglected.

Other than in an emergency, the NRA does not allow its staff to meet alone with officials of nuclear power plant operators so as to ensure transparency.

But Nayuki met with Japan Atomic Power officials alone and "carelessly" handed over the draft report, Morimoto told a press conference. The meeting came to light because Nayuki himself reported the matter the next day.

The draft report, officially disclosed Monday, said that a fault running directly underneath a reactor at Tsuruga plant is likely to be active -- a judgment Japan Atomic Power opposes and that could force the operator to scrap the unit.

Japan Atomic Power, which separately held a press conference Friday, said the company was eager to have an opportunity to speak to the members of the panel discussing the issue before the report is finalized.

"We told (Nayuki) on Dec. 21 that if we are given a chance to express our opinions about the draft report during the panel meeting, we want to learn the content in advance so that we can make an accurate counterargument instantly," a company official said.

Both Morimoto and Japan Atomic Power denied that Nayuki received any financial reward or gifts in exchange for handing over the report. The plant operator also said there was no "lobbying" based on the information it gained.

The panel members basically agreed on the content of the draft report on Monday, but it was not finalized. The panel also decided to listen to outside experts and opinions from Japan Atomic Power.

Effective Friday, the NRA reprimanded Nayuki and transferred him to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, where he originally came from.

Nuclear watchdog in hot water over leaked report to Tsuruga plant operator

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302020068>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A senior official of the Nuclear Regulation Authority secretariat was removed for leaking a draft report by an expert panel on seismic activity at the site of the Tsuruga nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture to Japan Atomic Power Co., operator of the facility.

Tetsuo Nayuki, 54, director-general for nuclear regulation policy, received an official reprimand Feb. 1 and was transferred to his old post at the science and technology ministry, the watchdog body said.

The NRA said Nayuki met with three officials of Japan Atomic Power, including one of its managing directors, Taiki Ichimura, in the NRA office building on Jan. 22 and handed copies of the draft report, which had yet to be released to the public, to those present.

The 30-minute meeting started around 3 p.m. It had been requested by Japan Atomic Power, and Nayuki met with the three officials alone, in violation of an NRA bylaw that requires at least two NRA officials to be present during meetings with power utility officials unless such gatherings are held purely to exchange pleasantries.

According to the NRA, Japan Atomic Power officials had put out feelers to get a copy of the draft report. Nayuki initially thought that providing one would help ensure more in-depth discussions at assessment meetings. But he had second thoughts, and on Jan. 23 acknowledged to colleagues what he had done.

The NRA stripped him of his duties by the end of that day.

"The document was a summary of discussions during open-door meetings of an expert panel, and contained no confidential information," NRA Deputy Secretary-General Hideka Morimoto told a news conference on Feb. 1. "But he acted extremely unwisely, because neutrality was an important part of his duties."

The NRA expert panel was tasked with assessing the seismic activity of fault lines beneath the premises of the Tsuruga nuclear plant. On Jan. 28, it endorsed a draft report saying that one of the faults, which runs directly beneath one reactor building, was likely active and could affect the safety of the complex in the event of an earthquake.

The NRA said the document handed to Japan Atomic Power was not the same as the final version presented to the Jan. 28 meeting. It also said that Nayuki, who had been put in charge of earthquakes and tsunami issues, was authorized to modify text in the draft but did not do so.

The latest revelation would seem to suggest that a cozy relationship still exists with power utilities. The NRA was only set up last September.

There has been intense criticism of the so-called nuclear village grouping bureaucrats, industry and academics in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011, especially in light of official government policy to promote nuclear energy.

The NRA was established to end that perception. It is defined as an independent body by Article 3 of the National Government Organization Law, in the same category as the Japan Fair Trade Commission.

As such, the regulatory functions of the industry ministry, which promotes the use of atomic energy, were spun off.

To ensure transparency, the NRA instituted a bylaw on protocol for meetings with power industry officials. It also requires that a record of such talks be kept.

The date, duration, names of those attending and a summary of discussions are posted on the NRA website for anybody to view.

But the NRA decided to exempt meetings to exchange pleasantries to help Nayuki ease into his job and build up a relationship with Japan Atomic Power.

Morimoto said he thought the provision was too vague to be properly enforced.

"The distinction between visits to exchange pleasantries and substantial meetings is not always clear," he told the Feb. 1 news conference.

Japan Atomic Power officials met Nayuki on five occasions in December and January. The utility held a news conference of rebuttal immediately after the draft report was released on Jan. 28.

"We have asked (NRA officials) to let us know in advance about what (the draft report) says, but we have never applied pressure of any sort," a Japan Atomic Power representative said.

Experts who had never been involved in safety screenings for nuclear reactors were called in to conduct on-site surveys at the Tsuruga nuclear plant and compile the draft report. They concluded the fault line in question was "likely active," a clear departure from the stance of the former Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, the NRA's predecessor.

That agency never reached a conclusion on the seismic risks posed by the fault line, although the problem had long been pointed out.

"We have been doing our best to draw up a trustworthy report," said Yasuhiro Suzuki, a professor of active fault studies at Nagoya University who served on the expert panel. "It is embarrassing that an official of the NRA secretariat acted in a way that could arouse questions about that trustworthiness."

Officials at a nuclear regulation office in Tsuruga, which reports to the NRA, also were clearly embarrassed.

"It is regrettable that this problem has occurred just as we were trying to regain confidence in nuclear power administration," said one employee.

"We, at the forefront, will be the most affected," said another. "Local residents may look at us with distrustful eyes."

Harumi Kondaiji, an anti-nuclear activist in the Tsuruga city assembly, a body that is dominated by proponents of atomic energy, said she thought the revelation symbolized a revival of the "nuclear village."

"That's no different from the former Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan," said Kondaiji, 62, referring to another predecessor of the NRA.

Tsuruga Mayor Kazuharu Kawase issued a statement to decry the development.

"(Nuclear regulators) should not behave in a way that could feed distrust at a time when they are trying to restore public trust," the statement said. "I am concerned about the negative impact on future discussions."

(Jin Nishikawa contributed to this article.)

Checking on nuclear workers

January 31, 2013-02-02

Japan to consider background checks for nuke plant workers

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301310069>

By JIN NISHIKAWA/ Staff Writer

The Nuclear Regulation Authority said Jan. 30 it may introduce mandatory background checks for workers at nuclear power plants as a way to prevent terrorist attacks.

The NRA plans to set up a panel of outside experts in February to consider this and other steps to shore up anti-terrorism measures at nuclear facilities.

The background checks will be conducted on workers employed by power utilities and their partner businesses who would be in a position to learn confidential information or enter key facilities at nuclear plants and other similar establishments. Workers will be screened for any criminal history, as well as for debt, drug addiction or other personal information terrorists could use to extort information from them. Japan is the only major nation using nuclear power that has not introduced a similar system. The International Atomic Energy Agency recommended in 1999 that power utilities carry out background checks on their nuclear plant workers, and Japan's industry ministry considered introducing such checks in 2005 but ended up shelving the plan.

The IAEA went on to recommend in 2011 that governments institute background checks on nuclear plant workers. Following the recommendation, an expert panel of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission compiled a report in March 2012 to call on the government to introduce such a system.

The Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami destroyed emergency power sources and transmission lines at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011, highlighting the vulnerability of nuclear plants to potential terrorist attacks.

It was learned following the Fukushima nuclear disaster that some nuclear plant workers who had been employed by subcontractors could not be identified.

Madarame questioned

February 4, 2013

Prosecutors grill nuclear safety chief over Fukushima

AFP-JJI

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/02/04/national/prosecutors-grill-nuclear-safety-chief-over-fukushima/#.UQ6LP_L1tEs

In a possible prelude to criminal charges, prosecutors have questioned Haruki Madarame, former chief of the now-dissolved Nuclear Safety Commission, about delays in announcing radiation fallout data when the Fukushima crisis began and the failure to protect power plants against tsunami, news reports said Sunday.

Madarame was responsible for giving the government technical advice on the crisis, NHK quoted sources as saying. He appeared voluntarily for questioning and was apparently asked to explain how he dealt with the disaster, the public broadcaster said.

Fukushima residents have filed a criminal complaint with prosecutors against Madarame on suspicion of professional negligence that resulted in deaths and injuries.

The complaint alleges that Madarame was responsible for delaying the public release of computerized projections that showed how radioactive fallout from the meltdowns might spread, the NHK report said.

It also reportedly faults him for failing to take the steps necessary to shield the plant against the tsunami that triggered the meltdowns in the first place.

NHK said prosecutors have also questioned executives of plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co., including former Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata, but expert observers say it was far from clear if any individuals could be charged over the disaster, which tainted wide swaths of the agriculturally productive prefecture.

A report last July by a Diet investigation panel said Fukushima was a man-made disaster caused by Japan's culture of "reflexive obedience." Tepco has admitted it played down known tsunami risks for fear of the political, financial and reputational damage.

Fukushima Directorate General to ease recovery

February 3, 2013

New umbrella body gets to work on Fukushima's postdisaster recovery

JJI

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/02/03/national/new-umbrella-body-gets-to-work-on-fukushimas-postdisaster-recovery/#.UQ4le_L1tEs

FUKUSHIMA – An umbrella body to help Fukushima Prefecture recover from the 2011 quake, tsunami and nuclear triple whammy began its first day of work Saturday, following its official launch the day before.

The Fukushima Directorate General, based in the prefectural capital, the city of Fukushima, is “aimed at speeding up local recovery based on the standpoint of the prefecture’s residents,” postdisaster reconstruction minister Takumi Nemoto told a meeting of senior officials.

“We will push forward with Fukushima’s recovery with two headquarters,” Nemoto said, referring to the directorate general and a new office set up within the Reconstruction Agency in Tokyo to boost reconstruction efforts.

The umbrella body, designed to make decision-making more comprehensive, will control Reconstruction Agency and Environment Ministry units based in Fukushima Prefecture, as well as the central government’s local headquarters for overseeing recovery work following the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant’s three core meltdowns in March 2011.

The directorate general, with a staff of around 60, is headed by Nemoto. Former vice reconstruction minister Yukiyoshi Minehisa serves as its secretary general.

Rebuilding Fukushima, however, has proven an uphill battle so far and an internal affairs ministry report released last month showed no letup in the prefecture’s population outflow

The Yomiuri on Nayuki's discharge

February 3, 2013

N-safety official fired over leak

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130202003272.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

The Nuclear Regulation Authority has dismissed a senior official of its secretariat because he gave a copy of a report about possible earthquake faults at a nuclear power plant to executives of the company operating the plant.

Tetsuo Nayuki, a director general of the Secretariat of the NRA, gave the document to executives of Japan Atomic Power Co. before its official release, according to the NRA.

The report is about the results of inspections of so-called crush zones suspected to be active faults in the precincts of the Tsuruga nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture.

The NRA reprimanded Nayuki and discharged him from the post effective Friday.

Hideka Morimoto, deputy secretary general of the Secretariat of the NRA, said at a press conference, "The action was too careless for an official of the regulatory organization, who should always remain neutral."

But he said the NRA will not further investigate the case because it was "due to the actions of an individual."

According to Morimoto and other sources, the document was a copy of a draft report of an assessment in which the NRA's expert team concluded that faults running beneath the plant's reactor buildings are highly likely active.

The conclusion was first unveiled at an assessment meeting held Monday.

Nayuki was one of three directors general of the Secretariat of the NRA, the authority's No. 3 positions after the secretary general and the deputy secretary general.

He was in charge of nuclear regulation policy for safety guidelines about earthquakes and tsunami.

He also helped prepare the draft report based on results of on-site inspections and debates at the assessment meeting as a coordinator for the team of experts.

On Jan. 22, six days before the assessment meeting, three officials of Japan Atomic Power, including its managing director, visited the office of the Secretariat of the NRA for what they said was a "courtesy call." Nayuki met them in his office and handed over the document.

On Jan. 23, Nayuki voluntarily told NRA officials that he had given the document to the company executives.

The Secretariat of the NRA removed him from all duties on the same day. After Nayuki was questioned by the secretariat, the NRA quoted him as saying, "I wanted to make debates at the assessment meeting fruitful."

But Morimoto would not answer questions about why Nayuki handed over the document or how Japan Atomic Power used it. He said, "I don't know the details."

Secretariat rules stipulate that when its officials meet with businesspeople:

- Appointments should be made in advance.
- At least two officials should attend the meeting.
- Details of the meeting should be transcribed.

The NRA said Nayuki's meeting with Japan Atomic Power executives was an exception because it was only a courtesy call.

But because Nayuki handed over a document before its official release and because it dealt with issues related to business interests, the NRA said that it concluded his action risked damaging the NRA's trustworthiness.

The NRA reprimanded Nayuki based on the internal rules and recommended he be transferred to the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry, where he worked before the Secretariat of the NRA was established. Nayuki was not punished under the National Civil Service Law.

As to why Nayuki was not punished, Morimoto said, "The document handed to Japan Atomic Power was a summary of debates held at the assessment meetings, which were open to the public. Thus it's not subject to a confidentiality requirement."

Japan Atomic Power, based in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo, on Friday acknowledged its executives asked Nayuki to provide a copy of the draft report in advance.

The company issued a statement that said: "We obtained the document believing it was provided with the approval of NRA officials. Our company has not made requests or taken any other actions since seeing the document."

Yoshida's records of gov't interviews seized by justice

February 4, 2013

Prosecutors seize testimony of former Fukushima nuclear plant chief

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130204p2a00m0na019000c.html>

Prosecutors investigating responsibility for the Fukushima No.1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster have seized testimony from the plant's former chief, who cannot currently be questioned due to poor health.

Prosecutors obtained records documented by a government disaster investigation team, apparently judging them necessary in deciding whether they can form a criminal case against the former chief, Masao Yoshida. Normally, disaster investigations are performed on the basis that they won't be used to lay blame on the parties involved.

Government sources said the investigation team began questioning Yoshida around five months after the onset of the nuclear disaster. He faced dozens of hours of questioning, spread out over several sessions. The team released an accident report based on the questioning in July 2012.

That report states that in 2008, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), which operates the Fukushima nuclear plant, estimated the damage that would result from tsunamis measuring up to 15.7 meters in height -- much higher than they had calculated before. At the time, Yoshida was head of a nuclear plant equipment management division at TEPCO and was in a position to evaluate safety measures at the Fukushima plant. However, he reportedly put off taking measures on the grounds that a 15.7-meter tsunami was only a worst-case scenario and wouldn't come.

Prosecutors began investigating TEPCO in the summer of 2012, on suspicion of professional negligence resulting in injury and death. In order to form a case, prosecutors need to determine whether officials could have predicted a complete loss of power at the plant from a tsunami. They sought to question Yoshida to learn more about TEPCO's safety measures in 2008. However, according to TEPCO sources, Yoshida, who has been reported as having esophageal cancer and having suffered a stroke, is in worse shape now than when he was questioned by the government team, and it would be almost impossible to question him.

Prosecutors apparently obtained records of Yoshida's testimony to shed light on his assessments, as he was a key person involved with pre-disaster safety measures as well as the on-site response to the disaster.

In the past, prosecutors' use of accident-probe data has stirred controversy. After a Japan Airlines flight in 1997 made abrupt flight-path changes that led to one death and injured 13, prosecutors sought and were granted the use of an accident-probe report as evidence against the flight captain, who was charged with professional negligence resulting in death and injury. The captain's defense team objected, saying the probe had been conducted to prevent future accidents, and shouldn't be used to blame anyone.

In the nuclear disaster case, the head of the government's accident investigation team, Yotaro Hatamura, stressed that the team was not seeking to place blame on anyone. A prosecution source commented that prosecutors probably "kept the scale (of the seizure of information) within reasonable bounds," because Yoshida and other TEPCO officials questioned by the team were not told that they had the right to remain silent, and because the recorded testimony had been kept private.

Tokai University law professor Yoshihiko Ikeda, who is familiar with the legal aspects of professional negligence, says, "The global trend is to place more emphasis on uncovering the causes of disasters (rather than pursuing blame). The government should quickly make relevant rules for disaster probes that also take punishment for negligence into account."

Tepco exec's interview records seized in probe

JJI

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/02/04/national/tepcO-execs-interview-records-seized-in-probe/#.UQ-msPL1tEs>

Prosecutors have seized records of a government panel's interviews with Masao Yoshida, the former manager of Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 power plant, as part of their criminal probe into Japan's worst atomic plant disaster, sources said Monday.

The seizure was initiated because Yoshida cannot present himself for long interviews with the prosecution because of an illness, the sources said.

The action is unusual in that the records of the interviews conducted to shed light on the disaster, instead of an actual witness, will be used in the criminal investigation.

Yoshida dealt with the crisis until he resigned in December 2011 due to esophageal cancer.

He is among the parties accused of negligence for failing to ensure the six-reactor nuclear plant could withstand a major temblor and monster tsunami, and for failing to respond to the crisis in an appropriate manner.

Yoshida was in charge of Fukushima No. 1's tsunami preparedness as head of Tepco's Nuclear Asset Management Department in 2008, when the utility compiled an estimate that the complex was at risk of being hit by 15-meter-plus tsunami.

Cattle cesium varies

A team recently determined that radioactive cesium distribution varied from organ to organ in cattle abandoned in the 20-km-radius hot zone around the Fukushima No. 1 plant, which suffered three reactor core meltdowns in March 2011.

The density of radioactive cesium released from the plant was highest in muscle tissue but lower in thyroid glands, said the team, which was led by professor Manabu Fukumoto of Tohoku University's Institute of Development, Aging and Cancer.

Japan must accept "heroic sacrifice"

PROMETHEUS TRAP (4): U.S. official sought 'heroic sacrifice' from Japan

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302040001>

By HIROYOSHI ITABASHI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the fourth part of a series that has run in the past under the overall title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the differences between Japan and the United States in dealing with the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011 following the Great East Japan Earthquake. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

* * *

At 9 a.m. on March 16, 2011, Kurt Campbell, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, invited Japanese Ambassador Ichiro Fujisaki into his office in Washington, D.C.

It was 10 p.m. in Japan.

After apologizing for calling him in so early in the morning, Campbell sat in a yellow leather chair with his back to the window. A small coffee table had been set up in that corner of Campbell's office. Fujisaki sat diagonally across from Campbell.

Also attending the meeting was Rust Deming, 71, director of Japan affairs at the State Department.

Campbell skipped the usual niceties of shaking hands and engaging in small talk. Instead, he got right down to business and started out with criticism of the lack of serious effort by the Japanese government to deal with the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The three embassy officials who had accompanied Fujisaki to the meeting hurriedly took notes of what Campbell said.

Not only did he say that the Japanese government had to make every effort to respond to the situation, but he added that the government also had to make decisions. He said the accident was not an issue for Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant operator, but for the nation of Japan.

Campbell went on to say that the Fukushima plant was in a very dangerous state and that immediate action was necessary. One phrase that caught the attention of embassy officials was "**heroic sacrifice.**" Campbell said such sacrifice was necessary by the several hundreds of workers who would have to go in while realizing what dangers were in store for them at the Fukushima plant.

Fujisaki entered the Foreign Ministry in 1969. In the late 1990s, he served as political minister at the Japanese Embassy in Washington while the administration of then President Bill Clinton engaged in what was described as "Japan passing," referring to the practice of leaving Japan out of the discussion in making various policy decisions.

Fujisaki later served as director-general of the North American Affairs Bureau at the Foreign Ministry. After building up a vast network of personal ties in the United States over many years, he became ambassador in 2008.

Because Fujisaki has known Campbell for many years, the consensus within the Foreign Ministry was that the two had a close relationship built on trust.

Despite their past, Campbell had harsh words for Fujisaki in their meeting. He also informed Fujisaki of the U.S. government decision to issue an evacuation advisory calling on U.S. citizens to leave an area in an 80-kilometer radius of the Fukushima plant.

Campbell said that protecting Americans was the primary responsibility of the U.S. government and that it would be forced to think about further measures if the Japanese government made no decisions. Campbell added that the policy also covered the U.S. military, and that there was **no intention of sacrificing [American] military personnel.**

With that, Campbell stood up. The meeting was over. Fujisaki and the embassy officials rushed back to the Japanese Embassy.

The three officials immediately began preparing a diplomatic cable to send to Tokyo. They put into words what Campbell said, what response Fujisaki gave, as well as how Campbell ended the discussion by leaving the meeting.

That style of explaining not only the gist of what was discussed, but also giving a feel for the atmosphere of the meeting, is known within the Foreign Ministry as being "the Fujisaki style."

The previous installments of this series are available at:

(1) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301280006>

(2) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301300006>

(3) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302010004>

Asahi follow-up 5

February 6, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP (5): Tears from an old Japan hand at the State Department

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302060007>

By HIROYOSHI ITABASHI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the fifth part of a series that has run in the past under the overall title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the different responses between Japan and the United States in dealing with the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011 following the Great East Japan Earthquake. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

For the second time that day, shortly before noon on March 16, 2011, in Washington, Ichiro Fujisaki, Japan's ambassador to the United States, was meeting with Kurt Campbell, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, at the State Department.

Some two hours had passed since their meeting in the morning. Fujisaki, together with Japanese Embassy staff members, had come to the State Department again after discussing their exchanges in the morning meeting with top government officials in Tokyo. The Japanese diplomat had to ask Campbell some questions raised by the Japanese government.

Fujisaki asked how the U.S. government intended to evacuate American citizens from Japan, which was facing a nuclear crisis.

Many of the State Department officials present at the meeting thought Japanese officials were concerned about the possibility that the evacuation of Americans from the country could develop into a political issue.

Campbell responded by saying it was not a political issue. It was a question of whether Japan can survive or not, he stressed.

Fujisaki was bombarded by a barrage of critical comments and acidic remarks from Campbell.

Campbell accused the Japanese government of failing to understand the seriousness of the situation. He also criticized Tokyo for leaving it to Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, to deal with the crisis.

Campbell also said Washington, as Tokyo's ally and close partner, was deeply concerned about what was happening in Japan. He repeatedly used the phrase "heroic sacrifice" in discussing the disaster and Japan's needed response to it.

How did the State Department assess the way the Japanese government was responding to the nuclear crisis?

An internal report on the issue secretly circulated among top State Department officials on that day contained one word that would answer that question--"FUBAR," or F----- Up Beyond All Recognition.

The internal report also voiced the suspicion that the Japanese government might be holding back some vital information and commented that Tokyo was not making any visible and effective response to the crisis.

Also on that day, Campbell attended a meeting of senior officials at the State Department's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. He informed the attendants of the department's decision to declare a "voluntary evacuation" from Japan.

Many of the senior officials attending the meeting were taken aback by the announcement, because Japan had been regarded as a safe evacuation site in East Asia.

While evacuations of American citizens from Asian countries in political turmoil to Japan had been done from time to time, the State Department had never evacuated Americans from Japan to another country.

One of the senior officials present at the meeting recalls seeing tears in Campbell's eyes.

One of the leading experts on Japan in Washington, Campbell had spent some 20 years devoting his efforts to deepening his country's ties with Japan. Now, he was facing the possibility of those ties being broken.

It was probably a painful situation for Campbell, the official said.

The previous installments of this series are available at:

(1) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301280006>

(2) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301300006>

(3) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302010004>

(4) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302040001>

Revise TEPCO's rehabilitation plan?

February 5, 2013

TEPCO turnaround plan faces review as reactor restarts remain elusive

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302050044>

By KENTARO UECHI/ Staff Writer

A government-backed fund set up to help compensate victims of the Fukushima nuclear disaster will review Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s business rehabilitation plan because of expected delays in restarting its key nuclear plant.

"We have no choice but to review the plan at an appropriate time," Yoshiharu Kawabata, who chairs the steering committee of the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund, said Feb. 4.

TEPCO's rehabilitation plan is based on the assumption that the utility will post a profit in fiscal 2013 after seven reactors at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture are restarted in succession from April.

Utilities need to obtain approval from the Nuclear Regulation Authority to restart idled reactors. But the new nuclear industry watchdog will not begin screening applications until it introduces new safety standards for nuclear plants by July.

The standards are expected to require utilities to install filtered venting equipment at boiling water reactors, such as those used at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant.

There is also a possibility that the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at the plant will have to be decommissioned if the NRA concludes that an active fault line runs beneath them.

TEPCO, however, appears reluctant to revise its rehabilitation plan.

"We will review the plan if necessary, but we want to keep it as is (for the time being)," President Naomi Hirose said Feb. 4.

TEPCO said it expects a net loss of 120 billion yen (\$1.3 billion) for the year through March, compared with a previous forecast of a 45-billion-yen net loss, as the weaker yen increased fuel costs for thermal power plants.

Compensation for nuclear disaster victims and costs for decontaminating areas around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant are also expected to increase.

"We remain in a severe condition," Hirose said. "We have to continue to streamline our operations."

For the nine months through December, TEPCO reported a net loss of 2.2 billion yen on sales of 4.33 trillion yen, up 14 percent from a year earlier.

The net loss shrank from 623 billion yen during the same period the previous year because extraordinary losses for compensation and other issues substantially fell, from 2 trillion yen to 653 billion yen.

TEPCO raised electricity rates for corporate users by 14.9 percent on average in April and those for households by 8.46 percent in September. The rate hikes increased sales by 227 billion yen.

TEPCO caught red-handed.. again

check the photos on the ASAHI site. Can't copy them at the moment

TEPCO misled Diet panel, averted quake-damage inspection at Fukushima plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302070058>

By HIDEAKI KIMURA/ Staff Writer

Tokyo Electric Power Co. misled a Diet investigation panel and cited “dreadfully high” radiation levels to effectively block an inspection for possible quake damage at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. “(TEPCO’s explanation) was absolutely false and seriously obstructed the investigation,” Mitsuhiko Tanaka, a former member of the now-disbanded Diet commission, said in a statement submitted to the chiefs of the two Diet chambers on Feb. 7.

Tanaka asked the Diet to inspect the No. 1 reactor building to see if isolation condensers--key safety components at nuclear plants--were damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011. If the emergency cooling system was damaged by the magnitude-9.0 earthquake, stricter quake-resistance standards would be required for nuclear power plants, further delaying the restarts of idled reactors around the country.

The isolation condensers stopped working soon after the earthquake struck, which is believed to have contributed to the early meltdown of the No. 1 reactor.

TEPCO has denied they were damaged by the quake.

Tanaka, a former reactor design engineer, was responsible for on-site inspections for the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission.

He and other commission members planned to visit the plant on March 5-6 last year after receiving reports that subcontracted workers had seen water on the fourth floor of the No. 1 reactor building following the earthquake. Two tanks and piping were holding water for the isolation condensers.

But Tanaka gave up on that plan after TEPCO said the reactor building was pitch-black and dangerous to enter.

In reality, a cover over the building transmitted 10-16 percent of sunlight. It was also equipped with powerful mercury lamps.

Toshimitsu Tamai, then chief of TEPCO's corporate planning department, visited Tanaka at a Lower House annex building around 7 p.m. on Feb. 28. Others were present during the meeting that lasted for more than one hour.

Tamai said the fourth floor had no lighting, and he repeatedly emphasized the potential dangers of wandering around in the dark, according to an audio recording obtained by The Asahi Shimbun.

"If you got lost, you would run into areas with dreadfully high levels of radiation," Tamai said. "You would face a considerable danger and could be thrown into a panic."

Tamai also cited other risks, such as the debris scattered around the site and the heavy dosimeters visitors must carry.

During the meeting, Tamai showed an image of a modestly lit fourth floor of the No. 1 reactor building, whose roof was blown off in a hydrogen explosion. He said it was taken before a cover was installed to keep radioactive materials from spreading.

Tamai never said TEPCO would reject the inspection, but he urged Tanaka to withdraw the plan.

"I might say it would be better if you would not go ahead with something that reckless," Tamai said.

Tanaka eventually chose not to visit the plant after Tamai asked him to make a decision on that day.

"We concluded that it would be dangerous to carry out the inspection at a completely dark site," Tanaka said in the statement to the chiefs of the two Diet houses. "We had no choice but to give up the inspection."

The Diet commission was authorized to ask the Diet to use its powerful investigation rights to uncover the causes of the Fukushima nuclear crisis. TEPCO was supposed to cooperate with the panel.

A TEPCO spokesman admitted that the utility gave wrong information to the Diet commission but said it did not intentionally make false reports.

The image shown during the meeting was actually taken four days after the cover was installed over the reactor building in October 2011. Tanaka and others in October found the image with the correct date on TEPCO's website.

The spokesman said the TEPCO officials who gave the explanation to the Diet commission mistakenly believed that the image was taken before the cover was installed.

The Asahi Shimbun found that the cover was equipped with lighting while checking a story in a construction industry magazine featuring cover installation work in January.

A set of five mercury lamps, as bright as the headlights of more than 40 vehicles, has been operational on the cover's ceiling since October 2011. An additional set of five mercury lamps is on standby.

An isolation condenser condenses steam into water that flows down into a reactor. It can lower pressure within the reactor and cool it even without a power source.

Although the Diet commission suspected the isolation condensers were damaged by the quake, a separate investigation panel set up by the government said it is reasonable to believe the condensers' functions were not lost in the disaster.

Asahi - Follow-up (6)

February 8, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP (6): SDF poised for dangerous mission into Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302080003>

By HIDEFUMI NOGAMI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the sixth part of a series that has run in the past under the overall title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the different responses between Japan and the United States in dealing with the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011 following the Great East Japan Earthquake. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Around 10:30 a.m. on March 15, 2011, after a strictly confidential diplomatic cable from Ichiro Fujisaki, Japan's ambassador to the United States, reached his government in Tokyo, Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa canceled his entire schedule for the day.

Kitazawa convened an emergency meeting of senior ministry officials to discuss the possibilities of Self-Defense Forces operations being brought in to cool the overheating reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The discussions at the meeting focused on the No. 4 unit at the plant, which had just suffered an explosion that morning. The attendees were also informed that the confidential cable had said top U.S. military officer Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was deeply concerned about the risk posed by the No. 4 unit.

Nobushige Takamizawa, director-general at the ministry's Defense Policy Bureau, briefed Kitazawa on the opinions of the U.S. government. Takamizawa told Kitazawa that the U.S. military had pointed out the possibility that the spent fuel pool for the No. 4 reactor might be empty and urged that measures be taken immediately to cool the reactor first, including utilizing the SDF in the effort.

Hideo Suzuki, the ministry's secretariat counselor, conveyed the views of the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency to the defense chief.

The agency had said TV footage of the explosion showing white steam rising from the No. 4 reactor indicated the presence of water in the pool, Suzuki told Kitazawa.

The debris scattered by the explosions at the No. 1 and No. 3 reactors had made it difficult to spray water on the crippled reactor from the ground.

By March 14, Prime Minister Naoto Kan had proposed to Kitazawa the use of SDF helicopters to spray water on the reactors. Kitazawa thought, without being indicated by the United States, that it was obvious that there was no choice but to use the SDF for the mission to cool the reactors.

A list of possible options compiled by the SDF included plans for spraying water from the ground or the air, as well as aerial drops of boric acid to prevent nuclear fission.

Kitazawa told top ground forces officer Yoshifumi Hibako, the chief of staff of the Ground Self-Defense Force, to carry out the mission after making careful preparations.

“We will do it with a firm resolve; leave it to us,” Hibako told Kitazawa.

Kitazawa, however, wanted to avoid any death-defying mission that risked casualties among SDF personnel. He voiced his concerns about the safety of the SDF personnel that would be involved in the mission, which would require work amid high levels of radiation.

Kitazawa suggested that married SDF officers be excluded from the units involved in the operations at the disaster-stricken nuclear power plant.

Kitazawa, who had painful memories of the Pacific War, strongly believed in making every possible effort to ensure that troops didn't have to perform any heroic acts that required them to put their lives at risk.

Immediately after the emergency meeting, Gen. Ryoichi Oriki, chief of staff of the SDF's Joint Staff, Japan's top military officer, received a phone call from Burton Field, commander of U.S. Forces Japan.

Field stressed the need to inject water into the spent fuel pool for the No. 4 reactor from above, effectively reiterating the point made by Mullen and described in the secret cable.

At 2 p.m. on the day, two section chief-level officials from Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the disabled plant, met with Suzuki and other senior government policymakers at the Defense Ministry.

Suzuki had asked for information needed for helicopter operations, such as the structure of the building housing the reactor and the height of steel towers around the building.

But the two TEPCO employees produced nothing but a ground plan showing the locations of facilities within the complex. It offered no information useful for the planned water-dumping operations involving helicopters.

"What did you come here for?" Suzuki yelled at the employees of the utility.

The previous installments of this series are available at:

(1) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301280006>

(2) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301300006>

(3) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302010004>

(4) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302040001>

(5) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302060007>

TEPCO caught red-handed (2)

February 8, 2013

Probe at reactor bldg blocked by false info from TEPCO

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130207005595.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Tokyo Electric Power Co. falsely told a Diet commission that a facility at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant was completely dark, causing the commission to abandon plans for an on-site inspection of the building housing the facility last March, it was learned Thursday.

Tasked with investigating the crisis at the plant in Fukushima Prefecture, the commission sought to examine the facility on the fourth floor of the building that contained the plant's crippled No. 1 reactor. However, a TEPCO official allegedly told them, "It would be dangerous, as it's pitch dark."

"There was a serious obstruction to our investigation due to a false explanation," Mitsuhiro Tanaka, then a member of the Diet commission, wrote in a letter submitted Thursday to the economy minister and the speakers of both houses of the Diet.

In the letter, Tanaka sought for the commission to conduct an on-site investigation of the building.

According to its written request, the commission tried to inspect the fourth-floor facility because they suspected the emergency isolation condenser there had been damaged by the earthquake, rather than by the tsunami that followed on March 11, 2011.

On Feb. 28, shortly before their planned inspection, TEPCO officials, including the then planning department chief Toshimitsu Tamai, visited the Diet to see Tanaka and others. They showed them dimly lit footage from inside the fourth floor facility.

While showing the footage, they reportedly told the commission members, "This was taken before the cover [to hamper the dispersal of radioactive materials] was installed. Now the building is covered, and there's no light inside."

However, the footage was later found to have been taken after the protective cover was installed. It was also learned that lighting had been installed there.

The commission compiled its final report in July, without confirming whether the condenser was damaged, and if damaged, how.

February 7, 2013

TEPCO suspected of false account to Diet panel

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20130207_19.html

The operator of the disaster-stricken Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has been accused of trying to block a Diet panel probe into the March 2011 nuclear accident at the facility.

Mitsuhiko Tanaka, a former Diet panel member, submitted a document to the leaders of both chambers of the Diet on Thursday, asking for an investigation into the matter.

Tanaka claims in the document that Tokyo Electric Power Company told the panel last February that the inside of the building housing the plant's No.1 reactor was pitch-dark as it was covered by a sheet, rendering it too dangerous for an onsite inspection to be carried out.

This explanation, he says, led the panel to give up the idea of conducting the on-site inspection.

TEPCO reportedly showed the panel a video depicting the interior of the reactor building, explaining that the footage was shot before the installment of the cover.

But Tanaka says it was later discovered that the images were shot after the installment and the inside was

not completely dark regardless of the existence of the cover.

Tanaka says TEPCO's false explanation constitutes a serious obstruction of the panel's business. He is demanding that the Diet look into the developments and conduct an onsite investigation.

TEPCO refuted the allegation, saying officials in charge made a mistake in dating the footage.

TEPCO's full cooperation is essential for safety's sake

February 8, 2013

EDITORIAL: New Diet probe into Fukushima disaster called for

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201302080044>

An unbelievable act of folly has come to light.

A year ago, Tokyo Electric Power Co. misled a Diet investigation panel looking into the March 2011 disaster at Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, causing it to abandon an on-site inspection of the plant's crippled No. 1 reactor.

Even though there was lighting, TEPCO erroneously informed the panel that the building housing the reactor was "pitch dark and dangerous."

From the outset of the disaster, some experts have suggested that crucial equipment designed to keep the reactor cool could have been damaged by the impact of the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake before the tsunami struck. The Diet panel's on-site inspection was supposed to uncover what really happened there.

In response to the recent revelation, TEPCO's public relations department said it did not intentionally make a false report. But this is utterly unconvincing. If it had looked into the situation with the intent of fully cooperating with Diet investigators, it would have immediately ascertained there was no problem as far as lighting was concerned.

On Feb. 7, a former member of the Diet panel that received the original TEPCO finding submitted written requests to the chiefs of the two chambers of the Diet calling for an on-site investigation and a hearing for TEPCO.

Although the Diet panel has already disbanded, a Lower House special commission on the nuclear energy problem was established in the Diet in late January.

Since the revelation showed that TEPCO did not take the authority of the Diet seriously, the new commission should exercise its full powers to unravel the truth. There is also a need to consider setting up a new Diet panel to mount a fresh investigation with more experts.

Getting to the bottom of the Fukushima disaster is closely related to the question of steps that need to be taken to prevent a recurrence of similar accidents.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority, the new nuclear industry watchdog, is currently engaged in drafting new safety guidelines for nuclear plants. Whether crucial equipment was damaged by the initial shaking in the Fukushima disaster will be an important factor in outlining measures for reactors to withstand the impact of a major quake.

Of the three investigative panels set up by the government, the Diet and the private sector, respectively, the government panel decided that the functions of important equipment were not impaired by the quake. Its finding was based mainly on reports by TEPCO. The private panel failed to secure TEPCO's cooperation and was unable to dig directly into the cause of the accident.

The Diet panel demanded an on-site inspection on grounds that emergency condensers used to cool nuclear reactors in emergencies could have been damaged by the impact of the earthquake. But the inspection was thwarted due to TEPCO's false explanation.

If nothing is done to rectify the situation, the new safety guidelines the NRA is now working on may end up riddled with holes in terms of quake preparedness.

TEPCO, for starters, should come forward to provide full details of what happened at the plant. If a new Diet investigation gets under way, the company should offer its fullest cooperation.

TEPCO had a history of repeatedly covering up accidents and making false reports to the government on its nuclear facilities even before the Fukushima disaster occurred.

After the accident, it made progress in terms of accountability by partially disclosing images of in-house video conferences. As for safety reform, however, the steps taken to date are far from adequate.

More than anything else, clarifying the cause of the accident serves the public interest. Having received a massive amount in public funds, if TEPCO fails to recognize this point, it does not deserve to be called a public-interest corporation.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Feb. 8

The investigation is not over

February 9, 2013

Editorial: Fukushima nuclear disaster investigation must continue

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130209p2a00m0na003000c.html>

Looking at the Fukushima nuclear disaster, many have wondered if some vital equipment at the power plant was knocked out by the March 2011 quake and not by the ensuing tsunami as plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) claims. Finding out is a lot harder than it should be, as TEPCO has sabotaged the disaster investigation meant to answer these types of questions.

In February last year, when the Diet's nuclear disaster investigative committee decided to carry out an on-site survey of the Fukushima No. 1 plant and asked TEPCO, the power company refused. TEPCO claimed that the No. 1 reactor building interior was "pitch black," making inspections impossible, and also said it was concerned investigators would wander into high-radiation zones. The truth was that light was shining into the shattered reactor buildings. Even a year after the event, this revelation is shocking.

Now TEPCO is saying the falsehood "was not intentional." That's hard to believe. Even if this was a crime of omission, if TEPCO simply failed to adequately check conditions at the plant for the Diet investigators, that in itself would be a major problem.

In a disaster as major as the Fukushima nuclear meltdowns, finding the cause must be given highest priority. The Diet investigation was working on behalf of the Japanese people, and thus TEPCO was duty-bound to cooperate with it to the greatest possible extent, for the sake of digging up as much truth about the disaster as there is to find.

If TEPCO gets an inspection request like the one from the Diet committee, it must assess conditions on-site and make sure the investigators can do their job without risking their health. If TEPCO had performed these common-sense tasks, there is no way the utility could have claimed the No. 1 reactor building was "pitch black" inside, because it wasn't. At the very least, TEPCO displayed a shocking lack of respect and sincerity to the Japanese people.

What the government inspectors wanted to see was the emergency isolation condenser, or IC, on the fourth floor of the No. 1 reactor building. They wanted to check if the unit had been damaged during the March 11, 2011 earthquake, before tsunami inundated the plant. The IC is supposed to pump water into the reactor core and keep it cool if the plant loses power, but it did not function properly on that day.

TEPCO insists that the IC unit was not damaged by the magnitude-9 Great East Japan Earthquake. According to one Diet investigative committee member, however, one witness stated that a water leak had been detected on the fourth floor before the tsunami hit, suggesting at least the possibility that the piping in the IC unit had been damaged in the quake.

But this issue is not just about unraveling the Fukushima disaster. **Whether the quake damaged vital equipment at the plant also affects future reactor risk evaluations and safety standards.** New safety standards are at this very time under evaluation at the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA). If reactor systems were in fact seriously damaged by the quake, that would be ample basis for demanding very strict regulations on vibration resistance.

Furthermore, after being stymied by TEPCO on its first attempt, the Diet must renew inspections, and not just of the No. 1 reactor's IC unit. The investigation into the cause of the meltdowns is not over. The Diet nuclear disaster investigative committee and its government cousin have been dissolved, their final reports filed, but **the investigation must continue.**

Last month, the House of Representatives established a permanent expert investigative commission on the nuclear power issue. We call on this organization to take up the mantle laid down by the previous disaster investigations and continue their work, to find out once and for all what caused the Fukushima nuclear disaster. The NRA, now building Japan's new nuclear safety standards, needs this information.

Lastly, leaving the cause of the disaster so indistinct would not just be a loss to Japan, but to the world at large. We cannot allow this to happen.

At least 30 illicit meetings with utilities

Nuclear watchdog execs held 30 illicit meetings with power firms

JJI

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/02/10/national/exec-at-japans-nuclear-watchdog-held-30-illicit-meetings-with-power-firms/#.URd0I_L1tEs

A former senior official of the Nuclear Regulation Authority held at least 30 meetings with power company executives in violation of the new watchdog's internal rules, it was learned Saturday.

Tetsuo Nayuki, who served as director general of the NRA secretariat, met with representatives of regional utilities and power firms on his own even though the organization's regulations prohibit its officials from participating in such meetings alone.

The finding arose through interviews with the nine utilities that operate nuclear power plants, as well as Japan Atomic Power Co., Electric Power Development Co. (J-Power), the Japan Atomic Energy Agency and Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd.

In the four months after the NRA's launch last September, Nayuki held eight meetings with executives from Japan Atomic Power, seven with Hokuriku Electric Power Co., and four each with Kyushu Electric Power Co. and Tohoku Electric Power Co., among other huddles with senior power company officials.

The Japan Atomic Energy Agency, Japan Nuclear Fuel and Chugoku Electric Power Co. refused to give concrete responses, saying they do not have detailed data on possible meetings between Nayuki and their executives.

Nayuki was removed from his post after the revelation earlier this month that he handed Japan Atomic Power a draft report by an NRA team of experts about a critical geological survey of a possibly active fault directly beneath the firm's Tsuruga nuclear complex in Fukui Prefecture, before the draft was publicly released.

Before Nayuki's blunder came to light, introductory meetings between NRA officials and power company officials were treated as an exception to the nuclear watchdog's ban on unaccompanied confabs.

Tangled in its own lies

February 10, 2013

TEPCO botches apology for misleading Diet investigatory panel

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302100051>

By HIDEAKI KIMURA/ Staff Writer

Tokyo Electric Power Co. has been caught in another lie in its apology on its website for misleading a Diet panel that was investigating the 2011 accident at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

TEPCO officials already had been forced to backtrack on telling a member of the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission that the No. 1 reactor was too dark to allow for on-site inspection of the damage caused by the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami.

After The Asahi Shimbun broke a story on Feb. 7 that the TEPCO explanation was false and given to block an inspection, TEPCO posted a statement on its website that a panel member had asked about the degree to which light was entering the No. 1 reactor. The utility said the explanation of darkness was given based on an incorrect understanding of the facts.

The utility explained that there was no intent to willingly submit a false report to the panel.

However, when TEPCO officials visited the panel member to offer an explanation last February, no panel member inquired about the visibility in the reactor.

In fact, Toshimitsu Tamai, then chief of TEPCO's corporate planning department, himself broached the subject of darkness within the reactor. In the course of their discussion, Tamai said, "The reactor is now pitch black because the building is covered."

In actuality, a cover over the damaged building allowed some sunlight in, and there were powerful mercury lamps on the cover's ceiling.

At a Feb. 7 Lower House Budget Committee session, Toshimitsu Motegi, the minister of economy, trade and industry, said in reference to the misleading comments by TEPCO officials, "If false information was given with the intent to mislead, it will be absolutely unforgivable."

TEPCO President Naomi Hirose is scheduled to appear before the Lower House Budget Committee on Feb. 12 to respond to questions about the issue as an unsworn witness.

A TEPCO official avoided responding directly when asked about the utility's explanation on its website. "We will proceed with an appropriate investigation based on instructions from the central government," the official said.

Press freedom and nukes don't mix

February 10, 2013

On this subject, see also : chapter Self Restraint and Nuclear Reporting in the Japanese Media Eriko Arita in *Fresh currents* Jan 3, 2013 on fukushima-is-still-news

<http://fukushima-is-still-news.over-blog.com/article-japanese-media-and-nukes-114018098.html>

Nuclear power and press freedom

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/02/10/editorials/nuclear-power-and-press-freedom/#.URd0g_L1tEs

Japan fell from 22nd place to 53rd in the rankings of press freedom last year, according to the nonprofit organization **Reporters Without Borders**. Japan's plummet was attributed to a single factor — the lack of access to information related to the disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

In the past, Japan could be relatively proud of its reputation for press freedom compared with that of most countries. But being ranked lower lately than countries such as El Salvador or Haiti is an embarrassing reminder that press freedom can quickly erode under pressure from the government and corporations.

In reporting on the serious disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, many reporters have met with restricted access, lack of transparency and even lawsuits.

Though investigation reports were issued by the government, the Diet and a private-sector committee as well as by Tepco, a genuine account of the crisis has yet to be completed.

So far, no one has been charged with crimes related to the nuclear power plant disaster. However, better access to Tepco's records, as well as to what was known by affiliated companies and the government, is the first step to determine possible negligence, collusion or criminal responsibility.

For that process to be fair and thorough, independent verification, one of the most important duties of a free press, is essential. The public deserves to know what the records of Tepco and of the government might reveal.

Tepco has consistently barred access to documents and to people. When freelance and independent reporters were finally allowed into the plant, Tepco demanded final say over their video and images. That does not constitute press freedom.

An investigative reporter was sued by one of Tepco's subsidiaries to keep his reporting quiet. The corporation, which was one of Tepco's primary affiliates, apparently sought to silence the reporter. Freelance journalists and magazines were sued after publishing articles on the alleged collusion among politicians, nuclear plant construction companies and Tepco.

It must be concluded that the intent of taking reporters and publications to court is to cover up the truth.

Another issue with regard to press freedom in general is **that freelance journalists are still not allowed full access to all official press club briefings**. This antiquated *kisha* (reporters') club system has started to allow registered freelance journalists to attend Friday news conferences given by the chief Cabinet secretary at the prime minister's official residence. But this is still insufficient.

All journalists should have access to official information directly. Journalists covering protests against nuclear power should also be free from any restrictions.

The reporting on how companies, ministries and agencies and the government handled the disaster at the Fukushima nuclear plant stands as a test case for Japan's commitment to press freedom. The most serious crisis in modern Japan deserves increased reporting, not decreased transparency.

People deserve to know the facts from multiple sources. Open access to crucial information is the only real test of press freedom. That is especially true when the issue is of such vital, ongoing importance. The right of the public to hear from multiple sources means that independent reporting must continue **without intimidation, limitation or smoke screens**. Determining the causes of the disaster is a difficult, demanding process even with sufficient access. Much still remains unknown.

Other ensuing problems, such as high levels of radiation in the soil or the question of where waste from Fukushima will be handled also deserve clear, full reporting. The Nuclear Regulation Authority should not shroud its examination of the safety of nuclear power plants in secrecy.

Reporting on their safety should not be just a matter of citing press releases. For the sake of fair and independent reporting, it must be ensured that journalists can verify what the NRA and power companies say so that they can be sure that safety measures are being followed.

Japan's press freedom is different from that of other countries. Japan is unlike Russia, ranked 148th in press freedom, where investigative journalists have been jailed without trial. Japan is also very different

from Pakistan, ranked 159th, where a young girl, Ms. Malala Yousufzai, was shot in the head for campaigning online for girls' educational rights.

However, Japan's press suffers from other problems. Noncooperation and the covering up of records are another way of reducing press freedom and keeping the truth from the public.

The latest low ranking of Japan is particularly disturbing because the issues surrounding the Fukushima No. 1 plant are just as important outside of Japan as inside Japan. Reporting exactly what happened and why is an issue that extends to every country with nuclear power plants.

Full, accurate reporting on the Fukushima meltdowns can help ensure that such a disaster will not occur again anywhere else. What happened should not be covered up. It is the right of the public of Japan and the rest of the world to know what happened so it will not happen ever again.

Freedom of the press helps guarantee that right and helps ensure accountability from the government and corporations. If the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster is covered by a truly free press, Japan's ranking will move back up to where it should be; Japan, and the world for that matter, is likely to be a safer place.

900,000 pages to be published on the web

February 11, 2013

Nuclear crisis info to be put on Web / About 900,000 pages of documents to be digitized, available in about 2 years

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130210002924.htm>

Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant



A locker at the Nuclear Regulation Authority Secretariat contains a huge number of files regarding the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority plans to digitize about 900,000 pages of documents related to the Fukushima nuclear crisis, with an eye to making them publicly available online in about two years, it has been learned.

According to NRA officials, some of the material has not been released before, and includes radioactivity monitoring results, how people were irradiated and evacuation plans worked out by local governments. The project is intended to bring together--and make accessible--the masses of documents stored by ministries and agencies on the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The digitization will not include material compiled by the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co. The officials said these documents do not belong to the government.

"There are 300,000 A-4 pages of documents here alone," one official of the NRA Secretariat said in a room of the building that houses the NRA in Tokyo's Roppongi district.

The official opened one locker, revealing a huge number of binders that the NRA took over from the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, which was abolished in September. The contents of the binders were sorted into many files.

Some documents appeared to contain radioactivity monitoring data recorded in Fukushima Prefecture immediately after the nuclear crisis started after the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. Radiation readings had been underlined several times. Some notes jotted on the documents were little more than a scrawl, indicating the urgency with which they had been written by people trying to handle the nation's worst nuclear crisis.

The documents have been stored by an array of entities, including the NRA, the government countermeasures headquarters against the nuclear crisis in Fukushima city, and the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry's Emergency Response Center in Kasumigaseki, Tokyo.

Many of the documents were thrown in files out of chronological order, and not all the documents on a common topic have been stored together. Some files were lumped together in boxes.

"The volume of documents is so huge that many have been left wherever they were put," admitted an NRA Secretariat official.

The documents to be digitized were written in the first 12 months after the crisis started. They include data stored by the central government's local countermeasures headquarters, and will include some internal documents drawn up by government bodies, the official said. Some of the documents have already been made public.

The NRA can keep documents provided by TEPCO and the Fukushima prefectural government, but not internal documents of TEPCO and other businesses because they are not government property, he said.

In addition, some documents handled separately by such government organs as the Prime Minister's Office and ministries and agencies will not be included, according to the official.

When completed, the documents can be searched by keywords online and will be available for anyone, he said.

This will enable people to verify how TEPCO and government organizations and their leaders tried to deal with the crisis. The documents will show, for example, what information was exchanged between the local countermeasures headquarters in Fukushima and the Emergency Response Center, and what instructions the center issued and when, the official said.

Arranging and sorting the 900,000 pages is a time-consuming process. Each document must be electronically scanned, so they will not be made public until at least two years from now, he said.

An expert panel will decide whether any personal information in the documents should be redacted, according to the official.

"We'll first digitize as many documents as we can," the NRA Secretariat official said. "Later, we'll try to expand the range of documents by asking TEPCO and various government organizations for cooperation."

Asahi- Follow-up (7)

PROMETHEUS TRAP (7): Gratitude expressed by Japan's commander in chief

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302110006>

By HIDEFUMI NOGAMI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the seventh part of a series that has run in the past under the overall title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the different responses between Japan and the United States in dealing with the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011 following the Great East Japan Earthquake. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

By the afternoon of March 15, 2011, the Defense Ministry had prepared a rough plan to cool the overheating reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant by using Self-Defense Forces helicopters for water air drops.

Around the same time, Prime Minister Naoto Kan was in his office on the fifth floor of the Prime Minister's office agonizing over a decision he had to make shortly.

The prime minister is the SDF's commander in chief. In the event of an invasion of Japan by a foreign country, there would be no hesitation in issuing an order to mobilize the SDF.

But what the nation was facing at the moment was a nuclear accident at home and the invisible threat of radiation from the crippled nuclear power plant. Kan was wondering what his decision should be.

In the wake of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986, Soviet soldiers were sent into the site to deal with the consequences in the face of life-threatening danger posed by high levels of radiation.

Kan was recalling what happened to these "liquidators," or cleanup workers at the Chernobyl accident site. He was unsure whether he could issue an order to send SDF personnel into the Fukushima plant on an extremely dangerous mission.

Legally speaking, it is the responsibility of Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the Fukushima plant, to deal with the situation. But the fact is that Kan, as the prime minister, was the only person who could make the decision to mobilize the SDF to contain the rapidly developing nuclear crisis.

At 3:58 p.m., Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa came into Kan's office, carrying a sheaf of documents describing a plan for SDF helicopters to spray water on the reactors.

"We have crafted a plan for spraying water on the reactors in the best possible way for preventing casualties (among the SDF personnel involved)," Kitazawa said, presenting the documents to Kan. "What do you think?"

Kan repeatedly expressed his gratitude. "I really appreciate that. I really appreciate that."

Gen. Ryoichi Oriki, chief of staff of the SDF's Joint Staff, the highest-ranking SDF officer, was accompanying Kitazawa to brief Kan on the plan. After explaining the operation to the prime minister, Oriki said, "Protecting the lives of people is our job, and we are ready to make all-out efforts (to carry out the mission) if we receive an order."

"I really appreciate that," Kan said again.

Oriki's words were reassuring to Kan, who was to issue an unprecedented order to mobilize the SDF to deal with the nuclear disaster.

During the hours leading up to this meeting, Japanese Ambassador to the United States Ichiro Fujisaki called the integrated government-TEPCO headquarters, which was responding to the nuclear crisis, to report that U.S. officials were urging the mobilization of the SDF to cope with the situation.

Immediately on the spot, Kan issued an order to the SDF to spray water to cool the reactors.

According to the plan, water would be sprayed on the No. 3 reactor from the air and on the No. 4 unit from the ground. There was the possibility that dumping water on the No. 4 reactor from above could cause a hydrogen explosion. The operations were to be carried out on the following day, March 16.

Kan's order was passed by Oriki through the chain of command to SDF troops chosen for the mission.

The Ground Self-Defense Force's 1st Helicopter Brigade was assigned to the water-dumping operation.

The brigade is composed of some 700 troops and a fleet of more than 30 aircraft, including Boeing CH-47 Chinook heavy-lift helicopters.

The unit had been carrying out airlifts to transport relief goods to areas hit by the March 11 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, operating from the GSDF's Camp Kasuminome in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, which has the Kasuminome Air Field.

Lead plates and protective sheets to shield SDF personnel from radiation during the operations were brought to Kasuminome and other SDF camps.

Whispers about the impending operations at the disaster-stricken plant started circulating among SDF members.

"It seems we will be used for operations at the No. 1 nuclear plant," some whispered. "We could die if we are sent to the plant," others said.

The previous installments of this series are available at:

- (1) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301280006>
- (2) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301300006>
- (3) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302010004>
- (4) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302040001>
- (5) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302060007>
- (6) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302080003>

How solicitous!

February 12, 2013

[Surrealism] MOE reinforces radiation monitoring for the nuclear test of N. Korea

Posted by **Mochizuki** on February 12th, 2013 ·

<http://fukushima-diary.com/2013/02/surrealism-moe-reinforces-radiation-monitoring-for-the-nuclear-test-of-n-korea/>

In the afternoon of 2/12/2013 (JST), North Korea announced the success of its third underground nuclear test. *1

In order to protect Japan from the radioactive contamination, Ministry of the Environment reinforced their radiation monitoring system.

They were monitoring radiation every one hour but changed it to every 2 minutes at 10 monitoring posts. *2

Also, Japanese self-defense force started dust sampling that may reach Japan by aircrafts before 15:00 of 2/12/2013. *3

(10 million Bq of Cs-134/137 is still released from Fukushima plant every single hour. [URL])

Russian emergency agency reported they didn't measure seismic activity or any change in radiation level. *4

More apologies from TEPCO

February 12, 2013

TEPCO head apologizes for false info stopping disaster site probe

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130212p2g00m0dm072000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. President Naomi Hirose on Tuesday apologized for the false information which prevented a parliamentary panel from conducting an on-site inspection of a reactor building severely damaged in the March 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant disaster.

The false explanation stemmed from a TEPCO official's ungrounded perception that the inside of the No. 1 reactor building was dark, Hirose told the House of Representatives budget committee.

A former member of the Diet-appointed panel recently said the panel suspended a plan to physically inspect the building in February 2012 after being told the inside was in complete darkness.

In fact, sunlight was able to penetrate the outer cover of the building and lamps were available.

The panel member has criticized TEPCO, the operator of the nuclear plant, for effectively blocking the on-site inspection.

At the Diet committee, Hirose said TEPCO will fully cooperate in any future investigation.

Nuclear Regulation Authority Chairman Shunichi Tanaka told the committee the authority plans to investigate the plant as early as possible, although radiation levels there are still high.

TEPCO president blames one official for misleading Fukushima investigative panel

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302120085>

By HIDEAKI KIMURA/ Staff Writer

Naomi Hirose, president of Tokyo Electric Power Co., denied an organization-wide effort to interfere with a Diet investigation into the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant, saying one official was responsible for spreading misleading information.

Hirose was summoned as an unsworn witness before the Lower House Budget Committee on Feb. 12 to respond to questions from Kiyomi Tsujimoto, a member of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan.

"We would like to cooperate as much as possible," Hirose said when asked about future on-site inspections of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Hirose's statements came after The Asahi Shimbun reported on Feb. 7 that a TEPCO official provided false information to a member of the Diet panel investigating the March 2011 nuclear accident.

Toshimitsu Tamai, then chief of TEPCO's corporate planning department, explained in February 2012 that the No. 1 reactor building was "pitch black" due to covering and was too dangerous for an on-site inspection, given the high radiation levels in parts of the building.

In reality, the cover over the No. 1 reactor building still allowed 10-16 percent of sunlight to enter. It was also equipped with powerful mercury lamps.

The Diet panel member wanted to determine if key equipment at the plant was damaged by the March 11 earthquake, not the tsunami. Such damage would have led to stricter quake-resistance standards at nuclear plants and delayed the restarts of idled reactors.

But after Tamai's warning, the panel member decided not to visit the building.

Hirose explained that the misleading explanation was due to a misunderstanding by Tamai, who served as a liaison with the now-disbanded Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission established by the Diet.

Tamai was likely under the impression that the interior of the No. 1 reactor building was dark, Hirose said, reiterating what the utility has been saying over the past few days.

Hirose also said Tamai, who was a nuclear energy expert of sorts since he had worked at both the Fukushima No. 1 plant and the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata Prefecture, gave the explanation without consulting with his direct superior.

Tsujimoto asked the TEPCO president who within the TEPCO organizational structure gave instructions to Tamai about his explanations to the Diet panel member.

Hirose ducked the question by saying that Tamai did not explain anything to his superior.

But the president also cast doubt on the supposed lack of knowledge among TEPCO executives on what Tamai was doing.

Hirose, who became TEPCO president last June, said it would have been natural for the TEPCO president to be involved in any explanation given to Diet panel members about an on-site inspection.

He also indicated that the TEPCO chairman and president at the time of Tamai's explanation would be covered in the utility's investigation into Tamai's false explanation. Hirose added that the company wanted to include outside experts on its investigative panel.

Tsujimoto called for a highly independent outside panel to look into the false explanation. She also asked that Tamai be called before the Budget Committee as an unsworn witness.

Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, also appeared before the Budget Committee and was asked what the industry watchdog would do if the Diet asked for a probe into the matter.

"We would quickly proceed with such an investigation," Tanaka said.

The Diet investigative panel decided early last year to conduct an on-site inspection after receiving reports that subcontracted workers had seen water on the fourth floor of the No. 1 reactor building following the earthquake.

Those reports indicated that the quake had damaged isolation condensers on that floor.

When Tamai gave his warning to the Diet panel member in February 2012, he showed images of the fourth floor that was receiving light in some locations.

Tamai explained that the pictures were taken before the covering was placed over the reactor, and that lighting was no longer available there.

In fact, the images that Tamai showed were taken four days after the cover was placed over the reactor.

TEPCO added to its embarrassment by including false information in its apology for Tamai's misleading information.

The company's apology, which appeared on its website, said a member of the Diet investigative panel had asked how much light was entering the No. 1 reactor building. In reality, it was a TEPCO official who brought up the topic of light in the reactor.

In its Feb. 11 post on the website, TEPCO again apologized and explained, "As a result of further confirmation, it was learned that a TEPCO official brought up the subject."

The utility repeated that there was no intent to willingly submit a false report to the Diet panel.

Workers on decontamination jobs cheated again

Ministry: Many Fukushima laborers deprived of danger pay

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302090067>

February 09, 2013

By TOSHIO TADA/ Staff Writer

The Environment Ministry has admitted danger pay has not been reaching some laborers entitled to a hefty bonus for their work on decontamination projects near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Unscrupulous employers likely pocketed the missing cash, but the ministry says it will neither penalize them nor name and shame them because that "would have a big adverse effect," an official in charge of the matter said.

Many cleanup workers are eligible to daily allowance of 10,000 yen (\$108) on top of their regular wage in recognition of the risk they face from radiation exposure.

It is thought that hundreds of workers failed to receive this, but the number could be much higher.

On Feb. 8, the ministry said it had identified seven projects in which workers did not receive the full amount.

In November 2012, The Asahi Shimbun aired allegations of nonpayment. Following that reporting, about 100 alleged victims petitioned the Environment Ministry for action.

The ministry took its time in responding. But on Jan. 22, it ordered contractors, including those with central- or local-government decontamination contracts, to investigate the allegations of nonpayment.

The contractors reported to the ministry that they found evidence that it happened in six of the 33 projects already completed and in one project that was still ongoing.

The ministry does not know exactly how many workers received less than they should have because it did not oblige contractors to reveal those figures.

But a decontamination project often involves anywhere from several hundred to several thousand laborers.

Therefore, the number of individuals deprived of danger pay is likely to be in three figures and could be significantly higher.

The Environment Ministry plans to issue a written demand to contractors involved that they now make back-payments to the workers concerned. But it will stop short of naming them publicly or imposing punitive measures.

The nonpayment issue is one that, under normal conditions, could result in the offending contractors being suspended temporarily from bidding for further public-works projects from the Environment Ministry.

In muting its response, the ministry apparently hopes to prevent the scandal from spreading.

Asahi - Follow-up (8)

February 13, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP (8): Burning the midnight oil for a plan to drop water on a reactor

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302130005>

By HIROYOSHI ITABASHI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the eighth part of a series that has run in the past under the overall title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the different responses between Japan and the United States in dealing with the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011 following the Great East Japan Earthquake. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

* * *

In the middle of the night on March 15, four days after the Fukushima nuclear disaster broke out, Col. Masahiro Onishi of the Ground Self-Defense Force was working at the SDF's Camp Kasuminome in Sendai to craft a plan for a dangerous mission.

Onishi, who heads the GSDF's 1st Helicopter Brigade, was drawing up the plan by using a pencil and a close-ruled notebook.

The brigade is experienced in aerial firefighting operations using helicopters to extinguish wildfires. But this was no wildfire. Onishi had been ordered by a higher officer to map out a plan to use SDF helicopters to spray water over crippled reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in a desperate attempt to cool them.

Usually, the development of plans of operations is the responsibility of helicopter pilots and other personnel involved.

But there was not enough time for the usual planning process, with the mission set for the next day. Sufficient advance training was also impossible.

Onishi took on the task of planning the mission and let the crew members go to bed early. He knew he had to work all night long.

The basic idea was simple. What Onishi's squad was expected to do was to dump 7.5 tons of seawater on a reactor from a huge bucket suspended on a cable carried by a helicopter.

But water had to be dropped precisely on the target without exposing the crew to dangerously high levels of radiation. It was a tricky task.

It would be easier to strike the target if the helicopter carried out the task while hovering over the reactor at a low altitude. But that would expose the crew to high levels of radiation. The only option was to drop water from a moving helicopter.

Trying to work out the best possible plan to deliver water accurately to the reactor while protecting the safety of the crew, Onishi made many trial calculations in his notebook.

After hours of work, he finally solved the equation: dropping water from a helicopter flying 20 knots (about 37 kilometers per hour) at an altitude of 91 meters (about 300 feet).

He was confident that if the mission was carried out according to this plan, its objective would be achieved up to a point.

Assuming that the average level of radiation above the reactor was 60 millisieverts per hour, the crew's total radiation dose during the mission would be a sufficiently low 0.236 millisievert.

Onishi then used the data and his computer to create a document describing the plan he had worked out. He completed the document showing the procedure for helicopter operations to spray water on the reactor with an illustration for quick understanding of the scheme.

Then, he gathered equipment and materials to be installed into the helicopter to shield the interior from radiation.

Onishi joined the SDF after dropping out of Hokkaido University. He then entered the National Defense Academy to become a high-ranking officer.

Although he had actually climbed through the ranks and became a senior officer, Onishi had made a point of always paying attention to the burden shouldered by SDF personnel on the front lines.

In the early morning on March 16, Onishi distributed the document among the crew members assigned to the mission. Some of them looked fully prepared, while others were showing signs of uneasiness.

Onishi thought nobody would welcome such a task. He imagined what was going through the minds of his men.

At 4 p.m., the first helicopter to carry out the mission took off. But the level of radiation over the reactor was 247 millisieverts per hour at an altitude of some 30 meters (100 feet), higher than the maximum permitted for work at the plant. The mission was called off, to the great disappointment of policymakers at the prime minister's office and the Defense Ministry.

But it was not for nothing. The crew clearly saw the glittering surface of the water inside the spent fuel pool for the No. 4 reactor even though the U.S. military had warned that the water might have evaporated. The top priority target of the water-spraying operation was switched to the No. 3 reactor.

The previous installments of this series are available at:

(1) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301280006>

(2) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301300006>

(3) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302010004>

(4) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302040001>

(5) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302060007>

(6) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302080003>

(7) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302110006>

Diet should restart investigation and TEPCO cooperate

February 14, 2013

Tepco's investigation obstruction

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/02/14/editorials/tepcos-investigation-obstruction/#.URv-i_L1tEs

It has surfaced that Tokyo Electric Power Co. provided misleading information to the Diet investigation committee tasked to determine the causes of the March 11, 2011, nuclear catastrophe at Tepco's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, thus preventing the examination of critical components of the No. 1 reactor, one of three Fukushima reactors that suffered meltdowns.

It is impossible to believe Tepco's explanation that it had no intention of obstructing the committee's work. **The Diet should restart its investigation and Tepco should fully cooperate.**

The committee had learned from eyewitness accounts by subcontract workers that, shortly before the reactor was hit by the March 11, 2011, tsunami, water was leaking on the fourth floor, where two isolation condensers (ICs) are located, of the building housing the No. 1 reactor. Isolation condensers turn steam vapor into water without using electricity and inject water into reactors to cool them by utilizing gravity in emergencies. The ICs in question stopped functioning shortly after the plant was hit by the 3/11 earthquake.

Suspecting that quake tremors might have broken the ICs and related piping, the committee scheduled an on-site inspection of the fourth floor for early March 2012. But in late February, the then head of Tepco's corporate planning department showed Mr. Mitsuhiro Tanaka, a former reactor designer and a member of the investigation committee, a video taken during Tepco's inspection of the ICs on Oct. 18, 2011. The planning department head explained that because the building was later encased to prevent radioactive materials from leaking, the inside of the building was dark enough to cause panic and that there was risk of injury from debris and of exposure to high radiation levels of 60 to 70 millisieverts per hour. As a result, the committee shelved the idea of conducting the on-site inspection.

Recently, however, it was found that the building's encasement had been completed four days before the Tepco inspection video was made, that the encasement cover lets through some sunlight and that Tepco installed powerful mercury lighting on the fifth floor 10 days after the video footage was made. Thus it is clear that Tepco lied to the committee about the amount of light available inside the building. It seems fair to say that not only did Tepco treat the committee with derision, as Mr. Tanaka stated, but actively sought to disrupt the committee's investigation.

While a government investigation committee ruled out the possibility that earthquake tremors had damaged the ICs, the Diet investigation committee has not. If it is found that quake tremors indeed damaged important components of the Fukushima nuclear power plant, the Nuclear Regulation Authority will be required to strengthen relevant post-Fukushima safety standards for nuclear power plants, which it is now in the process of writing.

Although the Diet investigation committee was disbanded in July 2012, the former committee members should proceed with their on-site inspection. If Tepco refuses to cooperate, the Diet should exercise its legal authority and reactivate the committee, then force Tepco to allow the inspection to take place.

Asahi- Follow-up (9)

February 15, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP (9): Politicians pushed for quick SDF water drop on nuclear plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302150001>

By HIROYOSHI ITABASHI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the ninth part of a series that has run in the past under the overall title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the different responses between Japan and the United States in dealing with the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011 following the Great East Japan Earthquake. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

* * *

The first attempt to use Self-Defense Forces helicopters to dump seawater on the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on March 16, 2011, was called off due to high radiation readings.

That night, Prime Minister Naoto Kan called the Defense Ministry with instructions to proceed with the mission the following day.

A consensus was developing among Defense Ministry officials that the flights could be attempted because helicopter crews would not be exposed to very high levels of radiation.

The order was immediately transmitted to Camp Kasuminome in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, where snow flurries were falling.

Col. Masahiro Onishi, a unit commander at the 1st Helicopter Brigade, received a phone call from the brigade commander, Maj. Gen. Akihiko Kanamaru, 51.

All Kanamaru said was, "Dump water one time tomorrow, no matter what."

After a short pause, Onishi replied, "I understand."

In the SDF, the response to orders is usually a more obedient, "Roger."

However, Onishi chose to use a phrase that he has used whenever he felt uneasy about a particular order. That was his way of showing a little resistance.

The real meaning behind Kanamaru's order was to dump water regardless of the radiation levels in the air above the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

At about the same time, in Washington, Kurt Campbell, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, was referring to the need for "heroic sacrifice" in dealing with the Fukushima accident during a meeting with Japanese Embassy officials.

What gave Onishi a degree of hope was the plan to spray water from the ground in the direction of the nuclear plant before any water was dumped from the air. That spraying would likely lower the radiation level in the air.

However, at 7:30 a.m. on March 17, Onishi received another phone call from Kanamaru.

"Head to the area immediately."

That meant the dumping of water from the air would precede any spraying from the ground.

Again, Onishi said, "I understand."

With a tight grip on the phone, Onishi said, "Give me 100 minutes to prepare for the deployment." That led other unit members who were standing near Onishi to realize there had been a sudden change of plans.

Onishi slammed the phone down and shouted, "Damn it!"

He slowly became angry at himself because he would be unable to provide sufficient safety or training to unit members flying in the helicopters.

Onishi's shout froze unit members, but Maj. Teruki Ito, 42, a veteran pilot, realized what was behind Onishi's frustration and knew there was only one thing to do.

"Prepare as quickly as possible," Ito said. "Let's go."

It was the decision of the prime minister's office to first dump water from the air.

There was a planned phone call between Kan and U.S. President Barack Obama for the morning of March 17. As was made clear in the top secret diplomatic cable sent from the Japanese Embassy to the Foreign Ministry, Obama was clearly concerned about how the Japanese government was leaving the response to the nuclear accident up to Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant operator.

About 90 kilometers from Camp Kasuminome stood the No. 3 reactor of the Fukushima No. 1 plant toward which Ito and his crew were headed. White smoke had been billowing from that reactor from the morning of the previous day.

Steam containing radioactive materials was spreading rapidly.

* * *

The previous installments of this series are available at:

(1) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301280006>

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(6) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302080003>

(7) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302110006>

(8) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302130005>

Check those condensers

February 14, 2013

Thwarted once, inspectors again seek truth about cause of Fukushima disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302140058>

By JIN NISHIKAWA/ Staff Writer

The Nuclear Regulation Authority is to inspect a building at the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant that may contain evidence proving whether it was the powerful tsunami or the earthquake that triggered reactor meltdowns.

The No. 1 reactor building houses isolation condensers, key safety devices which failed in the March 11, 2011, disaster. They should have withstood the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake.

"We want to begin an investigation soon," agency chairman Shunichi Tanaka said Feb. 13.

In February 2012, plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. lied about conditions inside the building, apparently to prevent an inspection taking place at that time.

A Diet investigation committee requested access. TEPCO replied that an inspection would be dangerous because the building was "pitch black" inside, an assertion later exposed as false.

An inspection could settle a fundamental difference of opinion between the Diet committee and a separate investigating panel set up by the government over the root cause of the disaster. The Diet committee believes it was the temblor, but the government panel says it was the tsunami.

If the condensers are found to show damage consistent with shaking in an earthquake there would be case for higher standards in nuclear plant design—with important implications for existing reactors built to lesser tolerances.

But the Nuclear Regulation Authority chairman warned against premature conclusions.

"We will not pre-judge the investigation," Tanaka said.

He added that an investigation "is essential if we are to learn full lessons from the Fukushima nuclear accident."

"We are now discussing how to approach it," he said.

However, inspecting the condensers will not be easy and investigators may find that they are unable to linger there for long. Radiation levels are extremely high inside the No. 1 reactor building. In some areas, levels are several tens of millisieverts per hour.

The NRA will now decide details of when and how the inspection should take place.

NRA's position at odds with Gov't policy?

February 15, 2013

Nuclear body's stance on reactor checks not consistent with LDP gov't policy

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130215p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) Chairman Shunichi Tanaka's stance to strictly judge whether idled nuclear reactors should be reactivated is inconsistent with the atomic power policy of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government.

In September last year, then Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda appointed Tanaka as head of the atomic power regulatory body at his own discretion. Noda did not seek the Diet's approval of his appointment while he was in office.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared on Dec. 23 last year, before he took office, that he would not replace Tanaka or four other commissioners in the NRA. The appointments were approved by the House of Representatives on Feb. 14 and by the House of Councillors on Feb. 15.

However, Abe's decision has raised questions as to the consistency between the appointments and the Abe administration's decision to fundamentally review the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) administration's goal of eliminating atomic power by the 2030s.

Moreover, whether to resume operations at idled nuclear reactors is closely related to the economic revitalization policy on which the prime minister placed top priority.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a news conference on Feb. 14 that there is no problem with the appointments of Tanaka and four other NRA commissioners. "The NRA commissioners should draw up safety standards with confidence. The government will decide whether to reactivate nuclear reactors at its own discretion," he said.

Despite a gap in the nuclear power policy between the NRA and the Abe administration, LDP legislators have refrained from openly criticizing Tanaka.

During a meeting of the party's Research Commission on Oil, Resources and Energy on Feb. 4, a junior legislator who previously worked as a bureaucrat at the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry demanded that the NRA's commissioners be replaced. However, Taku Yamamoto, chairman of the commission, took no notice of the demand.

"No matter how we replace the commissioners, we would be criticized for being arbitrary. We must retain Mr. Tanaka so that the appointments can be approved by the Diet (because the House of Councillors is controlled by opposition parties)," a top government official said.

However, Tsuyoshi Takagi, who represents Fukui Prefecture that hosts nuclear plants, and some other LDP legislators did not attend a House of Representatives plenary session on Feb. 14 that voted to approve the appointments of the NRA commissioners, highlighting opposition smoldering within the party.

Still, the party had no choice but to tacitly approve such a move. "The party has no intention of taking any action against opponents," said LDP Secretary-General Shigeru Ishiba.

On the contrary, opposition parties praised Tanaka for his stance toward nuclear power. It was only the Japanese Communist Party, People's Life Party and the Social Democratic Party that voted against the appointments in the lower house plenary session.

NRA members finally have "official" status

February 15, 2013

Diet OKs nuclear regulatory officials 5 months after they took posts

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130215p2g00m0dm061000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Japan's parliament on Friday approved the appointment of five experts who have been working as the new nuclear regulatory body's commissioners since September last year, a move that will bring an end to criticism that they lacked official status.

The appointments of Nuclear Regulation Authority Chairman Shunichi Tanaka and four others were endorsed by the House of Representatives on Thursday and by the House of Councillors on Friday.

Diet approval of the appointments had been an issue left over from the previous Democratic Party of Japan-led government amid criticism that Tanaka's past career suggests he could be influenced by vested interests promoting nuclear energy.

Fearing that an internal feud could intensify inside the DPJ, then Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda used his authority to appoint the five members in September as an extraordinary measure, rather than seeking a vote at the Diet.

The NRA was launched later in that month as part of the country's efforts to enhance nuclear regulations in the wake of the Fukushima Daiichi complex disaster, triggered by a huge earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

Tanaka had said his uncertain status would not affect his work, but the NRA has faced criticism from some quarters for producing views that could affect the fate of Japan's nuclear power plants even though members lacked parliamentary authorization.

Tanaka is a former vice chairman of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission, a key panel involved in setting the country's pro-nuclear policy before the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The other four NRA members are Kenzo Oshima, former ambassador to the United Nations, Kunihiro Shimazaki, former head of the Coordinating Committee for Earthquake Prediction, Kayoko Nakamura from the Japan Radioisotope Association, and Toyoshi Fuketa from the Japan Atomic Energy Agency.

Asahi -Follow-up (10)

February 18, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP (10): SDF crew fought fear in dumping water on Fukushima plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302180005>

By HIDEFUMI NOGAMI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the tenth part of a series that has run in the past under the overall title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the different responses between Japan and the United States in dealing with the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011 following the Great East Japan Earthquake. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

* * *

Early on the morning of March 17, 2001, six days after the Great East Japan Earthquake, Self-Defense Force members at Camp Kasuminome in Sendai received a sudden order to deploy toward the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Before 9 a.m., three CH-47 transport helicopters of the 1st Helicopter Brigade took off. Crew members took unusual steps to prepare for that day's mission. They wore lead vests weighing 20 kilograms and protective face masks. Each crew member also ingested two iodine tablets.

Sgt. Maj. Tsutomu Kimura, 42, a maintenance crew member on the lead helicopter, was taken aback by the bright red wrapping used for the tablets. There were five members on the helicopter--the crew chief, Lt. Col. Kenji Kato, 41, the pilot, Maj. Teruki Ito, his co-pilot and two maintenance crew members.

Two of the helicopters would handle the dumping of water while the third provided rear support. Kimura's responsibility was to look down on the Fukushima plant from a hatch on the floor in the center of the aircraft and push the button that would release water from the bag that was hanging down from the helicopter.

On his hands and knees in front of the hatch, Kimura kept a dosimeter by his side.

The helicopter flew out over the ocean to the east soon after takeoff and scooped up about 7.5 tons of seawater. With the coast to its right, the helicopter flew due south.

Kimura informed crew members that there were no irregular readings at intervals of 15 minutes, shorter than usual procedure. He called out, "Maintenance panel, normal."

While the crew was used to flying over the Tohoku region during training exercises, what they saw below them that day was unlike anything they had ever seen before.

Kimura thought about the smile of his second daughter, Ruka. Her first birthday was just two weeks away.

He imagined what would happen if the nuclear plant exploded just as the helicopter flew right above it. He thought to himself, "Am I to die without seeing Ruka turn 1?"

The selection of crew members was left up to those who would actually do the work. The previous night, Kimura asked the 10 maintenance crew members what they wanted to do. Since no one spoke up, he decided to exclude single, young crew members.

Although two younger members insisted they be allowed to ride the helicopters, Kimura assigned them to rear-line support duties.

His thoughts while in the air were interrupted when the co-pilot said, "We have a reading of 100." The figure on the dosimeter, which had been at zero, slowly began climbing.

Kimura began perspiring profusely. He was also slightly hyperventilating, and began to drool and developed a runny nose. He turned to the side to avoid showing the younger crew member that he was becoming nervous. He inhaled for four seconds and exhaled for four seconds. Using this method he had been taught four or five times helped to calm him.

At 9:48 a.m., the helicopter approached the No. 3 reactor, where smoke was rising through the exposed framework of the structure.

"Prepare the water!" Ito shouted.

Kimura and the younger crew member placed their thumbs on the release button.

The tactical plan called for flying at a height of about 91 meters (about 300 feet), but the helicopter approached the reactor at a lower altitude.

Col. Masahiro Onishi, the unit commander who drew up the plan, watched the operation through a video monitor back at Camp Kasuminome.

"Don't fly any lower!" he shouted.

* * *

The previous installments of this series are available at:

(1) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301280006>

(2) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301300006>

(3) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302010004>

(4) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302040001>

(5) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302060007>

(6) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302080003>

(7) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302110006>

(8) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302130005>

(9) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302150001>

Did TEPCO lie?

February 18, 2013

Panel to look into TEPCO's alleged falsifications

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20130218_25.html

The operator of the stricken Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant has launched a third-party committee to look into alleged false explanations by the company of conditions inside one of the reactors.

The move follows accusations by a former Diet panel member that the company's explanation was aimed at blocking an on-site probe at the plant.

Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, set up the committee on Monday. It is led by a former judge, Yasuhisa Tanaka.

Earlier this month former panel member Mitsuhiro Tanaka accused TEPCO of having lied in February of last year about the state of the plant's number one reactor. The Diet panel was planning an on-site survey at the time.

Mitsuhiro Tanaka says the panel had to give up the survey because the TEPCO officials said it was too dangerous to work inside the reactor, which they described as pitch-dark. He is demanding that the Diet look into the matter.

TEPCO denies that the officials handling the matter lied, saying rather that their perception of the

situation was wrong.

The new panel will determine whether or not the officials lied and how TEPCO responded to the call for the survey.

TEPCO says the company will not become involved in the panel's investigation but will cooperate with it. The company says it will make public the findings of the investigation as soon as possible.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority says it wants to meet former panel member Tanaka's request for a survey of the reactor, but has as yet made no plan to do so due to high radiation levels.

Lawyers to check on TEPCO

February 19, 2013

TEPCO forms 3rd-party verification panel over false info to block on-site reactor probe

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130219p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) set up a third-party verification panel on Feb. 18 to examine why and how the utility firm gave false information to block an attempt by a Diet-appointed investigative panel to enter the No. 1 reactor building at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

The third-party panel plans to hold its first meeting on Feb. 21. The panel is to investigate why and how TEPCO, the operator of the troubled Fukushima nuclear power station, gave false information last year to block the Diet-appointed panel from conducting on-site inspections of the reactor building as well as whether senior TEPCO officials were involved in the wrongdoing.

The verification panel, which is comprised of three lawyers, is headed by Yasuhisa Tanaka, former justice chief of the Sendai High Court. Two other lawyers on the panel are Zenzo Sasaki, former chief prosecutor at the Kyoto District Prosecutors Office, and Takashi Kondo, professor at Omiya Law School. On the selection of the three lawyers, Masayuki Ono, acting head of TEPCO's nuclear power and facilities section, told a news conference, "We selected legal experts who had not been involved in the management of our company."

In February 2012, the Diet-appointed panel tasked with investigating the Fukushima nuclear disaster asked TEPCO to allow its members to conduct an on-site inspection of the inside of the fourth floor of the

No. 1 reactor building to check the emergency isolation condenser -- a key component behind the outbreak of the accident at the No. 1 reactor. But TEPCO told the panel, "It is completely dark inside the reactor building." Therefore, the panel decided not to conduct the inspection. But in fact, sunlight penetrated the inside of the reactor building.

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Japan Atomic Power Co. to pay for road to Tsuruga plant

Power company agrees to fund road to idle Tsuruga nuke plant

February 19, 2013

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201302190070

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Japan Atomic Power Co. has agreed to donate about 700 million yen (\$7.5 million) in fiscal 2013 to the city of Tsuruga for the construction of a road between the city's center and the utility's idled Tsuruga nuclear power plant, according to a source close to the city government.

The agreement came after it became highly likely that the plant's No. 2 reactor will be decommissioned as the Nuclear Regulation Authority has determined that a seismic fault beneath the reactor building is probably active.

Japan Atomic Power owns the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors of the Tsuruga plant in Fukui Prefecture, and the reactor of the Tokai No. 2 plant in Ibaraki Prefecture. All three reactors have been offline mainly due to the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

Some prefectural assembly members said Japan Atomic Power promised to cover the entire cost of the 3.8-kilometer road around 2002, at a time the city agreed to the construction of No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at the Tsuruga plant.

Due to the March 11 quake, however, there are no expectations that the construction of the Tsuruga No. 3 and No. 4 reactors will ever break ground.

"As the plant operator, we will shoulder an appropriate amount of the road construction costs because it will be useful as a means of access to the plant in the event of a nuclear disaster as well as be convenient for local residents," a Japan Atomic Power representative said.

But there are no prospects of Japan Atomic Power's three reactors--including the two at the Tsuruga plant--being brought back online.

It has been 42 years since the Tsuruga No. 1 reactor was first operational, exceeding the 40-year threshold the NRA is considering for decommissioning.

As for the Tsuruga No. 2 reactor, the regulation authority in January compiled a draft report that recognizes high possibilities of a fault directly under the reactor building being an active one. The reactor will highly likely be decommissioned.

Japan Atomic Power is objecting to the draft report, saying, "The draft is unacceptable."

Despite its three nuclear reactors being shut down, Japan Atomic Power has been receiving "basic fees" from five utilities--including Kansai Electric Power Co.-- through electricity sales contracts.

Kansai Electric, which filed an application to raise power rates, has announced that it will exclude contributions to local governments hosting nuclear plants and other related bodies from "costs" to calculate power rates, starting in fiscal 2013.

Even so, the utility does include the fees it pays to Japan Atomic Power into the costs, raising concerns that power rates paid by individuals and businesses could be used for the donations.

Prefectural assembly members said the city of Tsuruga received 440 million yen between the fiscal 2009 construction start and fiscal 2011 from Japan Atomic Power, and is expected to collect 1.08 billion yen at the end of March as the fiscal 2012 donation.

Around 700 million yen in contributions for fiscal 2013 was agreed upon in February, sources said.

Donations for fiscal 2014 and 2015 are undecided. The road is planned to be completed in fiscal 2015.

Elsewhere, Japan Atomic Power's idle Tokai No. 2 plant has been facing increasing local opposition. (This article was written by Hideki Muroya and Satoshi Otani.)

Transparency and trust - Still a long way to go for the NRA!

February 19, 2013

NRA secretariat must halt collusion

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/02/19/editorials/nra-secretariat-must-halt-collusion/#.USNGNPL1tEs>

The Nuclear Regulation Authority's secretariat on Feb. 1 disciplined a high-ranking official for leaking information to a nuclear power plant operator. But the inadequate nature of the disciplinary measure indicates that the secretariat does not realize the grave nature of the incident.

In the past, collusive relations existed between Japan's nuclear regulation organizations and the power industry. For example, the then Nuclear Safety Commission in 1992 asked the power industry to think up reasons for not taking measures to cope with the loss of all power sources at a nuclear power plant and adopted a composition written by Tokyo Electric Power Co.

The latest incident shows that such collusive relations have not been eradicated. A full investigation should be launched.

The NRA secretariat reprimanded Mr. Tetsuo Nayuki, the No. 3 official of the secretariat, and seconded him to the secretariat of the education and science minister as part of his punishment for giving Mr. Taiki Ichimura, managing director of Japan Atomic Power Co., and other officials of the company a draft assessment report on geologic faults running beneath the power company's Tsuruga nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture on Jan 22. Mr. Nayuki is originally from the education and science ministry.

Six days later, on Jan. 28, the members of a panel appointed by the NRA in principle agreed to adopt the draft, which says that there is a strong possibility that a fault running beneath the plant's No. 2 reactor is active.

It is known that Mr. Nayuki met officials of the company five times in and after December. Despite this, NRA head Mr. Shunichi Tanaka said that the relationship between Mr. Nayuki and the officials of Japan Atomic Power Co. cannot be characterized as collusion. In announcing the disciplinary measure against Mr. Nayuki, the NRA secretariat's No. 2 official Mr. Hideka Morimoto did not offer any apology for what he did.

At the very least, it is a grave lapse in judgement for the No. 3 official of the NRA secretariat to meet officials of a power company so often within four months of the NRA's Sept. 19 establishment.

The decision to second Mr. Nayuki to the secretariat of the education and science minister is also problematic. The NRA secretariat was established by integrating the now-defunct Nuclear and Industrial Regulation Agency of the trade and industry ministry, the NSC and the radiation monitoring section of the education and science ministry.

When the NRA secretariat started with some 450 workers and officials, a rule was introduced to not send them back to organizations that they had earlier belonged to help ensure the independence of the NRA

secretariat from these organizations. Seconding Mr. Nayuki to a ministry where he previously worked is a clear violation of this rule. After Mr. Nayuki was disciplined, it was learned that he held at least 30 meetings with executives of power companies, violating the NRA's internal rules. **To regain the public's trust, the NRA must take strict steps to prevent the recurrence of such incidents.**

Nukes: It's high times to do something about it

February 19, 2013

EDITORIAL: Why wait for the election? Abe should address nuclear power issues

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201302190028>

About 70 percent of voters want to see an end to nuclear power generation in Japan, according to an Asahi Shimbun opinion poll conducted on Feb. 16 and 17.

Respondents were asked to pick their preferred scenario from among five choices on the future of nuclear energy in this country. Nuclear power generation should be: "stopped immediately," "stopped before 2030," "stopped in the 2030s," "stopped after the 2030s," and "continued without being stopped."

The poll results indicate about 60 percent of Japanese want the use of nuclear energy to terminate by the end of the 2030s. Only 18 percent supported the choice that nuclear power generation should continue.

The poll shows that Japanese sentiment toward nuclear power has remained mostly unchanged despite the transition of power from the government led by the Democratic Party of Japan to one headed by the Liberal Democratic Party.

However, politicians are currently showing little interest in holding in-depth discussions for building a society that is not dependent on nuclear energy.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has also advocated a reduction in Japan's dependence on nuclear power. However, his administration appears to be tilting toward changing the direction from reduction to promotion of nuclear power. For example, it has vowed to review the policy of the DPJ-led government toward phasing out nuclear power. But the Abe administration has yet to make clear what elements of the policy it will change and how it will implement such changes.

The administration is adopting a wait-and-see attitude as the Nuclear Regulation Authority is working on new safety standards and determining if active faults are running under nuclear reactors. The government has apparently decided to avoid making any risky political move until the Upper House election in summer.

The Diet has exhibited no great zeal, either, in holding serious debate over the future of nuclear power in Japan.

Any major change in the nuclear power policy would have a huge economic and social impact.

That's why any significant change in the policy requires careful preparations and enormous efforts to secure a broad public consensus. It is vital to minimize the negative effects of the policy shift and ensure it will lead to renewed economic growth and beneficial structural changes.

The NRA's more rigorous safety inspections and assessments are certain to increase the number of reactors that are likely to be decommissioned or left idled for prolonged periods.

This prospect raises some important questions. **What types of procedures are needed to decommission reactors? How should the government mitigate the effects on local economies and on the system for a stable supply of electricity? How should spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste be stored?**

All these questions must be tackled immediately. The government should sort out all issues that need to be addressed, and the Diet should start discussing them immediately.

Late last month, based on a proposal by the Diet's Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission, the Diet set up a special committee to study issues related to nuclear power generation. The investigation panel called for close public monitoring of nuclear regulators through the special committee so that they will not serve the so-called nuclear village, a close-knit community of politicians, businesses, academics and bureaucrats with vested interests in nuclear power.

While respecting the purpose of creating the special committee, the Diet should consider using it as a forum for broad policy debate on reducing the nation's dependence on nuclear energy.

Another idea worth serious consideration would be starting a fresh initiative to promote discussions among citizens, such as last summer's "national debate" programs.

If political leaders avoid grappling with tough policy challenges and postpone necessary actions, they will only exacerbate future confusion.

Greenpeace wants nuke industry to stop evading responsibility

February 20, 2013

Greenpeace wants nuclear plant suppliers held accountable for Fukushima crisis

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/02/20/national/greenpeace-wants-nuclear-plant-suppliers-held-accountable-for-fukushima-crisis/#.USPaMvL1tEs>

The international environmental group Greenpeace launched an online campaign Tuesday saying nuclear power plant manufacturers should be held accountable for the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

Greenpeace wants Japan's law on compensation for nuclear damage to be revised so that the companies who designed and built the reactors pay as well.

Currently, compensation is being paid by Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the Fukushima plant that has been crippled since the massive earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

Greenpeace said only India, Russia and South Korea have legislation under which nuclear plant suppliers are held liable in the event of a disaster.

The environmental group is calling for a system that does not allow the nuclear industry to evade responsibility for compensating the public for disasters.

“The Fukushima disaster exposes the shameful defects in a system that only requires nuclear operators to pay a fraction of the costs of a disaster and does not require suppliers of reactors to pay anything,” Aslihan Tumer, Greenpeace International nuclear campaigner, said in a press release dated Tuesday.

“It is not fair that the nuclear industry benefits while the public is left to pay the heavy price for its failures,” Tumer said.

<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/publications/Campaign-reports/Nuclear-reports/Fukushima-Fallout/?accept=5b933ccb585ee78e2032646122812f85>

Fukushima Fallout

Nuclear business makes people pay and suffer

Publication - February 15, 2013

From the beginning of the use of nuclear power to produce electricity 60 years ago, the nuclear industry has been protected from paying the full costs of its failures. Governments have created a system that protects the profits of companies while those who suffer from nuclear disasters end up paying the costs.

The disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in March 2011 proves again that industry profits and people pay. Almost two years after the release of massive amounts of radiation from the Fukushima nuclear disaster, hundreds of thousands of people are still exposed to the long-term radioactive contamination caused by the accident. The daily lives of victims are disrupted. They have lost their homes, their jobs, their businesses, their farms, their communities, and a way of life they enjoyed.

This new Greenpeace report demonstrates how **the nuclear sector evades responsibility for its failures**. The nuclear industry is unlike any other industry: it is not required to fully compensate its victims for the effects of its large, long-lasting, and trans-boundary disasters. In this report, the current

status of compensation for victims of the Fukushima disaster is analysed as an example of the serious problems due to lack of accountability for nuclear accidents. The report also looks into the role of nuclear suppliers in the failure of the Fukushima reactors.

We learned from Fukushima that **nuclear power can never be safe**. The nuclear industry, largely protected from the financial liability for the Fukushima accident, continues to do business, while the Fukushima victims still lack proper compensation and support. Would things be different if the next big nuclear disaster happened in your country? You would likely be facing the very same problems. **We have to phase out dangerous nuclear power entirely, and do so as soon as possible**. Yet, if there is another major nuclear accident, people could be given better protection if we hold the nuclear industry fully accountable and liable. We need to **learn the lessons from Fukushima**, and change the system in order to **make all companies in the nuclear industry responsible for the risks they create**.

Download "Fukushima Fallout"

30 billion yen a year

Panel eyes KEPCO upkeep fees

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130219003564.htm>

The Yomiuri Shimbun

An expert panel of the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry examining the rate hike planned by Kansai Electric Power Co. has begun coordinating views to allow KEPCO to include in initial costs its payments to maintain nuclear reactors at Japan Atomic Power Co.'s Tsuruga plant, according to informed sources.

The focus of discussion is the more than 30 billion yen a year in expenses that KEPCO pays to Japan Atomic Power for the maintenance of two nuclear reactors at the plant in Fukui Prefecture.

The panel, tasked with examining the electricity rate of power companies, is examining the average 11.88 percent rate hike for general-household users sought by KEPCO.

As the operation of the two nuclear reactors in question is suspended, KEPCO is not buying any electricity from the plant.

With regards to the No. 2 nuclear reactor at the plant, a Nuclear Regulation Authority expert panel has said there is a high likelihood that active faults run below the reactor.

Yet Japan Atomic Power denies the possibility of active faults running below the reactor, maintaining a stance that it will not decommission the reactor, but aims to restart it in the future.

The expert panel therefore finds the granting of approval to KEPCO to include maintenance expenses paid to Japan Atomic Power in its original costs to be unavoidable. The ministry is expected to confirm the panel's decision.

If approved, the sense of unease over the corporate management of Japan Atomic Power will be eased somewhat. But there is a possibility KEPCO customers will criticize the utility's payments for the maintenance of reactors that have such dim prospects of being restarted.

The government plans to scrutinize KEPCO's personnel costs and fuel procurement costs so as to hold the margin of its rate hike to a minimum.

Japan Atomic Power has signed contracts to sell power generated at its Tsuruga plant to KEPCO, Chubu Electric Power Co. and Hokuriku Electric Power Co.

Asahi- Follow-up (11)

February 20, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP (11): We are still alive!

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302200001>

By HIDEFUMI NOGAMI/ Staff Writer

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At 9:48 a.m. on March 17, six days after the nuclear crisis broke out at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the lead aircraft for the water-dropping mission, a helicopter belonging to the Ground Self-Defense Force's 1st Helicopter Brigade, reached the sky above the plant's crippled No. 3 reactor.

The captain of the helicopter, Maj. Teruki Ito, a veteran pilot, pushed the collective lever, located on his left side, forward while pulling the cyclic stick he was holding with his right hand. He moved the helicopter at a slower speed and lower altitude than planned in advance.

Ito was looking at the building that housed the reactor through the narrow space between his legs. The moment the building disappeared out of sight, he growled a command. "Drop water!"

When Ito slowed the aircraft further, bringing it close to hovering speed, the flight engineer pushed a button. Seven and a half tons of seawater fell into the building, whose ceiling had been blown off.

Ito felt the helicopter become lighter as it released water.

The document describing the water-dropping mission showed one number in yellow to draw special attention: 250 millisieverts. It was followed by a comment: "clinical observations necessary."

That means an accumulated radiation dose of 250 millisieverts can cause significant adverse health effects.

The figure 250 had been etched into the minds of all the crew members involved.

Then, the co-pilot, looking at a dosimeter, cried out, "256! We are going to die!"

Ito yelled back, "We are still alive, aren't we?"

When the captain started working the flight controls hastily to get the helicopter away from the site, a radio call came in.

"Order from the brigade's commander to all the aircraft. Drop water again!"

The order was passed to the crews by the Air Self-Defense Force's flight control. When asked about the reading on the dosimeter, the co-pilot answered, "Two, five, six!"

“Man! We went the whole nine yards because we were told to do it just once,” Ito said in his mind while dipping the bucket his helicopter was carrying in the sea to fill it with seawater. Then, he steered his aircraft toward the No. 3 reactor again.

The two helicopters assigned to the mission released water on the reactor twice each for a total of four drops.

After the mission was carried out, the aircraft landed in the J-Village, a soccer-training complex in Fukushima Prefecture, located 20 kilometers south of the disaster-stricken plant. The complex was now serving as a staging area for efforts to contain the nuclear crisis.

After Ito stopped the engine, the co-pilot began to cry, saying, “I’ve been exposed to radiation.”

“Don’t cry,” Ito said harshly to the co-pilot, but felt sorry for the man, whom he had chosen for the mission without asking his opinions.

As he took off a lead vest and got out of the aircraft, the captain of a logistics support helicopter that had been on standby came running toward the crew. “Let me take a look,” the captain said and grabbed the dosimeter from the co-pilot.

“It’s in micro. Don’t worry,” he said, referring to the fact that the dosimeter’s readings are shown in microsieverts.

The co-pilot mistakenly thought that the reading was in millisieverts, 1,000 times larger than microsieverts.

Ito breathed a long sigh of relief.

Thirty minutes after the helicopters dumped water on the overheating reactor, Prime Minister Naoto Kan was speaking with U.S. President Barack Obama over the phone.

“We Japanese, including the SDF, are making all-out efforts to deal with the situation at the nuclear plant,” Kan told Obama.

Obama responded by saying he thought Japan was working hard.

* * *

A vital ongoing issue of safety

February 21, 2013

Disclosure of nuclear crisis data

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/02/21/editorials/disclosure-of-nuclear-crisis-data/#.UST_xDf1tEs

It’s research time! Over the next two years, the Nuclear Regulation Authority is going to make public around 900,000 pages of documents concerning the Fukushima nuclear crisis. The plans to digitize the material, much of it previously unreleased, will mean that independent researchers, academics, the media and the general public will have access to important information about the truth of the 3/11 nuclear catastrophe.

The project will make accessible documents from all ministries and agencies connected with the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, but it will not include material from the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Tepco). Those documents should also be made accessible since they contain critical information about the disaster that cannot be found elsewhere. Considering that Tepco owes its continued existence as a private company to the fact that it was bailed out with taxpayer money, it should not try to hide facts about the disaster from the public. If it does not voluntarily release the information, the government should pursue all available means to force it to do so.

The documents in the NRA's computer system will be searchable by keywords online and available to anyone. This access is what a democratic society demands. The public has a right to know this information and how the ministries and agencies made decisions based on that information. They can decide then what failures and mistakes happened. Without knowing the facts, the public essentially remains in the dark about the most serious crisis in Japan in decades.

The release of information will be an important turning point in understanding what happened, but more importantly it will help to decide what should be done in the future. The problems associated with nuclear energy in Japan remain unresolved, and these documents will be crucial to shaping the best energy policy for the nation. The information can help to evaluate how well nuclear energy has, or has not, been regulated in the past and how well a crisis can, or cannot be, handled in the future.

The information will help to establish responsibility, upgrade safety standards, and determine whether nuclear energy really can be made safe or not.

These documents are not about historical trivia. **They are about a vital ongoing issue of safety in the lives of Japanese. Their release is an important step forward and an example of why freedom of information is one of the most important means to ensure the safety of citizens.** This is all the more reason why it is critical that Tepco release all documents in its possession that are related to the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

Asahi - Follow-up (12)

February 22, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP (12): Inject more water into the reactor

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302220006>

By HIROYOSHI ITABASHI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 12th part of a series that has run in the past under the overall title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the different responses between Japan and the United States in dealing with the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011 following the Great East Japan Earthquake. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

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At 11:40 a.m. on March 17, shortly after the Ground Self-Defense Force's 1st Helicopter Brigade completed the mission to spray water on a crippled nuclear reactor that was dangerously overheating, Charles Casto of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) met with Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa at the minister's office in Tokyo.

Casto was chief of the team of experts the NRC had sent to Japan immediately after the March 11 earthquake and tsunami to help deal with the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Before his meeting with Kitazawa, Casto had visited Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the disaster-stricken nuclear plant, the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA), the now-defunct body then responsible for regulating and supervising the nuclear power industry, and other organizations concerned, but had not got the detailed information he needed. It was not even clear which organization he should contact in the first place.

After several days of frustrating attempts to get what he wanted, Casto ended up visiting the defense chief.

The American nuclear energy expert immediately got down to business. The effects of the GSDF brigade's work to cool the reactor would be limited, Casto said. **The amount of water that had been poured into the reactor was insufficient, he added, urging additional injections of water.**

Casto didn't give much value to the dangerous mission that had just been accomplished by the GSDF in terms of its contribution to the efforts to contain the fast-moving nuclear crisis.

Kitazawa nodded as he listened to Casto's opinion. He and other top Japanese defense officials were fully aware that the volume of seawater that had been dropped on the reactor was insufficient.

Casto then demanded detailed information about the condition of the disabled reactors.

Defense Counselor Hideo Suzuki, who was present at the meeting, conveyed to the American official the information that had been provided by the NISA.

It was the kind of information Casto should have asked the agency to give him. But he opted to request the information from the Defense Ministry for a reason.

Three days earlier, on March 14, U.S. Ambassador to Japan John Roos asked the prime minister's office to allow NRC experts to be permanently stationed at the office to cooperate with the Japanese government in handling the crisis. But his request was politely declined.

That, along with the Japanese government's reluctance toward information disclosure, provoked the criticism within the U.S. government that Japan was hiding some vital information.

Concerned about the straining of Tokyo's ties with Washington at this crucial moment, Prime Minister Naoto Kan asked Kitazawa to do whatever he could do to keep the bilateral relationship from deteriorating further. Accordingly, the defense chief arranged his meeting with Casto.

The NRC official switched the subject to the No. 4 reactor, the main source of concern for the United States.

The Defense Ministry informed him that the GSDF's helicopter crew actually saw water in the spent fuel pool for the No. 4 reactor.

If so, Casto said, he wanted to know the temperature and the level of radiation being released from the reactor.

Kitazawa ordered an immediate survey to get these data.

The task was assigned again to the GSDF's 1st Helicopter Brigade. A few days later, a helicopter of the brigade flew above the nuclear power plant to do the survey.

It was then decided that the NRC and the Japanese ministries and agencies concerned would hold regular meetings, starting on March 18, to share information and discuss efforts to deal with the nuclear crisis.

On the Japanese side, officials from the NISA, TEPCO, the Foreign Ministry and the Defense Ministry would attend the meetings.

The United States wished to work with Japan to put the situation at the Fukushima plant under control.

But the Japanese ministries and agencies were in disarray, not ready to make concerted and well-coordinated responses to the crisis.

The United States was in for serious conflict with its close ally in tackling the formidable safety challenge facing Japan.

* * *

Asahi - Follow-up (13)

February 25, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP (13): U.S. officials frustrated with Japanese at crisis meetings

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302250001>

February 25, 2013

By HIROYOSHI ITABASHI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 13th part of a series that has run in the past under the overall title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the different responses between Japan and the United States in dealing with the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011 following the Great East Japan Earthquake. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

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With the crisis raging at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and the Japanese government agreed to hold regular meetings to share information and discuss responses.

At 10 a.m. on March 18, 2011, the conference between NRC representatives and Japanese officials began at the Defense Ministry, in accordance with the agreement reached the previous day.

Representatives of the U.S. forces stationed in Japan and the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo were also present.

The meeting was presided over by the Defense Ministry, which was acting under instructions from the prime minister's office.

Nobushige Takamizawa, head of the ministry's Defense Policy Bureau, opened the meeting by declaring the strict confidentiality of the conference. He told the attendees not to disclose any information about the conference, including its very existence, not even to their colleagues in their organizations.

This declaration of secrecy at the outset of the meeting cast doubts on the very purpose of the forum, which was supposed to be the sharing of information.

Takamizawa had a list at hand. **It showed the types of support the U.S. military had offered to provide. Among the dozens of items on the list were radiation management, decontamination and the supply of chemical technology.**

But Takamizawa only read out part of the list without distributing copies to the attendees, who were only allowed to make notes.

The Defense Ministry classified the list as confidential.

The meeting that started at 4:40 p.m. on the following day, March 19, was also attended by officials from the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA), including Hisanori Nei, deputy director-general for nuclear fuel cycle.

The NRC was prepared to offer complete cooperation to Japan's struggle with the nuclear crisis and asked for updates on the conditions of the reactors.

But the NISA showed little interest in sharing such information with the NRC. The agency's representatives at the meeting just kept saying they didn't know about the matter because they were not in charge of it. It was clear that they saw no point in having such discussions with the U.S. regulatory body. The NRC staff protested angrily. They said they wanted to cooperate with Japan but couldn't if they didn't have access to vital information.

Defense Counselor Hideo Suzuki urged the agency officials to be more cooperative, saying the Americans were trying to help Japan. But **the agency refused to change its attitude.**

Behind their recalcitrance was a directive from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which told them not to speak on their own at a meeting whose purpose was unclear.

On the other hand, Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Banri Kaieda called Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa on his cellphone and asked for the list compiled by U.S. forces of all the types of support they could provide.

The representative of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, at the meeting was a senior executive in charge of general affairs, instead of an engineer. **The TEPCO official was unable to answer technical questions from the NRC** and kept saying he would convey the questions to the company's headquarters.

An assistant director at the Foreign Ministry said nothing throughout the meeting except for introducing himself.

Time was wasted as even the roles and responsibilities of the attendees at the meeting were not clear. The talks only increased discontent among the Americans about the way their efforts to help Japan were being foiled as well as their distrust of the Japanese government.

The tension and friction between the two countries over the battle to bring the crisis under control began to decrease only after Japanese and U.S. officials started consultation on March 22 in a new conference established under the prime minister's office. The conference was designed to unify the policies and operations of all Japanese ministries and agencies concerning the bilateral cooperation over the Fukushima disaster.

Eleven days had already passed since the crisis broke out.

Asahi - Follow-up (14)

February 27, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP (14): Gap grew between Japan, U.S. in providing support

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302270007>

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(function() { var po = document.createElement('script'); po.type = 'text/javascript'; po.async = true;
po.src = 'https://apis.google.com/js/plusone.js'; var s = document.getElementsByTagName('script')[0];
s.parentNode.insertBefore(po, s); })();
```

 By HIDEFUMI NOGAMI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 14th part of a series that has run in the past under the overall title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the different responses between Japan and the United States in dealing with the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011 following the Great East Japan Earthquake. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

A misunderstanding arose between the United States and Japan over disaster relief activities one day after the Great East Japan Earthquake struck.

During a telephone call on March 12, 2011, U.S. President Barack Obama told then Prime Minister Naoto Kan that the United States was prepared to provide every form of assistance possible.

Based on that discussion, the Defense Ministry set up coordination offices between Japan and the United States at the Self-Defense Force Sendai base, the U.S. Yokota Air Base in Tokyo and at the Defense Ministry. On March 15, Col. Jiro Hiroe, who was the group leader for defense exchange at the Ground Staff Office, was dispatched to Sendai to serve as the liaison officer there.

When he entered a building at the Sendai base, Hiroe found about 20 U.S. military personnel in camouflage gear. They were members of the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force based in Okinawa. However, they did not know what to do because no requests were being made by Japan.

Sitting on stairways with no heating, the military personnel were gathering information over the Internet using notepad computers.

On March 16, the first joint meeting between Japanese and U.S. personnel was held.

Col. Christopher Coke said a number of times, "Tell me whatever you want."

According to Coke, the Marines arrived in Sendai on March 13. However, he said although the Marines wanted to help, they did not receive any requests or any information. Hiroe felt frustration and distrust toward Japan on the part of Coke.

On March 14, the SDF established a joint structure involving the Ground, Maritime and Air SDF in Sendai to provide support for local disaster victims. However, it would take **another week for a logistics system to be established in the area**. Because of the SDF's own delay in setting up a logistics network, its members had its hands full and were unable to liaise with the U.S. military.

All Hiroe could do was apologize and ask that the U.S. military personnel wait another two or three days. One example brought up by U.S. officers was the relief effort made in 2004 after an earthquake and tsunami struck off the coast of Sumatra in Indonesia. At that time, U.S. military helicopters dropped relief supplies from the air, which was greatly appreciated by local residents.

However, Hiroe said, "That would be counterproductive to the Japanese mentality. Assistance must be conducted in an orderly fashion. Please wait a while longer."

Hiroe spent a considerable amount of time dealing with his U.S. counterparts on such matters.

It took about 10 days after the disasters for there to be greater synchronization between the two sides.

Through Hiroe's coordination efforts, U.S. Marines were sent to the Oshima district of Kesenuma, Miyagi Prefecture, where the harbor was devastated. They took on the task of rebuilding that facility.

However, the Marines did not simply use bulldozers right away to clear away debris. They first searched for and collected by hand photo albums and wallets that had been scattered in the area.

During Operation Tomodachi, the name given to the U.S. forces relief effort in the Tohoku region, as many as 16,000 U.S. military personnel were sent to the disaster-stricken areas. They were involved in such tasks as restoring the Sendai Airport back to a state in which it could resume operations as well as cleaning schools in the area before the start of the new school year in April 2011.

TEPCO does not reports workers' radiation data - No laws on reporting data

February 28, 2013

TEPCO fails to report worker radiation levels

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20130228_24.htm

1

Tokyo Electric Power Company has failed to report to a national body the radiation exposure doses of 21,000 workers mobilized to contain the crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Operators of nuclear plants in Japan are required to report such exposure every year to the Radiation Effects Association to keep each worker's dose below 50 millisieverts.

The missing data is for the year starting in March 2011, when the accident took place.

The firm says it has taken a long time to digitize data after the meltdown.

It apologized for the delay and said it will submit the data to the national database center in March.

Nuclear workers in Japan carry personal databooks to record their exposure. The system was introduced to manage such data in an integrated manner as the number of nuclear plants rose and an increasing number of staff worked at more than 2 plants.

Feb. 28, 2013 - Updated 08:14 UTC (17:14 JST)

TEPCO fails to submit dose data on 21,000 Fukushima plant workers

photo

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302280086>

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(function() { var po = document.createElement('script'); po.type = 'text/javascript'; po.async = true;
po.src = 'https://apis.google.com/js/plusone.js'; var s = document.getElementsByTagName('script')[0];
s.parentNode.insertBefore(po, s); })(); THE ASAHI SHIMBUN
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Tokyo Electric Power Co. failed to submit radiation dose data to an industry database, compromising the health of 21,000 people who worked at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant after the March 2011 disaster.

The development shows that Tokyo Electric Power Co. remains lax about protecting the safety of workers, many of whom are employed by subcontractors. It also underscores flaws in the private records system to prevent nuclear plant workers from being exposed to dangerous accumulated doses.

A big problem is that many nuclear plant workers often switch companies—including unscrupulous ones—and they can be exposed to more radiation than legally allowed unless the dose data are kept at a centralized database.

The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare has repeatedly told TEPCO to submit the dose data of the 21,000 people to the Central Registration Center of Radiation Workers, operated by the Radiation Effects Association, a public-interest corporation that manages dose data of nuclear plant workers in an integrated manner.

The workers were at the Fukushima plant between March 11, 2011, the day the plant was destroyed by the Great East Japan Earthquake and subsequent tsunami, and March 31, 2012, or the end of fiscal 2011. More than 80 percent of those workers, or 17,600, were from other companies, including subcontractors. TEPCO on Feb. 18 agreed with the Radiation Effects Association to submit workers' accumulated data for fiscal 2010 and 2011 by the end of March. The provisional data will be replaced when full-fledged records, including the names of employers and other details, are ready.

"We are extremely sorry for the delay," a TEPCO spokesman said.

The company has said it took several months before data were retrieved from a computer system damaged by the tsunami. After the disaster, records were initially kept on paper, and it took time to convert them into electronic form.

In May or June each year, electric power companies submit dose data for the previous fiscal year to the center.

Around June 2011, TEPCO said the submission of data for fiscal 2010 would be delayed, and it also did not provide data for fiscal 2011. Records for fiscal 2010, excluding the post-disaster period, were submitted around July 2012.

Electric power companies, primary contractors and subcontractors are legally required to measure doses of nuclear plant workers and keep them under 50 millisieverts a year and 100 millisieverts over five years.

Many primary contractors set 20 millisieverts as the annual ceiling.

Of the 25,000 people who worked at the Fukushima No. 1 plant between March 11, 2011, and Dec. 31, 2012, more than 4,800 were exposed to an excess of 20 millisieverts a year, compared with seven for all of Japan in fiscal 2009.

The average among 76,000 nuclear plant workers across the country that year was 1.1 millisieverts.

Electric power companies have said data management in an integrated manner is not essential. They argue that they can check information in radiation management records--a dose record book kept by individual workers--when new workers arrive at their nuclear plants.

The companies say they make inquiries to the central registration center only when they need to confirm entries in the record books. The center receives 60,000 to 90,000 inquiries a year.

However, workers themselves say dose data cannot be strictly managed by radiation management records alone.

Primary contractors or subcontractors enter data into the record books. But some do not comply with laws and regulations.

One subcontractor had workers cover dosimeters with lead plates at the Fukushima No. 1 plant to keep readings low so that they could continue working at nuclear facilities. Other lax practices about dose management have been uncovered.

A man in his 40s who left the Fukushima No. 1 plant more than a year ago said accurate dose data have not been written into his radiation management record.

The worker was illegally sent there as an employee of a company he does not know well. Moreover, a different company's name is listed in his record book.

The worker could be exposed to more radiation than legally allowed if he continues to work at nuclear plants with his dose data being left uncorrected.

The Radiation Effects Association says both the system based on the central registration center and radiation management records are essential to manage dose data accurately.

The record book usually includes the latest data available for the worker, but the figures may be revised later. Some workers even lose the record book.

The central registration center, on the other hand, keeps closely examined data, but they are updated only once a year.

The dose data management system including the central registration center was established in 1977 with financial support from the government.

But it is a private-sector framework based on contracts between electric power companies and the Radiation Effects Association. The utilities and other parties are paying 275 million yen (\$3 million) to administer the system in fiscal 2012.

It remains unclear whether the utilities, or layers of contractors involved in the nuclear power industry, are responsible for managing workers' dose data and protecting their safety.

The government is not directly responsible, although the science ministry, the health ministry, the Nuclear Regulation Authority's secretariat and other branches are involved.

"No ministry or agency is expected to take the lead because the health of individuals is at stake and the responsibility is heavy," a government official said.

The momentum for change could come from politicians.

Some lawmakers, led by those in the Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito, submitted a bill to establish a state management system in August, when the two parties were in the opposition camp.

Under the bill, utilities would be required to enter dose data into a government-issued record book and the government would collect and manage the data in an integrated manner.

The bill was scrapped when the Lower House was dissolved in November for a snap election. But some politicians plan to submit the bill to the Diet again.

(This article was written by Jun Sato and Toshio Tada.)

Radiation exposure data for over 20,000 nuclear cleanup workers still not submitted

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130228p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. has not yet submitted radiation exposure records for over 20,000 workers who helped in the cleanup at its disaster-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant to the association charged with managing the data, it has emerged.

Nuclear power plant contractors and subcontractors record exposure data in workers' radiation handbooks, and power companies digitalize it and send it to the Radiation Effects Association's central registration center for workers exposed to radiation, which manages the information. However, **officials say there are no laws on reporting data**; rather, companies in the industry send it under a self-imposed rule.

Power companies and employers must measure workers' radiation exposure and make sure it doesn't exceed 50 millisieverts in a single year or 100 millisieverts over five years. When workers take on new employment at a nuclear power plant, officials check their handbooks for radiation exposure data, comparing it with data held by the Radiation Effects Association's central registration center. The center's

information is also used when reissuing lost handbooks. The association says it receives between about 70,000 and 100,000 data requests from power companies each year.

Around May or June each year, utilities hand the association radiation exposure records for the preceding fiscal year. Around June 2011, TEPCO told the association that it would be late in submitting records for fiscal 2010, which overlapped with the onset of the nuclear disaster.

In July 2012, TEPCO submitted data recorded before the start of the nuclear disaster, but it has still not handed over data for over 20,000 workers since then.

"We managed the records on paper, and it has taken a long time to convert them to digital data," a TEPCO representative said when questioned over the delay.

1 trillion yen to meet new safety standards

Nuke plant operators put tab on new safety standards at 1 trillion yen

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302270063>

February 27, 2013

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Japan's 10 nuclear power plant operators said it will cost close to 1 trillion yen (\$10.87 billion) to bring them in compliance with government-mandated safety standards on disaster preparedness, according to an Asahi Shimbun survey.

The final tab could increase further because the companies currently cannot accurately estimate the expenses that will be required to take measures against disasters.

The utilities cannot restart any idle reactors unless they meet the safety standards. Currently 48 of the nation's 50 nuclear reactors are offline.

The draft outline of the new standards, presented in late January by the Nuclear Regulation Authority, calls on operators to take broad measures against natural disasters and accidents. But some details of the new standards have yet to be determined, so plant operators have not finalized specifications of some safety measures.

The 10 companies estimated the costs at 998.7 billion yen for their 15 plants, excluding the crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant and the nearby No. 2 plant, both operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co.

The costs mainly consist of expenses for emergency safety measures, such as the construction of levees to guard against tsunami. The measures also include the provision of emergency power supply vehicles, which were required by the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, the predecessor of the NRA, immediately after the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Kansai Electric Power Co. projects it will have to spend 38 billion yen by the end of March and a total of 285.5 billion yen by the end of March 2018, the largest amount among the 10 operators.

Kansai Electric hosts 11 reactors at its three nuclear plants of Mihama, Oi and Takahama. Its degree of dependence on nuclear power generation was about 50 percent in fiscal 2010.

Because of this high dependency, early restarts of idle reactors are necessary for the company to improve its financial performance.

Chubu Electric Power Co. estimated the costs needed to take measures against tsunami at its Hamaoka plant at 150 billion yen. The Hamaoka plant is located in an area of a possible Tokai earthquake, which seismology experts expect to occur in the near future.

Chubu Electric is currently constructing a 1.6-kilometer-long levee at the Hamaoka plant. The utility originally planned to erect an 18-meter-tall levee, but the government's predicted highest tsunami exceeded that height, making it necessary for Chubu Electric to spend an additional 10 billion yen to raise the levee by 4 meters.

Kyushu Electric Power Co. estimated it will need 200 billion yen to meet the new regulations.

The new safety standards are expected to go into effect in July.

The NRA plans to strictly uphold the regulations so that plant operators will take the necessary measures to guard against severe accidents, earthquakes and tsunami.

(This article was written by Jin Nishikawa and Ryuta Koike.)

New nuclear safety measures to cost power companies 1 trillion yen: Mainichi survey

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130228p2a00m0na011000c.html>

Japan's 10 nuclear power plant operators estimate they will spend nearly 1 trillion yen on new safety measures stemming from the Fukushima nuclear disaster and new safety regulations, a Mainichi survey has found.

The Mainichi poll, conducted in February, asked the 10 companies to estimate their total spending on measures taken based on the Fukushima meltdowns as well as expected spending on measures mandated under new Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) rules set to go into effect in July this year. The latter mandates a number of new requirements, including the construction of facilities to deal with a major disaster, forcing up costs.

The survey found the firms' estimated new safety spending at a total of 998.7 billion yen, or about 22.7 billion yen per reactor. This number, however, did not include as yet unreleased estimates on the cost of protecting nuclear materials, and the actual total likely tops 1 trillion yen.

The largest safety expenses were for anti-tsunami sea wall construction, emergency generators, and pumper trucks that could supply coolant water to reactors in an emergency. The three companies set to spend the most were Kansai Electric Power Co. at 285.5 billion yen, Kyushu Electric Power Co. at a flat 200 billion yen, and Chubu Electric Power Co. at 150 billion yen.

The power companies have complained, however, that it is "difficult to estimate costs at this time" as the NRA has yet to reveal many details of the new regulations. However, a number of provisions the NRA has released -- including mandatory filters on reactor vents to prevent radioactive contamination of the atmosphere in an accident -- will certainly increase the companies' operations costs.

"The new anti-disaster measures alone will cost some tens of billions of yen more," Chubu Electric stated. Meanwhile Chugoku Electric Power Co., which has estimated its new safety costs at 50 billion yen, wrote that "considerations regarding the vent installation will necessitate a reappraisal of total costs."

Breaking silence

March 1, 2013

CROOKED CLEANUP: Workers break silence to allege boss ordered corner-cutting

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303010084>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Three laborers involved in radioactive cleanup around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant have alleged that a supervisor told them to dump debris in a river without regard for correct decontamination procedures, becoming the first workers to confirm publicly that corner-cutting took place.

At a news conference in the Diet building on Feb. 28, the men said a foreman ordered them to discard fallen branches and leaves into a river in an upland forest in Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, in November 2012. The material was potentially contaminated with radioactive fallout and should have been collected for safe disposal.

"I dropped branches and leaves into the river, wondering whether it was all right," said one of the men, who is in his 40s. "I was afraid that I might be fired if I refused. But the supervisor was doing the same thing right in front of me."

The men identified the supervisor as one working for a subcontractor.

Slipshod cleanup work in Fukushima Prefecture has already been widely reported, but this is the first time that decontamination workers have publicly come forward.

Another of the men, in his 50s, said the supervisor told the workers they needed to dump the material because a deadline was approaching.

"We looked at each other when we received the instruction," he said. "We thought we were not supposed to do that."

The third man, in his 40s, said he related what had happened to officials at the Environment Ministry. He spoke to them for more than an hour, he said, but they appeared not to believe him.

The government has said it has no evidence of substandard work in that locality.

Asahi - Last episode (15)

PROMETHEUS TRAP (15): U.S. maintained sense of urgency over nuclear accident

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303010012>

By HIROYOSHI ITABASHI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the final part of a series that has run in the past under the overall title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the different responses between Japan and the United States in dealing with the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011 following the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, summoned Ichiro Fujisaki, the Japanese ambassador, to the Pentagon at 4:30 p.m. on March 29, 2011. It was 5:30 a.m. the next day in Tokyo. On March 14, 2011, three days after the Great East Japan Earthquake, Mullen pressed Fujisaki to have the Self-Defense Forces dump water on the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Even though more than two weeks had since passed, Mullen still had concerns about whether the reactors at the Fukushima plant were being properly cooled.

By that time, piping was being used to pump in water to the fuel storage pools in the reactors to cool them. In the immediate aftermath of the nuclear accident, fire trucks had been spraying water into those pools.

Although cooling had been switched to the use of piping, Mullen still asked Fujisaki for further steps to strengthen the cooling process.

He told Fujisaki that the nuclear plant was not yet stabilized and there was no telling when another accident could occur.

On March 28, at Tokyo Electric Power Co. headquarters, a U.S. brigadier general asked Sakae Muto, an executive vice president, to allow participation at meetings of the joint task force to deal with the nuclear accident set up by the Japanese government and TEPCO.

The brigadier general stressed the **importance of having real-time information.**

The U.S. military is dispatched to handle critical disasters in order to secure the safety of U.S. citizens. That policy remains the same whether the disaster occurs in the United States or abroad.

The brigadier general said there was a need for complete understanding of the situation in order to protect Americans living in Japan. TEPCO officials agreed to allow the brigadier general to attend the task force meetings.

Rust Deming, who was director of Japan affairs at the State Department at the time of the nuclear accident, was asked about the differences in the response between Japan and the United States. Deming sat in on the meeting between Fujisaki and Kurt Campbell, the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, that was held on March 16, 2011, at the State Department.

Deming said the United States was most concerned about whether the Japanese government actually had a response in mind to deal with the Fukushima crisis. He added that **because information was not provided quickly or accurately, there was a sense of distrust toward Japan.**

Under the Japanese special measures law to deal with nuclear disasters, primary responsibility for dealing with nuclear accidents rests with the utilities that operates the plant.

As a result, water was dumped from helicopters six days after the nuclear accident occurred, and it was 11 days after the accident before a joint body was created with the United States to deal with the situation.

In 1979, a meltdown occurred at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant in the United States.

Deming explained that because the initial response was left up to the plant operator, confusion continued for about a week. He added that U.S. officials used the lessons from that accident to review their crisis management setup. He expressed expectations that Japan would implement similar revisions.

He was asked what the United States would have done if Japan failed to bring the nuclear accident under control.

Deming said he would not respond to hypothetical questions and ended the interview.

Misleading info on workers real radiation doses

63 workers exposed to higher radiation than logged in their records

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303020048>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Dozens of workers at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant were exposed to radiation levels higher than those registered in their personal records, according to a health ministry investigation.

Misleading information was kept in at least 63 cases.

The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare has instructed the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., and its contractors to correct their records, based on the finding.

Data for 49 workers was put right as of Feb. 25, but records for 14 have yet to be updated because their whereabouts are unknown, the ministry said.

The ministry instructed TEPCO and its 37 contractors report to it for the investigation, which looked into radiation exposure levels of those who worked at the plant between November 2011 and October 2012.

These companies introduced a system in November 2011 that used two types of dosimeters: one monitors the radiation dose a worker was exposed to daily and the other tallies cumulative radiation exposure.

The investigation found that 63 workers had the lower of the two readings registered in their individual records despite at least a 20-percent discrepancy between the two devices.

The ministry said the higher reading should be logged for the safety of the workers.

In the largest discrepancy, one worker's monthly exposure was revised from 4.4 millisieverts to 6.35 millisieverts.

Those whose records are not updated could end up working at a nuclear facility beyond the legal annual limits for radiation exposure.

The number of workers with inaccurate personal radiation exposure records is expected to increase because the ministry has yet to start an investigation into the eight-month period immediately following the disaster that unfolded in March 2011.

In those months, radiation levels were much higher than the period investigated and TEPCO and its contractors did not rigorously monitor radiation levels to which the workers were exposed.

Electric utilities and their contractors are obliged to issue personal records for workers at nuclear facilities and in cleanup work and monitor their radiation exposure to keep it within legal limits: up to 50 millisieverts annually and 100 millisieverts over five years.

The records also include the results of their health checks.

Workers receive their records when their contracts end, and new employers are supposed to use them to ascertain the accumulated radiation dose of each individual.

In addition to tracking the radiation exposure of their workers themselves, utilities are also supposed to submit the data in electronic form to the Radiation Effects Association, a public entity, for centralized management.

Earlier, TEPCO was found to have failed to send the association data for a total of 21,000 workers employed over a period from the nuclear accident through fiscal 2011.

The ministry's recent investigation followed reports by The Asahi Shimbun last summer that subcontractors manipulated readings of dosimeters for their workers by covering them with lead shields.

The ministry announced in October that it confirmed 19 instances of irregularities, including non-use of dosimeters.

(This article was written by Toshio Tada and Jun Sato.)

Same old story about workers' exposure

March 4, 2013

Fukushima decontamination workers' exposure doses go unchecked

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130304p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Radiation dose management for workers engaged in decontamination work near the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant has gone unchecked, it has been revealed, raising questions about the government's control of businesses supplying workers for the hazardous work.

The Radiation Effects Association (REA), a public interest corporation keeping track of individual radiation workers' exposure data, has not received any data on workers carrying out government-led decontamination work near the Fukushima plant, despite an agreement last year between the REA and the Ministry of the Environment that the workers' employers send the data to the association. The failure apparently came because the ministry's instructions to those employers were insufficient.

Under the Industrial Safety and Health Law, the employers of decontamination workers are obliged to keep track of the workers' exposure doses. However, there is no framework for such data to be collected and managed in an integrated manner. If a worker was engaged in decontamination work under multiple employers, that worker's exposure doses cannot be aggregated, allowing the possibility of the total dose topping the legal limit of 50 millisieverts a year or 100 millisieverts over five years.

In the case of nuclear plant workers, radiation doses of individual workers are managed under the industry's voluntary rules, called the "exposure doses registry management system." Under the system, the REA's center for registering workers' radiation doses produces and manages a database on those doses in a uniform manner. Employers of nuclear plant workers are supposed to record individual workers' exposure doses in radiation control handbooks, and the data is then sent to the REA's registration center by power companies.

In May last year, the Environment Ministry produced common contract forms to be used with general contractors and other companies that receive decontamination work orders. The forms clearly state that, as much as possible, contractors must have their workers obtain radiation control handbooks. The REA requested the ministry have contractors send their workers' exposure data to the REA's center on occasions such as when the workers leave their jobs, which the ministry agreed to. However, no such data has been received by the center to date.

An official with the ministry's decontamination work team defended its position, saying that the data transmission is left up to contractors and the REA, and that the ministry hasn't given detailed instructions to contractors. The REA, on the other hand, insisted that for uniform dose management, radiation control handbooks and dose data transmission are inseparable, adding that it has requested the ministry give detailed instructions to contractors.

Out of a total of 25 government-led decontamination projects in 10 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture initiated in December 2011, 18 have thus far been completed. In three-month model decontamination projects in the prefectural town of Okuma in 2011 and 2012, at least one worker was exposed to 11.6 millisieverts of radiation -- nearly one-fourth of the annual legal limit.

"The government needs to accurately grasp radiation doses workers are exposed to during decontamination work. Otherwise, workers will suffer disadvantages when they apply for workers' accident compensation. If the current framework isn't working, the government should establish a new system," said Kazumitsu Nawata, professor at the University of Tokyo graduate school, who is specialized in the situation of radiation workers.

Asahi "new" series : Shadow Units (1)

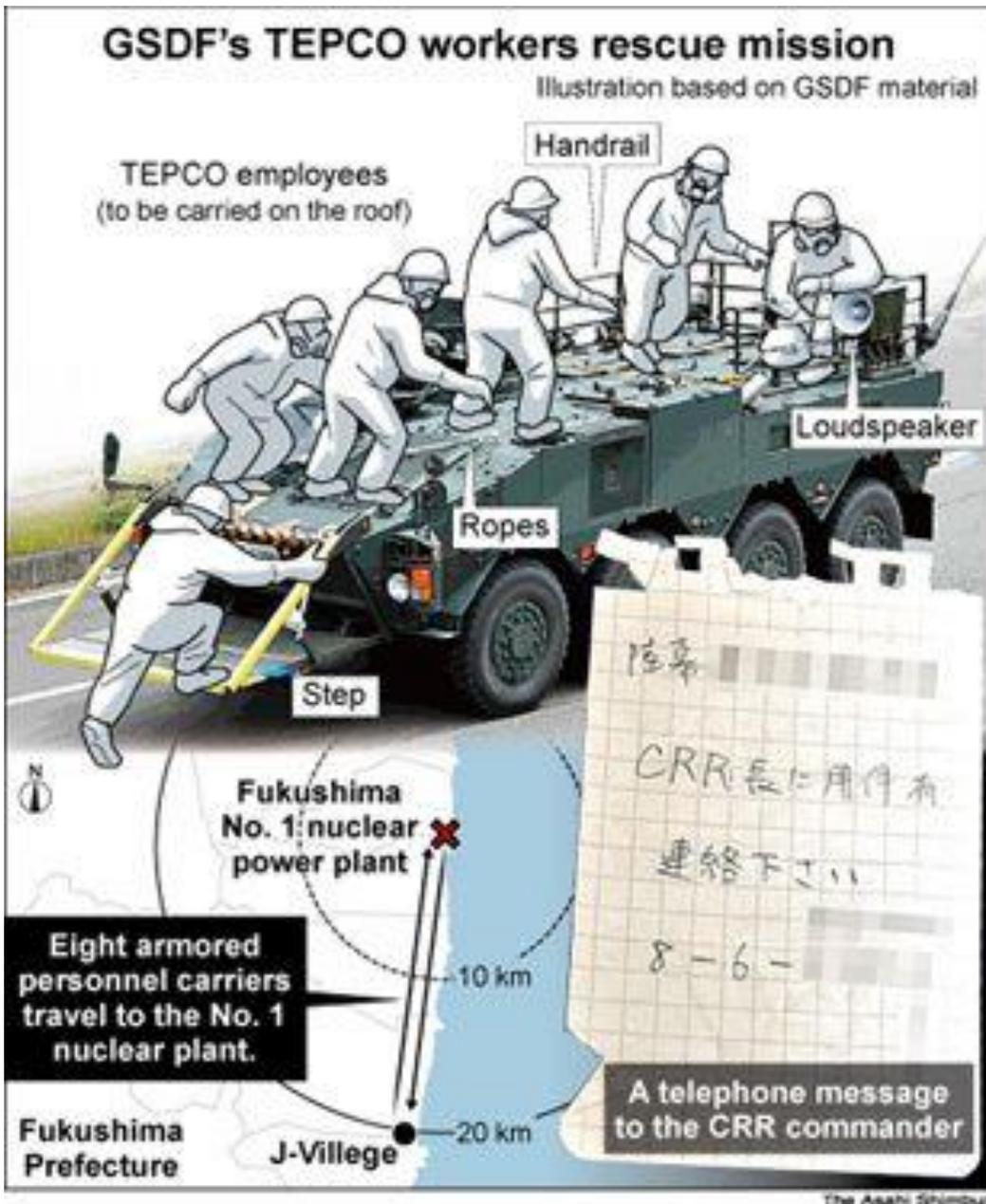
PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (1): Secret rescue mission at the Fukushima plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303040001>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Editor's note: This is the first part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

* * *



After the nuclear crisis broke out at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on March 11, 2011, a special "shadow unit" of the Self-Defense Forces got the call to mobilize for a secret mission.

The Ground Self-Defense Force's Central Readiness Regiment (CRR) is one of the SDF's special units whose operations are shrouded in secrecy and "invisible" to the public.

When the SDF participates in United Nations' peacekeeping operations, the CRR is the first to be dispatched to the operation site. The unit makes preparations for billeting and guarding ahead of the start of peacekeeping operations. Members of the unit regularly receive vigorous physical training to be ready for contingencies.

On March 19, 2011, Col. Kazunori Yamaguchi, the 48-year-old commander of the CRR, was at the GSDF's Camp Koriyama in Fukushima Prefecture. At 9 p.m., when he returned to his desk, Yamaguchi found a telephone message from an officer at the Defense Ministry's Ground Staff Office.

"We have something to discuss," it said. "Call me."

On that day, the Tokyo Fire Department's Hyper Rescue team had been continuously spraying water on the overheating No. 3 reactor at the disaster-stricken nuclear power plant. Yamaguchi thought it must be something related to the ongoing nuclear crisis. Since water had started being poured into the crippled reactors, he assumed that his unit would be assigned to an even tougher mission.

As he called the Ground Staff Office, Yamaguchi found that he had guessed correctly.

"We are considering a plan to deal with the worst possible situation at the nuclear plant," said the officer. "That would involve rescuing the Tokyo Electric Power Co. employees who would have been left behind (within the compound)."

The proposed mission to rescue TEPCO employees would probably force Yamaguchi's team to head into the accident site amid high levels of radiation. "Would it be safe?" Yamaguchi asked despite himself. The answer was not quite reassuring. "I ... would guess so."

When the phone conversation was over, the Defense Ministry officer told Yamaguchi to keep the mission secret.

The reason for the secrecy was fear that disclosure of the mission would provoke anxiety and speculation among the public. Even now, information about the mission is still being kept from the public.

Details of the mission dribbled out bit by bit from senior officials at the Defense Ministry through interviews. Through them, contours of the plan gradually emerged.

The 700-man-strong CRR was created in 2008 and is headquartered in the GSDF's Camp Utsunomiya in Tochigi Prefecture. It comprises four companies, including infantry companies equipped with armored fighting vehicles and mortars.

Yamaguchi's unit was dispatched to Camp Koriyama on March 17, two days before the phone call for him came in.

The unit helped evacuate residents living between 20 and 30 kilometers from the disaster-stricken nuclear power plant. But Yamaguchi was convinced that there were tougher tasks in store for his squad.

In the dead of night on March 19, shortly after the telephone conversation, eight-wheeled armored personnel carriers mobilized from SDF bases all over the country began to arrive at Camp Koriyama.

These armored vehicles are equipped with eight special reinforced tires that can keep the vehicle running even when they have blown out. They are used for land transport of personnel at a maximum speed of 100 kilometers per hour.

The rescue plan called for the unit's entry into the nuclear plant compound no matter what was happening there to save dozens of workers. That required converting the vehicle for the mission.

The rescued workers would be carried on the roof to spare the time needed for them to get into the vehicle and finish the mission as quickly as possible. To ensure that the rescued workers could climb up onto the vehicle's roof quickly, a step was attached to the front while a handrail was fixed on the roof. Two ropes with knots at intervals of 50 centimeters were hung from the roof.

A loudspeaker was also installed to make the vehicle's arrival known to the workers. The driver's station was covered with a protective sheet to shield the crew from radiation.

Early March 20, a formal order was issued. Yamaguchi's unit was ordered to carry out four tasks: preparing meals; communications support; search for missing victims; and "various support" in response to the needs of organizations concerned.

The "various support" cited last referred to the rescue mission.

Yamaguchi found it hard to eat as he wondered how he should explain the mission to his men.

At 8 a.m., Yamaguchi briefed 220 members of the unit about the mission at an exercise area where they were quartered.

“We will carry out tasks assigned to us, with the principal focus on rescuing TEPCO employees in an unforeseen emergency,” he said. “Don’t fear or underestimate the crisis.”

The unit members were standing in silence on the grounds, which was slushy with melting snow.

Yamaguchi told them to say nothing about the mission to anyone and called it a night.

“This is going to be a long operation. Take a bath and rest for what starts tomorrow.”

(This article was written by Hidefumi Nogami and Hiroyoshi Itabashi.)

Asahi - Shadow Units (2)

March 6, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (2): SDF rescuers don heavy protective gear plus diapers

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303060001>

add photo

A member of the Ground Self-Defense Force wearing special gear for protection from radiation. (Photo courtesy of the GDSF)

By HIDEFUMI NOGAMI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the second part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the “shadow units” of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

On the night of March 20, 2011, the Ground Self-Defense Force’s Central Readiness Regiment (CRR) started preparing for a secret mission to rescue Tokyo Electric Power Co. employees working at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The CRR left Camp Koriyama in Fukushima Prefecture and moved to Iwaki Seaside Nature Center, a seaside recreation complex, located 70 kilometers southeast of the camp.

The complex, which features accommodations, a gymnasium and various facilities for camping and other outdoor activities, is often used by elementary and junior high schools for their summer school camps.

Located in an inconspicuous place on a hill at 60 meters above sea level, the facilities are ideal for launching such a secret mission.

At 9:30 p.m., Kazunori Yamaguchi, the regiment commander, held a meeting to discuss the game plan.

Some 30 GSDF officers, including company commanders and section chiefs, gathered in a meeting room.

Yamaguchi briefed the attendees on an outline of the operation, drawing charts on a whiteboard.

According to the plan, the regiment was to move from the recreation center to J-Village, a soccer training complex located 10 kilometers north, and use the facilities as the operation base for the mission.

From J-Village, members of the unit were to make a round trip to the nuclear plant, 20 kilometers north, in a convoy of eight-wheeled armored personnel carriers.

The TEPCO workers rescued and carried back from the plant as well as the vehicles would be decontaminated at J-Village.

Yamaguchi told the attendants to make the necessary preparations to conduct the tasks they were in charge of by March 25.

Details of the rescue plan were gradually worked out.

The vehicles would use the highway in their travel to the nuclear plant as much as possible. But other possible routes, including those using narrow farm roads, were also checked to secure alternatives in the event of the highway being totally or partially impassable.

After entering the nuclear plant, the unit would use loudspeakers attached to the vehicles to announce their arrival and urge workers inside buildings to exit them and get on the roofs of the vehicles quickly.

The CRR hastily converted the vehicles for the special rescue operation.

The regiment began training for the high-risk mission on the morning of March 21.

The regiment members assigned to the mission would wear 20-kilogram lead vests over their protective suits to shield their bodies from radiation and also put on protective masks. The garments were the same kind of heavy protective clothing as that worn by members of the GSDF's 1st Helicopter Brigade when they carried out the mission of dropping water on overheating reactors from the sky.

In addition, all members of the regiment participating in the mission were to wear disposable diapers because there would be no time for them to take off their gear to go to the bathroom.

One round of the rescue operation, from leaving J-Village to finishing the decontamination, would take at least five hours.

If there were many workers to be rescued, the process would have to be repeated many times without rest.

At a corner of a room with a straw-mat floor used for standby, Sgt. 1st Class Takayuki Saito, 36, who was assigned to serve as the driver of a vehicle, tried both urinating and defecating while standing.

Saito decided to cut back on his intake of both water and food.

It was decided that each vehicle would be manned by a team of just two--the driver and the commander. Typically, the driver operates the vehicle with his head sticking out of the hatch. But the hatch would remain closed during the mission for safety, forcing the driver to operate by using only three periscopes provided for observation.

Depending totally on the three periscopes, which are each roughly the size of a rear-view mirror, meant there would be many blind spots.

However, there are six periscopes for wider observation available to the commander seated to the rear of the driver. The commander would help the driver operate the vehicle by providing supplementary information through in-vehicle radio communications.

Covered with a protective sheet, the interior of the vehicle was extremely narrow, effectively immobilizing the crew inside.

Their protective masks caused their faces to be drenched in sweat and made it difficult to breathe.

Some members vomited due to the heat and a feeling of being suffocated.

* * *

The previous installment of this series is available at: (1)

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303040001>

Three anti-nuke activists dropped from Central Environment Council

March 5, 2013

LDP boots anti-nuke advocates from environment panel

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201303050071

By TETSU KOBAYASHI/ Staff Writer

Japan's ruling party, while hardly a champion of environmental issues, is apparently rather touchy about any criticism of its policies in that area.

That may explain the decision by the Liberal Democratic Party to drop three anti-nuclear activists from the government's Central Environment Council.

The three individuals were approached about becoming or staying on as panel members last December, before the Lower House election that brought the LDP back into power, but have subsequently been told their services are no longer required.

While Environment Ministry officials cited a need for fewer members so as to energize discussions, it has not gone unnoticed that the three are vocal opponents of nuclear energy and forceful advocates of more drastic measures to combat global warming.

Ministry officials said Nobuteru Ishihara called for a review of the number of panel members after he was named environment minister following the LDP's landslide victory on Dec. 16.

January is traditionally when the Central Environment Council appoints new members. By early December 2012, the ministry had a roster of 30 people.

However, after the change in government, the first council meeting scheduled for Jan. 10 was postponed and the council membership reconsidered.

A new lineup was appointed on Feb. 8, but only 25 members were included.

Among the individuals left off the new list are Mie Asaoka, a lawyer who heads the environmental nongovernmental organization Kiko Network, Kazuhiro Ueta, an economics professor at Kyoto University, and Junko Edahiro, an environmental journalist.

Asaoka has campaigned for Japan to maintain its international pledge of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent in 2020 over 1990 levels. However, the Abe administration has said it wants to review that promise in light of the 2011 nuclear disaster that has forced Japan to rely more sharply on thermal power generation.

Ueta chaired a panel tasked with considering whether that 25-percent reduction goal was achievable under the previous government led by the Democratic Party of Japan.

All three individuals advocate greater use of natural energy sources. Prior to the nuclear disaster that has left nearly all reactors idled, they had proposed wide-ranging reforms of the electricity supply system to sharply reduce the nation's dependence on nuclear energy.

Asaoka had been a member of the council since 2005. She said a ministry official told her privately in early December that her reappointment was a done deal.

However, in early February, a high-ranking ministry official contacted her to say she had been dropped from the new roster because the number of council members was being reduced.

Both Ueta and Edahiro served as temporary members of a subcommittee discussing measures to deal with global warming until last year. According to them, they were informed late last year that they would be included as full members of the council. However, they were contacted this year by ministry officials and told the earlier decision had been rescinded.

Regarding the postponement of the first council meeting, Ishihara said at a Jan. 8 news conference, "Now that there is a new Cabinet (under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe), members need time to get used to the new policies that are being put forward."

In response to questions from The Asahi Shimbun about the thinning out of council members, the Environment Ministry's Policy and Coordination Division said, "We have decided to streamline the council in order to improve discussions."

According to sources in the policy division, ministry officials showed Ishihara the proposed lineup of council members shortly after he became environment minister, expecting him to approve the list. Instead, he called for a review of the number and makeup of panel members.

In addition to specialists, the council includes members who represent local governments, business organizations and labor unions.

A high-ranking ministry official said: "We cannot simply eliminate members who have been recommended by various organizations. As a result, a number of those considered pro-environmental were not included in the council."

Asahi - Shadow Units (3)

March 8, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (3): Keeping the public in the dark

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303080009>

By HIDEFUMI NOGAMI/Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the third part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

The Ground Self-Defense Force's Central Readiness Regiment (CRR), a "shadow unit" trained for special operations, made every effort to guard the secrecy of their planned mission to rescue Tokyo Electric Power Co. employees from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant if the need arose.

The CRR had to ensure that even its training for this highly confidential mission would not be seen by anyone outside the organization.

Even TEPCO, the operator of the nuclear plant, was kept in the dark on the rescue plan.

Yoshifumi Hibako, 61, GSDF Chief of Staff, says TEPCO was then believed to be too preoccupied with dealing with the nuclear crisis to cooperate with the SDF in any way.

"We were also concerned that disclosure of the rescue operation could upset the company," he says.

Starting on March 21, 2011, members of the CRR expected to take part in the mission repeatedly practiced quickly donning protective masks and lead vests. They also practiced operating the armored vehicles to be used with the hatches closed. They carried out rescue drills to check if members pretending to be TEPCO employees could climb onto the roofs of the vehicles quickly.

The CRR members also did simulations of using loudspeakers attached to the vehicles to call on TEPCO employees within buildings to come out and get onto their vehicles.

What they would tell to the employees was as follows: "We have come to rescue you. Please get onto the roofs of our vehicles swiftly. Act calmly."

But the unit had to ensure that the voices saying these words in simulation exercises would not be heard. It was also necessary to prevent their exercises from being seen by the public.

Initially, the unit conducted rescue exercises secretly in an industrial park near the Iwaki Seaside Nature Center, the recreation complex where they were camped. But they changed the location after their drills were seen by local residents.

In its efforts to keep the mission secret, the unit constantly changed the locations for the exercises, using various sites between 20 and 30 kilometers from the disaster-stricken nuclear power plant, including a public playground and a municipal parking lot.

At 9:30 a.m. on March 26, the CRR conducted an exercise involving entry into the premises of the nuclear plant for the first time.

The unit asked TEPCO employees to guide the members to the plant, but didn't tell them that it was a rescue drill. The TEPCO employees were only told that the objective was reconnaissance of the route.

The massive armored vehicles to be used for the rescue mission posed a big problem.

During the actual rescue operation, a convoy of eight such vehicles would travel in a row. But a line of eight armored personnel carriers with reinforced tires would inevitably be very conspicuous.

The unit members told the TEPCO employees that they wanted to use a variety of vehicles because various situations would be possible.

The convoy used for the exercise was composed mostly of smaller four-wheel armored vehicles, with only one being the carrier that would be used in the actual mission.

Kazunori Yamaguchi, the regiment commander, was on board the personnel carrier. The convoy came to the side of a reactor building whose framework had become exposed due to an explosion.

At least once every week, the CRR rehearsed the entire operation, from receiving an emergency order to rescuing workers at the plant.

Maj. Atsushi Kikuchi, 37, who was the first company commander, imagined finding TEPCO employees lying on the ground when they arrived at the plant for the rescue operation. He thought that CRR members would also collapse as they exited their vehicles to save the employees. He prepared himself to die.

Master Sgt. Yasuyuki Machida, a 41-year-old member of the public relations section, produced an extra of the regiment newspaper to allay concerns among the families of the members. The extra, of course, said nothing about the secret mission.

The first extra after the decision on the rescue mission was made was published on March 29 in the middle of training for the mission.

The paper only reported on the CRR's operation of transporting local residents on buses from an evacuation center to a hotel where they could take a bath.

Beside a big headline saying, "Assistance produces smiles," was a large photo showing a girl smiling and waving.

* * *

Asahi - Shadow Units (4)

March 11, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (4): Selection of personnel for Fukushima mission limited by unit makeup

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303110012>

March 11, 2013

By HIDEFUMI NOGAMI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the fourth part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

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On March 27, 2011, one week after the Ground Self-Defense Force's Central Readiness Regiment received the order to rescue employees at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the 50 personnel involved in the mission went to Camp Koriyama for a briefing.

The talk was given by Lt. Col. Katsumi Nakamura, 53, who heads the chemicals section at the Kanto Logistics Depot.

The service members were all novices when it came to radiation. That was evident when one asked, "What is a meltdown?"

All the participants were seriously taking notes because they were well aware that not understanding any bit of information could mean the difference between life and death.

The question was raised to what extent protective sheets applied to the armored vehicles would protect personnel from radiation.

When Nakamura said, "about 20 to 30 percent," a gloomy silence prevailed in the room because of the seriousness of the situation.

Although the briefing was originally scheduled to last one hour, it was extended for about 30 minutes because of the many questions the participants had.

Selection of the commander and driver for the armored vehicles that would enter the site of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant to rescue the employees of Tokyo Electric Power Co. was left up to those who would be involved in the mission. That was similar to what happened in selecting members of the 1st Helicopter Brigade, who were tasked with dumping water on the reactor buildings.

Sixteen personnel would be needed for the eight armored vehicles. That meant choosing 14 members in addition to the regiment and company commanders.

Atsushi Kikuchi, the 1st Company commander, isolated himself in the strategy room to look over a list of about 60 personnel. He wanted to exclude single members as well as those who were about to start families. However, because mainly young members were on the list, he designated 14 personnel without enlisting any opinions or giving a reason for his selections.

Those members who were not chosen for the mission assisted in training by helping the driver don his protective gear as well as inspecting the vehicles. Two to three personnel were assigned to each armored vehicle to provide backup support.

Driving using periscopes meant there would be many blind spots. The armored vehicles also would have to be navigated into the nuclear power plant, which was experiencing an emergency in which no one knew what was unfolding there. Such conditions naturally called for veteran personnel to serve as drivers.

One such individual was Sgt. 1st Class Yasufumi Suzuki, 30, who had about 7,000 kilometers of driving experience. On March 11, 2011, Suzuki was bench pressing 70-kilogram barbells at Camp Utsunomiya when the earthquake struck.

A standby order meant he could not go home, so he called his wife, Mineko, 30, that night.

"Cancel the wedding reception," Suzuki said.

While they had married the previous year, they had not yet held their reception. It had been scheduled for March 21, 2011.

Taken aback, Mineko asked, "What? Won't everything be all right in 10 days?"

Suzuki shot back, "Stop kidding around."

They had planned to hold the reception at a hotel in Yokohama and had already sent out invitations to 60 people, including relatives and senior officers. They had planned to have Suzuki carry a beer server on his shoulder while Mineko passed out snacks as they made their way around to guests sitting at the tables at the reception.

During training, Suzuki could not divulge to his wife what the mission would entail. After dinner, he would e-mail her with simple messages such as, "I just ate."

How independent was that panel?

March 14, 2013

ANALYSIS: TEPCO inquiry admits 'misinformation,' but critics demand more

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303140095>

By HIDEAKI KIMURA/ Staff Writer

An inquiry by Tokyo Electric Power Co. into allegations the utility misled Diet investigators and thereby thwarted an inspection of a particular building at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant has agreed that there was misinformation, but insisted it was unintentional.

But the findings were dismissed by one official who believes TEPCO willfully prevented the pursuit of truth, Mitsuhiko Tanaka, who sat on the National Diet's Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission.

"I am not interested in a token investigation that only cited arguments in TEPCO's favor," he said. "I hope the Diet will take up the matter at an early date."

On Feb. 7, The Asahi Shimbun reported on a conversation that Toshimitsu Tamai, general manager of TEPCO's Corporate Planning Department, had with Mitsuhiko Tanaka and other commission members on Feb. 28, 2012.

During that conversation, Tamai dissuaded the committee from visiting and examining the plant's No. 1 reactor building by falsely insisting that it was pitch black inside.

A recording of the conversation, obtained by The Asahi Shimbun, makes clear that Tamai put pressure on Tanaka to abandon the proposed inspection.

"Would it not be better to drop it?" Tamai is heard saying.

Tamai also tells the Diet officials that conducting an on-site survey would set an awkward precedent which might trigger an onslaught of similar requests.

"People such as war photographers might start pestering us, saying: 'I'll risk it. I don't care about my life. I'm going in at all costs,'" Tamai is heard telling Tanaka. "If you'll allow me to say this, that would place a burden on our company."

And Tamai tries the hard-sell: "I'd like you to make a decision today," he says.

The committee did, indeed, drop its plans to visit, even though some observers believe an on-site examination could answer an important unresolved question: Did the plant fail because of the tsunami, as TEPCO insists; or because of damage sustained in the earlier earthquake? It should have been built to withstand the size of the temblor that struck on March 11, 2011.

Under pressure to confirm or dispel suspicions that it misled the committee, TEPCO commissioned a third-party panel to examine what happened.

In a report submitted to TEPCO on March 13, the investigative panel declared that Tamai had misled the Diet committee, but that he had not done so on purpose. In other words, the report said, he did not misinform investigators such as Tanaka with the aim of dissuading them from carrying out an on-site inspection.

The panel argued that Tamai would have had no motive to tell a lie that would have been rapidly exposed had the inspectors gone ahead with their visit. It would be hard to assume that he had lied on purpose, it said, because by doing so, he would have dug a hole from which it would have been hard to climb out.

But that logic is flawed because the lie would not have been exposed if TEPCO had successfully blocked the visit.

One major problem with the TEPCO-commissioned panel is that all 26 people it interviewed are TEPCO insiders.

The panel initially asked members of the now-disbanded Diet investigation commission if they would cooperate. The former Diet investigators said they would cooperate if the Diet gave them permission to do so. But the panel then never requested such permission and, therefore, conducted no interviews with the former Diet investigators.

The panel also said its investigations included a review of media reports. However, here, there are indications to the contrary.

There was no mention in the panel's report of Tamai's remarks that could have indicated his intention, such as his pressure to "make a decision today." It contained no investigation of the reported voice recording.

On Feb. 7, Tanaka asked the heads of the two chambers of the Diet--the Lower House speaker and the Upper House president--to investigate the allegations and to press ahead with an on-site survey.

But the Diet has since left it to TEPCO to investigate the case of alleged misinformation--and has left it to the Nuclear Regulation Authority to decide whether to inspect the site.

The Lower House secretariat said March 13 that Tanaka's request is "not under discussion." The Upper House secretariat said: "There is no particular move at this stage."

By HIDEAKI KIMURA/ Staff Writer

March 13, 2013

Panel says no cover-up attempt by TEPCO

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303130112>

An independent panel says the operator of Japan's tsunami-crippled nuclear plant misinformed investigators and blocked inspection of key equipment last year, but that there was no cover-up attempt. The case involves a parliamentary probe of equipment at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant's No. 1 reactor. A member of the investigative team said investigators had to scrap an inspection of the reactor's emergency cooling equipment, accusing plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. of falsely saying the building was dark and dangerous.

After the incident caused an outcry from lawmakers and the public, TEPCO commissioned a panel to look into the matter.

On March 13, the panel attributed the problem to a TEPCO official's misunderstanding of the situation at No. 1 reactor building, and said TEPCO wasn't trying to hide the equipment from the inspectors.

Asahi - Shadow Units (5)

March 13, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (5): CRF units aligned against common enemy, the crippled nuclear plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303130007>

By HIDEFUMI NOGAMI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the fifth part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

* * *

On March 11, 2011, after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck a wide area of eastern Japan, then Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa issued an order at 7:30 p.m. to the Self-Defense Forces to prepare for deployment.

Their mission would be to deal with the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which was quickly spiraling out of control.

Under the direction of the commander of the Northeastern Army, SDF members based in Fukushima Prefecture, as well as the northern Kanto and Shinetsu regions, were among the first to respond to the nuclear accident.

But that deployment changed at 11:05 a.m. on March 14, 2011, when all response to the Fukushima nuclear accident was unified under the Ground Self-Defense Force's Central Readiness Force (CRF). The CRF is made up of so-called "shadow units," which are trained for special operations and whose missions are shrouded in secrecy. The Central Readiness Regiment that was preparing for a possible rescue of employees of Tokyo Electric Power Co. is just one element of the CRF. The force has five major units with the equipment and capabilities to deal with various emergencies and a total of about 4,000 members.

The commander was Gen. Toshinobu Miyajima, 59.

He gave specific orders to the various units under his command. While the Central Readiness Regiment was given the top-secret order to rescue TEPCO employees at the plant, the 1st Airborne Brigade was ordered to prepare to evacuate residents in the event of an emergency. The brigade, the only parachute unit in Japan, is based in Narashino, Chiba Prefecture.

The Central Readiness Regiment set up its living quarters about 30 kilometers south of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. The 1st Airborne Brigade was divided into three units, which were dispersed to locations north, west and south along an arc 30 kilometers from the nuclear plant.

The Central NBC Weapon Defense Unit, which is specialized to deal with acts of terrorism involving nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, had already begun preparations by setting up its base in Okuma, the town where the Fukushima No. 1 plant is located.

The unit went into action when the Aum Shinrikyo cult spread sarin gas in the Tokyo subway system in 1995 and again in 1999 when a criticality accident occurred in Tokai, Ibaraki Prefecture. Unit members not only are accustomed to working while wearing protective gear and face masks, but are also knowledgeable about the dangers of radiation.

The 1st Helicopter Brigade was dispatched to Sendai and would handle the dumping of water on the Fukushima No. 1 plant as well as the transport of relief supplies and disaster victims.

In that manner, the various "shadow" units of the CRF were set up around the Fukushima No. 1 plant, almost as if they were surrounding an enemy force.

The most highly classified unit under the CRF is the Special Forces group, which specializes in taking on terrorists. The 300 members of that group were not dispatched to deal with the natural disasters, but were on hand to deal with any other possible military-related development.

The decision to deploy the CRF units was made by Gen. Ryoichi Oriki, 62, chief of staff of the SDF's Joint Staff, Japan's top military officer. As he observed the growing crisis unfolding at the nuclear plant, Oriki felt that the SDF had to be called into action. He also decided that a command structure to deal with the nuclear accident should be separate from that to help provide relief to the disaster-stricken areas.

The direct catalyst for his decision to deploy the CRF units was the explosion at the No. 3 reactor of the Fukushima No. 1 plant, which occurred at 11:01 a.m. on March 14, 2011. Four minutes later, command for dealing with the nuclear accident was shifted from the Northeastern Army to the CRF.

At that same time, an emergency report was filed with CRF command at Camp Asaka in Tokyo's Nerima Ward.

"Members appear to have encountered a problem," the report said. "We cannot make contact with them." Members of the Central NBC Weapon Defense Unit had been sent to the No. 3 reactor to provide support for supplying water.

The emergency report said six members were missing, including the commander of the unit, Col. Shinji Iwakuma, 51.

"Don't die," was the thought running through the mind of CRF commander Miyajima.

Regulators are there to say no and resist industry's pressure

March 14, 2013

INTERVIEW: Former U.S. nuke watchdog chair says regulators must stay independent

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303140050>

By SHIRO NAMEKATA/ Correspondent

As it is poised to impose strict regulatory measures on the operation of nuclear power plants, the Nuclear Regulation Authority is increasingly met by opposition that it is making the resumption of plants that are currently offline virtually impossible.

In a recent interview with The Asahi Shimbun in Washington, Gregory Jaczko, former chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), said it is crucial for a nuclear watchdog to stay independent from the nuclear industry.

Jaczko, who, unlike his four colleagues, opposed the first new construction and operation of a nuclear plant in the United States since the 1979 Three Mile Island accident, also discussed the future of nuclear energy. Excerpts from the interview follow:

Question: Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority is an independent watchdog modeled after the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, but the nuclear industry in Japan has criticized it for being too strict. What do you think?

Jaczko: If the industry is unhappy with the regulatory body, it is probably a good thing. Independence in decision-making, in particular, licensing decisions, is crucial, and I believe that exists in Japan.

The regulators need to have technical expertise, because without technical expertise they rely on others for information and cannot make independent judgments.

They are there to say no, sometimes when the industry does not want them to do so. It is the role of the regulators.

After the Fukushima nuclear accident, everyone turns around and says, "why didn't they make TEPCO analyze the tsunami hazard earlier?"

Had they been doing it earlier, TEPCO probably would have complained, saying it would cost too much money or there was no scientific basis.

But it would have been the right thing, and then the accident never would have happened.

It is always easy to criticize the regulators before you have an accident, and then, if they have not done their jobs, it is easy to criticize them after.

That is the nature of being a regulator.

Q: Last year, when you were chairman, you were the only one to vote against approval of new reactors. Wasn't that unusual?

A: Yes, well, it was very simple. You would not buy a car if somebody was telling you that they were trying to fix the brakes.

You would wait until they had fixed the brakes, and then you would go ahead and buy the car.

Unfortunately, there was tremendous pressure for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to issue these licenses.

I suggested putting in a requirement or a "condition" in the license, that said that they would not operate the plant until all of the Fukushima changes were implemented.

My colleagues on the commission rejected that proposal. Given that they rejected it, I had no choice but to disapprove issuing the licenses.

Q: The United States has implemented anti-terrorist measures for nuclear power plants after the Sept. 11 attacks. How would that be effective for disasters and other challenges?

A: It does not really matter whether it is terrorist-induced, whether it is earthquake-induced, or some type of other accident.

In many cases, the problems are still the same, which is how do you ensure that the reactor stays cool, that the integrity of the fuel is maintained, so that you can provide adequate cooling.

After the Fukushima accident, many people, including myself, said that the anti-terrorism measures would have prevented the accident. I am not so convinced that is the case today.

When we inspected nuclear plants in the United States after the Fukushima accident, we found many of the anti-terrorism measures had not been implemented appropriately the way they were designed. The plants would not necessarily have survived a tsunami or an earthquake, because the safety measures were designed to be used in the event of a terrorist attack.

If you are worried about the plant being attacked, the kind of backup safety equipment you want to put somewhere far away from the plant. But, the plant would not necessarily be protected from hurricanes and earthquakes.

So, even if that equipment had been at Fukushima No. 1 plant, it probably would have been destroyed along with many of the other equipment that was destroyed. There were some areas there for improvement.

Q: The NRC has implemented its first measurements, so-called "Tier 1 recommendations," following the Fukushima accident. Would you still vote against approval of a new reactor even now?

A: I certainly would, if I were in that position. I would think that the regulatory body would want to make sure that they could not operate, before the Fukushima lessons had been implemented.

I visited Japan after the accident to hear directly from the people who had been impacted. It was important to me to hear what the effects were, how the people were dealing with challenges of being evacuated and how the evacuation was progressing.

It is not acceptable, to the people who had to be evacuated, the people of Namie, the people around that site who had their lives disrupted because of this accident.

There is nothing like being removed from your home. You, your friends and your family are displaced, and you are no longer in the place that you are the most comfortable.

It is something that the industry, the regulators and anyone involved in nuclear power should all agree on that this is simply not acceptable.

We have to rethink this technology in such a way that these kinds of accidents simply cannot happen and that I could, as a regulator or as anyone else, comfortably say to you: "that accident will never happen."

Q: What was the problem facing the NRC even before you became chairman?

A: The biggest problem with the NRC continues to be the heavy influence that the industry has in selecting the members of the commission. It is a very political process.

There are few commissioners who ever get onto the commission who are not endorsed by the industry, including myself and the current chairman.

There are many good people, who are very technologically sophisticated, but especially in the last few years that I was on the commission, there was very strong influence from the industry on the commission members. You need to have much more diversity in the views of the commissioners.

It would be virtually impossible for someone who is publicly skeptical of nuclear power to ever be confirmed as a commissioner on the NRC. That is fundamentally wrong.

If you look at the state of nuclear power in the United States, it is not very good.

There are very difficult and challenging things, but the culture that exists now is one of not wanting to have the NRC involved, wanting to do more things by the licensees themselves and having less oversight from the NRC.

A lot of what I fought against when I was chairman was to re-instill that culture that our job is to ensure safety and to do what we need to do. And that was met with tremendous opposition from my colleagues on the commission.

Q: Was there pressure from the industry?

A: That pressure is always there. The nuclear industry, very early on, learned that I was not going to respond to a lot of pressure, so they stopped. And, they applied pressure elsewhere.

Q: What was the exact pressure like?

A: It is ultimately meetings with senior executives of the utilities, who demand certain things and ask certain things of the chairman, and expect it to be done.

Then it turns into political pressure from members of Congress, as utilities will work with members of Congress to have them apply pressure.

Most of it is in the form of dialogue, discussion and questions, and that is the type of pressure that is applied. It is very pervasive.

What I saw is that we have very good staff at the agency, and the challenges really come in from the leadership, in the direction that is set by the commission.

That is really where the problems lie. The commissioners come in with strong connections to the industry and are very open with the industry.

It would not be uncommon for a reviewer at the agency to have a challenge with the utility and the utility goes directly to a commissioner and say, "I am having trouble with this particular review. Can you help move this along?"

Q: You resigned the chairmanship a year before your term expired after your former colleagues made accusations against how you managed the commission. Did the industry play a role behind that?

A: I cannot say for sure what role the industry played, but I have been told that there were some in the industry who wanted me out of my position.

But it was exclusively my decision. It was an opportunity to have a replacement for me who was, I believed to be, reform-minded and safety-focused.

There are very few times in which non-industry people have become chairman of the NRC, and for me to resign early was one way to do that.

Q: How difficult is it for the watchdog to stay independent from industry pressure?

A: if you have the legal and technical independence, it is the leadership that really gives you that true independence in your operation. It is the tone that the leadership sets.

When I look at the NRC, almost all the people were there because they believed in safety. That was what their number one job was. It was what they came to work every day to implement.

A lot of what I spent my time at the NRC was setting a tone that our job as regulators was to put safety first.

There is no one else who has the authority to say no to a utility, other than the regulator. Maybe the bank could in some way, but when it comes to safety, the only people that can say no are the regulator.

Q: In the United States, the development of shale gas is outperforming nuclear power in cost effectiveness. How do you think of the future of nuclear energy?

A: It is hard to say, but I think there are two futures for nuclear power.

One is a future in which the industry continues to kind of degrade, that more plants, as they get older, start to shut down, do not restart. And you have very little interest in people studying nuclear technology, nuclear engineering, nuclear science, and the industry slowly disappears.

It will probably not disappear completely. There will probably always be some nuclear reactors, but there will not be growth.

Here we are, 50 years since the first reactor ideas were born, or the first plants were built, and now we are talking about a significantly new safety feature in the United States.

This is not things that you would expect to be adding now, 50 years after this technology had been developed.

Every time there is something we did not expect, then we add on a new safety system to fix that hole. **It is like a dike leaking everywhere.**

And, if you look at the projections, right now, for the number of plants that will ultimately be nearing the end of their licenses in the next 20 years or so, you will probably see a reduction in the total number of plants in the United States.

We have four units that are being built right now, but that has not sent a good signal for new construction. It will be difficult for there to be more nuclear plants built, absent specific legislation to address climate change.

But there certainly are attractive features of nuclear power. We need to rethink the current design to have better designs such as small modular reactors.

If we have a reactor that is 100 megawatts, the quantity of material and the energy we have to disperse that material is significantly reduced.

It will not contaminate a 10-kilometer radius area, because it does not have enough material.

Q: How about the problem of nuclear waste?

A: Everybody knows how to solve the problem. It is just finding a place to do it.

Q: In a democracy, it is difficult to find a place to dispose of it with the consent of local residents.

A: I do not think it is impossible. But in the United States, for instance, we have tried to do exactly the opposite.

We try to find a place without getting the consensus of the local populace, and as a result, it has been a disaster--the Yucca Mountain disaster.

Yucca Mountain was not chosen because the people of Nevada held a referendum and said they want this waste dump in Nevada. It was chosen because of a very political process that left Nevada as the only state left after all the other ones were taken off the table, for political reasons.

Done in the right way, you can do it, and then it is a very difficult science to predict.

I always think of it this way: it is not easy to find out where your roof is leaking. Sometimes it takes a lot of trial and error and you still get a leak somewhere, and somebody comes and they fix it.

Well, now imagine trying to do that in a rock for the next 100,000 years. That is what you are trying to do to determine the safety of geological repositories.

It is not easy to do that science, and there may be some people who might say you cannot really do it, because the assumptions you make are so far-fetched and you are over time scales of which you have absolutely no ability to really predict.

There will always be people who will say the analysis is flawed, but if you cannot really do it, then it is hard to say it is going to be safe. You have to just kind of go back to some first principles.

Fundamentally, the way I look at it is that we know how to maintain nuclear fuel in the short term. For the most part, we think it maintains its integrity. It does not need a lot of active systems, and dry casks work very well as far as we know.

The biggest challenges may be in a couple hundred years you may have some degradation in the fuel and it loses its integrity. It changes how you have to keep it and maintain it, but in principle, it should not create a problem.

But at a certain point, if we do not want to deal with the waste, and if nobody wants a repository, you just have to stop generating nuclear power. There is no other answer.

Transparency - The new energy panel

March 15, 2013

6 of 8 panelists who voted to phase out atomic power by 2030s axed

Abe purges energy board of antinuclear experts

Bloomberg

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/15/national/abe-purges-energy-board-of-antinuclear-experts/#.UUM0Wjf1tEs>

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government has removed most of the antinuclear researchers appointed to a post-Fukushima energy policy board that was advising the state, it was learned Friday.

After his Liberal Democratic Party won a landslide victory in December's Lower House election, Abe said the ousted Democratic Party of Japan administration's policy of abandoning atomic power had to be reconsidered by his own team to help revive the economy.

Six of the eight members who voted for phasing out nuclear power while advising the DPJ have been dropped from the panel. Another 10 were reappointed, including Akio Mimura, an adviser to Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corp.

Mimura, now chairman of the panel, which resumed discussions Friday, once headed an energy advisory board under a previous LDP government that promoted nuclear power.

"Mimura may have a wonderful personality and good policy ideas, but it's wrong to let the same man who led discussions on pre-Fukushima energy policy be in charge," said Tetsunari Iida, executive director of the Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies and one of the members dropped from the advisory board.

In September, the DPJ-led administration endorsed the elimination of nuclear power by the 2030s in response to the March 2011 quake-tsunami that caused three reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 plant. Around 160,000 people were evacuated because of radioactive fallout.

Three options were considered for the country's future nuclear energy supply: zero, 15 percent, and 20 to 25 percent of the total electricity generated annually. A government poll last August found 47 percent of citizens favored the zero atomic power option, with the remainder split on the other two alternatives.

"The LDP wants to avoid the zero nuclear scenario at all costs and is looking for a point of compromise between 15 and 20 percent atomic energy," said Hiroshi Takahashi, a research fellow at Fujitsu Research Institute who was also dropped from the advisory panel. "Nobody, not even power companies, would try to revive the pre-Fukushima plan for boosting nuclear power's share of electricity to 50 percent."

The government has added five new people, including Issei Nishikawa, governor of Fukui Prefecture, which has 14 reactors. Hajimu Yamana, a nuclear engineering professor at Kyoto University, was also appointed. Overall, the number of advisory board members was cut to 15 from 25.

The people selected have different views on not only nuclear power, but also renewable energy and electricity industry reform, Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Toshimitsu Motegi said March 1. "We took into account specialities in their fields, not whether they agree or disagree on individual issues," he said.

Mimura, former vice chairman of Keidanren, Japan's biggest business lobby, made his view known at a Sept. 18 meeting of the post-Fukushima policy group, stating that the nation should continue using nuclear power.

The group didn't meet again for almost two months. The delay "made me furious," said Hideyuki Ban, codirector of the Citizens' Nuclear Information Center and yet another member dropped from the board. "I demanded that (METI) ministry officials dismiss Mimura."

Asahi - Shadow Units (6)

March 15, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (6): SDF members exposed to high radiation levels in reactor explosion

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303150009>

By HIDEFUMI NOGAMI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the sixth part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Six members of the Central NBC Weapon Defense Unit, including unit commander Col. Shinji Iwakuma, could not be contacted after an explosion occurred at the No. 3 reactor of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on March 14, 2011.

The explosion was also heard at the off-site center, located five kilometers southwest of the plant, where the central government had established a local response headquarters to deal with the nuclear accident. A mushroom cloud was also visible from that center.

Lt. Col. Kazunori Hishinuma, 54, was nearby installing equipment to be used for decontamination work when a subordinate told him that radio communications with Iwakuma had been cut off.

Hishinuma instinctively knew that Iwakuma and his unit must have been affected by the explosion. The lieutenant colonel ran to the off-site center.

The entrance to the building was sealed off to prevent radiation from entering, so Hishinuma had to shout to attract the attention of someone inside.

"Radio contact with the unit commander has been cut off!"

Eventually, a Self-Defense Force member appeared, and a piece of paper was held against the glass in the door. The paper said, "Go to the hospital at the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear power plant."

The instruction meant that any injured personnel should be taken to the hospital at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant's sister facility, located about 12 kilometers to the south.

It was at that point when Hishinuma heard a voice behind him.

"If you're looking for me, I'm here."

It was Iwakuma. The other five members of his unit were with him.

About 40 minutes had passed since the explosion.

All six wore protective gear that was covered with dust and dirt. One member was dragging his leg due to an injury. There was blood on the protective gear.

"We have all been contaminated with radiation," Iwakuma said, spreading his arms wide. "Clean us up in a hurry."

Hishinuma took the six to the Fukushima prefectural environmental medical research institute next to the off-site center.

The institute had the equipment necessary for radiation testing and decontamination work. However, it had become inoperable after the natural disasters because of a blackout and water outage.

Hishinuma had been trying from the morning of March 14, 2011, to convert the building into a site where decontamination work could be conducted.

After clearing away fallen lockers, a generator was brought in and shower facilities installed. All the equipment belonged to the Central NBC Weapon Defense Unit.

After work was completed, a trial run for decontamination was conducted in cooperation with specialists from the National Institute of Radiological Sciences (NIRS). The explosion at the No. 3 reactor occurred right after the trial run was completed.

Although the decontamination facility had been prepared to decontaminate workers at the Fukushima plant, the first actual users would be members of the unit Hishinuma belonged to.

Before the decontamination work began, NIRS specialists checked the radiation exposure levels of Iwakuma and his men.

"These are very high," one specialist said. "It will be dangerous if all six of you are together in one place. Move away from each other."

If people who have been exposed to high levels of radiation stand in close proximity to each other, they will only further heighten the levels, just by being close to one another.

Iwakuma realized then the grave severity of the dangerous situation he had experienced.

No nukes without the yakuza

Cleanup and the yakuza

By Philippe Mesmer

LE MONDE/Worldcrunch

<http://worldcrunch.com/culture-society/how-the-japanese-mafia-is-making-millions-from-the-fukushima-cleanup/japan-corruption-yakuza-mob-nuclear/c3s10837/#.UUJI1Tf1tEs>

TOKYO – It has been almost two years since the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, and since then there have been multiple allegations about the role played by the Japanese mafia – the yakuza – in the reconstruction process.

On Jan. 31, Japanese police arrested a yakuza boss on suspicion of illegally sending workers into the disaster zone. According to the police, Yoshinori Arai is the head of a crime gang operating in the Yamagata prefecture – in northern Japan. His gang is affiliated with the Sumiyoshi-kai crime syndicate, the second most powerful crime syndicate in all of Japan with 12,600 members.

Arai is accused of sending day laborers to a nuclear decontamination project in the city of Date, in the Fukushima prefecture. The workers only got paid half the promised 20,000 yens (\$216) per day. The rest of the money went to Arai's crime gang.

The reconstruction of the regions devastated by the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster – and the billions of yens involved – is very appealing to the Japanese mafia.

The chance to cash in came at the right time for the yakuza, who have fallen on hard times in recent years. They have lost a huge chunk of revenue as the result of stricter anti-gang laws introduced in October 2011 and increased police crackdowns. The new laws made it illegal to do business with crime syndicates or have ties with gangs.

In Tohoku – the region devastated by the earthquake and tsunami – crime gangs are allegedly implicated in all different aspects of the reconstruction, from demolition to waste removal. The police are investigating 37 cases involving crime syndicates active in the rebuilding and cleanup effort. In May 2012, they arrested Makoto Owada, another high-ranking member of the Sumiyoshi-kai, for illegally dispatching workers to the Fukushima power plant through local front companies.

Jobs no one else wants

The close ties between the yakuza and the nuclear industry have been known for a long time. Journalist **Tomohiko Suzuki wrote about it in 2011 in his book: *Yakuza and Nuclear Energy: Diary of An Undercover Reporter Working at the Fukushima Plant.***

He reports that yakuza have been around the Fukushima site since the nuclear disaster -- working to stem the effects of the plant's meltdown. They "find people and send them to the site," recruiting men who owed money to the yakuza, who were homeless, unemployed or even mentally handicapped. According to Suzuki, this system didn't start with Fukushima – the nuclear industry has always used the yakuza to recruit people for the most dangerous tasks, the jobs no one else wants.

In the first days following the nuclear disaster, Tepco, the electricity company managing the plant, who was short on manpower, asked recruiters to fetch "those who are not afraid of dying."

In July 2011, Tepco was forced to make a public statement announcing they would be cutting ties with the yakuza. The company also decided to ask its subcontractors to sign a document stating they had no ties to the mob. But since subcontractors use front companies, this is virtually impossible to verify.

The announcement of Arai's arrest came just as Tetsuo Nayuki, a senior official with the Japanese Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA), which was set up in September 2012 to "restore public trust in Japan and abroad regarding nuclear regulation," was being sacked. On Jan. 22, Nayuki leaked a report on the nuclear sector to the Japan Atomic Power Company (JAPC). He shared a draft report about a site survey of the company's Tsuruga nuclear plant before its public release.

The NRA was evaluating seismic risks at every Japanese nuclear plant, and found that there was an active fault under the Tsuruga plant and that the reactors would have to be decommissioned. The JAPC wanted to get their hands on the document before its public release to be able to prepare its rebuttal. The JAPC had denied lobbying the nuclear watchdog, saying it never gave Nayuki any money. Read the article in the original language.

How the Yakuza went nuclear

What really went wrong at the Fukushima plant? One undercover reporter risked his life to find out

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/japan-earthquake-and-tsunami-in/9084151/How-the-Yakuza-went-nuclear.html>

By Jake Adelstein

11:30AM GMT 21 Feb 2012

On March 11 2011, at 2:46pm, a 9.0 magnitude earthquake struck Japan. The earthquake, followed by a colossal tsunami, devastated the nation, together killing over 10,000 people. The earthquake also triggered the start of a triple nuclear meltdown at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant, run by Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco). Of the three reactors that melted down, one was nearly 40 years old and should have been decommissioned two decades ago. The cooling pipes, “the veins and arteries of the old nuclear reactors”, which circulated fluid to keep the core temperature down, ruptured.

Approximately 40 minutes after the shocks, the tsunami reached the power plant and knocked out the electrical systems. Japan’s Nuclear Industrial Safety Agency (Nisa) had warned Tepco about safety violations and problems at the plant days before the earthquake; they’d been warned about the possibility of a tsunami hitting the plant for years.

The denials began almost immediately. “There has been no meltdown,” government spokesman Yukio Edano intoned in the days after March 11. “It was an unforeseeable disaster,” Tepco’s then president Masataka Shimizu chimed in. As we now know, the meltdown was already taking place. And the disaster was far from unforeseeable.

Tepco has long been a scandal-ridden company, caught time and time again covering up data on safety lapses at their power plants, or doctoring film footage which showed fissures in pipes. How was the company able to get away with such long-standing behaviour? According to an explosive book recently published in Japan, they owe it to what the author, Tomohiko Suzuki, calls “Japan’s nuclear mafia... A conglomeration of corrupt politicians and bureaucrats, the shady nuclear industry, their lobbyists...” And at the centre of it all stands Japan’s actual mafia: *theyakuza*.

It might surprise the Western reader that gangsters are involved in Japan’s nuclear industry and even more that they would risk their lives in a nuclear crisis. But the *yakuza* roots in Japanese society are very deep. In fact, they were some of the first responders after the earthquake, providing food and supplies to the devastated area and patrolling the streets to make sure no looting occurred.

As the scale of the catastrophe at Fukushima became apparent, many workers fled the scene. To contain the nuclear meltdown, a handful of workers stayed behind, being exposed to large amounts of radiation: the so-called “Fukushima Fifty”. Among this heroic group, according to Suzuki, were several members of the *yakuza*.

The *yakuza* are not a secret society in Japan. The government tacitly recognises their existence, and they are classified, designated and regulated. *Yakuza* make their money from extortion, blackmail, construction, real estate, collection services, financial market manipulation, protection rackets, fraud and a labyrinth of front companies including labour dispatch services and private detective agencies. They do the work that no one else will do or find the workers for jobs no one wants.

“Almost all nuclear power plants that are built in Japan are built taking the risk that the workers may well be exposed to large amounts of radiation,” says Suzuki. “That they will get sick, they will die early, or they will die on the job. And the people bringing the workers to the plants and also doing the construction are often *yakuza*.” Suzuki says he’s met over 1,000 *yakuza* in his career as an investigative journalist and former editor of *yakuza* fanzines. For his book, *The Yakuza and the Nuclear Industry*, Suzuki went undercover at Fukushima to find first-hand evidence of the long-rumoured ties between the nuclear industry and the *yakuza*. First he documents how remarkably easy it was to become a nuclear worker at Fukushima after the meltdown. After signing up with a legitimate company providing labour, he entered the plant armed only with a wristwatch with a hidden camera. Working there over several months, he quickly found *yakuza*-supplied labour, and many former *yakuza* working on site themselves.

Suzuki discovered evidence of Tepco subcontractors paying *yakuza* front companies to obtain lucrative construction contracts; of money destined for construction work flying into *yakuza* accounts; and of politicians and media being paid to look the other way. More shocking, perhaps, were the conditions he says he found inside the plant.

His fellow workers, found Suzuki, were a motley crew of homeless, chronically unemployed Japanese men, former *yakuza*, debtors who owed money to the *yakuza*, and the mentally handicapped. Suzuki claims the regular employees at the plant were often given better radiation suits than the *yakuza* recruits. (Tepco has admitted that there was a shortage of equipment in the disaster's early days.) The regular employees were allowed to pass through sophisticated radiation monitors while the temporary labourers were simply given hand rods to monitor their radiation exposure.

When Suzuki was working in the plant in August, he had to wear a full-body radiation protective suit and a gas mask that covered his entire face. The hot summer temperatures and the lack of breathability in the suits ensured that almost every day a worker would keel over with heat exhaustion and be carried out; they would invariably return to work the next day. Going to the bathroom was virtually impossible, so workers were simply told to "hold it". According to Suzuki, the temperature monitors in the plant weren't even working, and were ignored. Removing the mask during work was against the rules; no matter how thirsty workers became, they could not drink water. After an hour fixing pipes and doing other work, Suzuki says his body felt like it was enveloped in flames. Workers were not checked to see if they were coping, they were expected to report it to their supervisors. However, while Tepco officials on the ground told the workers not to risk injury, it seemed that anyone complaining of the working conditions or fatigue would be fired. Few took their allotted rest breaks.

Those who reported feeling unwell were treated by Tepco doctors, nearly always with what Suzuki says was essentially cold medicine. The risk of radiation exposure was 100 per cent. The masks, if their filters were cleaned regularly, which they were not, could only remove 60 per cent of the radioactive particles in the air. Anonymous workers claimed that the filters themselves were ill-fitting; if they accidentally bumped their masks, radiation could easily get in. The workers' dosimeter badges, meanwhile, used to measure an individual's exposure to radiation, could be easily manipulated to give false readings. According to Suzuki, tricks like pinning a badge on backwards, or putting it in your sock, were commonplace. Regular workers were given dosimeters which would sound an alarm when radiation exceeded safe levels, but it made such a racket that, says Suzuki, "people just turned them off or over and kept working."

The initial work, directly after a series of hydrogen explosions in March, was extremely dangerous. Radiation was reaching levels so high that the Japanese government raised the safety exposure levels and even ordered scientists to stop monitoring radiation levels in some areas of the plants. Tepco sent out word to their contractors to gather as many people as possible and to offer substantial wages. *Yakuza* recruited from all over Japan; the initial workers were paid 50,000 yen (£407) per day, but one dispatch company offered 200,000 yen (£1,627) per day.

Even then, recruits were hard to find. Officials in Fukushima reportedly told local businesses, "Bring us the living dead. People no one will miss." The labour crunch was eased somewhat when the Japanese

government and Tepco raised the “safe” radiation exposure levels at the plant from pre-earthquake levels of 130-180cpm (radiation exposure per minute) to 100,000cpm.

The work would be further subcontracted to the point where labourers were being sent from sixth-tier firms. A representative from one company told Suzuki of an agreement made with a Tepco subcontractor right after the accident: “Normally, to even enter the grounds of a nuclear power plant a nuclear radiation personal data management pocketbook is required. We were told that wasn’t necessary. We didn’t even have time to give the workers physical examinations before they were sent to the plant.”

A former *yakuza* boss tells me that his group has “always” been involved in recruiting labourers for the nuclear industry. “It’s dirty, dangerous work,” he says, “and the only people who will do it are homeless, *yakuza*, or people so badly in debt that they see no other way to pay it off.” Suzuki found people who’d been threatened into working at Fukushima, but others who’d volunteered. Why? “Of course, if it was a matter of dying today or tomorrow they wouldn’t work there,” he explains. “It’s because it could take 10 years or more for someone to possibly die of radiation excess. It’s like Russian roulette. If you owe enough money to the *yakuza*, working at a nuclear plant is a safer bet. Wouldn’t you rather take a chance at dying 10 years later than being stabbed to death now?” (Suzuki’s own feeling was that the effects of low-level radiation are still unknown and that, as a drinker and smoker, he’s probably no more likely to get cancer than he was before.)

A recent report in Japan’s *Mainichi* newspaper alleged that workers from southern Japan were brought to the plant in July on false pretences and told to get to work. Many had to enter dangerous radioactive buildings. One man was reportedly tasked with carrying 20kg kilogram sheets of lead from the bottom floor of a damaged reactor up to the sixth floor, where his Geiger counters went into the danger zone. One worker said, “When I tried to quit, the people employing me mentioned the name of a local *yakuza* group. I got the hint. If Tepco didn’t know what was going on, I believe they should have.” Former Tepco executives, workers, police officials, as well as investigative journalist, **Katsunobu Onda, author of *TEPCO: The Dark Empire***, all agree: Tepco have always known they were working with the *yakuza*; they just didn’t care. However, the articles Suzuki wrote before his book was published, and my own work, helped create enough public outcry to force Tepco into action. On July 19, four months after the meltdowns, they announced that they would be cutting ties with organised crime.

“They asked the companies that have been working with them for years to send them papers showing they’d cut organised crime ties,” Suzuki says. “They followed up by taking a survey.” Tepco has not answered my own questions on their anti-organised crime initiative as of this date; they’ve previously called Suzuki’s claims “groundless”.

The situation at Fukushima is still dire. Number-two reactor continues to heat up, and appears to be out of control. Rolling blackouts are a regular occurrence. Nuclear reactors are being shut down, one by one, all over Japan. Meanwhile, there is talk that Tepco will be nationalised and its top executives are under

investigation for criminal negligence, in relation to the 3/11 disaster. As for the *yakuza*, the police are beginning to investigate their front companies more closely. “*Yakuza* may be a plague on society,” says Suzuki, “but they don’t ruin the lives of hundreds of thousands of people and irradiate the planet out of sheer greed and incompetence.” Suzuki says he’s had little trouble from the *yakuza* about his book’s allegations. He suspects this is because he showed they were prepared to risk their lives at Fukushima – he almost made them look good.

Gov't should not interfere with the NRA

March 12, 2013

Editorial: Japan's nuclear crisis the starting point for new energy policies

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130312p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Two years after the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, some 3,500 subcontract workers press on with efforts to clean up the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant under the threat of radiation.

The crippled frame of the building housing the plant's No. 3 reactor is still exposed following the hydrogen explosion that ripped through the building, and radiation levels are high.

The embankment next to the plant's No. 4 reactor was carved away by the massive tsunami on March 11, 2011, and a truck on the coastal side of the plant remains on its side. It is expected to take four decades to decommission the plant and there is seemingly no end to work to bring the disaster under control.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has stated his party will revise a pledge by the former Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) administration to eliminate all nuclear power plants in Japan by the 2030s. Calls have increased, notably from the economic world, to restart nuclear power plants at an early stage, but we cannot allow backtracking on a zero-nuclear policy. We must remember that the Fukushima nuclear crisis is the starting point in a new approach to the nation's nuclear energy policy.

At the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, a massive amount of water continues to be injected into the reactors to cool down melted nuclear fuel. Some 30 to 40 tons of contaminated water is expelled from the reactor buildings every hour, and transferred to storage tanks on the grounds of the nuclear plant. The plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), plans to build more tanks, but the vessels are expected to be filled in two years.

In the building housing the No. 4 reactor, whose roof was blown apart in a hydrogen explosion, a pool containing over 1,500 spent nuclear fuel rods remains exposed. Work to remove these rods is slated to begin in November, and the rods are due to be placed in temporary storage at the plant, but no decision has been reached over what to do with them after that.

Problems like these represent nuclear power's main trade-off. It is impossible, when running a nuclear power plant, to sidestep the problem of how to dispose of radioactive waste.

The Abe administration says it will retain a national policy to reprocess spent nuclear fuel. But the nuclear fuel cycle, under which fuel is reprocessed and used once again in nuclear power plants, has ground to a standstill.

The nuclear reprocessing plant being constructed by Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd. in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, is supposed to be completed in October, but it has faced a spate of problems, causing its construction to be extended 19 times. In addition, the Monju fast breeder reactor in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, which is supposed to use plutonium extracted from spent fuel, has been stopped due to operation problems.

In light of technical demands, safety issues and cost, Japan should draw the curtains on its nuclear fuel cycle.

The disposal of highly radioactive nuclear waste involves burying it in a stable geological layer hundreds of meters underground. But it takes tens of thousands of years for the radioactivity of such waste to drop to a safe level, and it remains uncertain whether any geological layer can actually be guaranteed as stable.

The Nuclear Waste Management Organization of Japan is seeking a final disposal site for the nation's nuclear waste, but so far no local bodies have come forward and agreed to accept it. As a result, spent nuclear fuel from the nation's nuclear power plants continues to pile up. Japan should quickly seek to reduce its dependence on nuclear power to prevent the burden of nuclear waste being passed on to future generations.

In spite of all this, it appears that the Abe administration is trying to turn the clock back on the nation's nuclear power and energies policies to the period before the March 2011 quake and tsunami that triggered the nuclear crisis. Symbolic of this stance is its selection of members on panels handling energy policies.

The Coordination Subcommittee of the Advisory Committee for Natural Resources and Energy, a consultative body to the minister of economy, trade and industry, is to discuss the nation's mid- to long-term energy policy. Under the previous DPJ administration, seven of the 24 members of the fundamental issues committee, which performed the same role, were clear opponents of nuclear power. But now the number of committee members has been cut to 15, leaving just two opposing dependence on nuclear power. Meanwhile the governor of an area hosting a nuclear power plant has been added to the panel's ranks.

The panel operating under the previous DPJ administration engaged in fierce debate in 33 heated sessions. The discussions were open to the public, which heightened interest in the issue. The members failed to reach a unified decision, but the target that emerged following national debate was to eliminate nuclear power in Japan by the 2030s.

Of course, the government administration has now changed hands, but still, the public will not agree to a sudden scrapping of this goal.

The Central Environment Council, a consultative body to the minister of the environment mulling environment-related policies such as the nation's response to global warming, previously accommodated three members in favor of reducing dependence on nuclear power, but after Abe's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) took over from the DPJ, their appointments were revoked.

The Abe administration is seriously mistaken if it thinks it can create the impression that its policy changes have been approved simply by removing opponents of nuclear power from government panels.

In his policy speech to the Diet last month, Abe stated, "Under the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA), we will foster a new culture of safety. ... After doing so we will restart nuclear power plants where safety has been confirmed."

If nuclear power plants are allowed to be restarted for economical reasons and to secure a supply of electricity, safety is an utmost priority. The NRA is to set new safety standards by July, incorporating tough measures such as requiring the latest safety standards to be applied to existing nuclear power plants.

Proponents of nuclear power have heaped criticism on the conclusions drawn from earthquake fault surveys that the NRA is conducting at nuclear power plants, as well as on the way the surveys are being conducted. But **let us not forget that it was the LDP, during its stint as an opposition party, which called for a high level of independence in the agency. The current administration must not disdain the severity of regulations or interfere in the NRA's judgments on safety.**

Abe has stated that over a period of three years, the government will provide support to spur innovation in developing alternative forms of energy. Efforts to make renewable energy the key to recovery have been witnessed in areas hit hardest by the quake and tsunami disaster. We call on the government to develop nuclear power and energy policies truly focusing on the public, while remaining mindful of the accomplishments stemming from such efforts.

Vulnerable and unreliable

March 20, 2013

No. 1 fuel pool power to be restored: Tepco

Repairs of makeshift switchboards to rectify woes; tardy reporting hit

by Reiji Yoshida

Staff Writer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/20/national/no-1-fuel-pool-power-to-be-restored-tepco/#.UUihejf1tEs>

Critical cooling systems for four pools containing thousands of nuclear fuel assemblies at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant shut down due to a loss of power overnight Monday, highlighting the **vulnerability** of the ad hoc equipment set up after the meltdowns two years ago.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. said repairs to fully recover the cooling functions of the fuel pools at reactors 1, 3 and 4 were completed on Tuesday night. Meanwhile, the utility said another huge common fuel pool would be fully functional by 8 a.m. Wednesday.

Tepco was still trying to pinpoint the cause of the power loss Tuesday afternoon, raising concern about the soundness of the facilities at the badly damaged nuclear plant, where decommissioning work will take decades.

Tepco emphasized that it would take at least three more days for the water in the spent fuel pool in the damaged reactor 4 building, potentially the most dangerous one, to reach the threshold control temperature of 65 degrees, giving the operator ample time to restore power before the coolant water started to boil and evaporate.

The utility speculated that a makeshift switchboard set up after the meltdowns of reactors 1-3 probably malfunctioned Monday evening, causing two more switchboards and other equipment to automatically shut down.

It is thought that this led to the power loss to the cooling systems for the fuel pools in the reactor 1, 3 and 4 buildings as well as the large common pool, which contains 6,377 nuclear fuel assemblies, Tepco said.

The injection of coolant water into the damaged cores of reactors 1, 2 and 3 was not disrupted, Tepco said.

“We are still trying to identify the cause (of the power loss). We need to investigate further,” said Tepco executive Masayuki Ono, who served as a spokesman at the news briefing Tuesday morning.

Tepco announced the loss of cooling functions shortly after 10 p.m. Monday, about three hours after the power went out, drawing criticism from the media.

Tepco said the information was withheld because it took several hours to figure out which equipment was affected by the power disruption.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, meanwhile, sought to ease concern by assuring the public that the plant has backup equipment on hand for worst-case scenarios.

“We are preparing (backup safety) measures so that you don’t need to worry,” Suga told a news conference Tuesday morning.

According to Tepco, fire engines are deployed at the Fukushima plant, and other water pumps are available as well to inject water into any of the pools in the event the cooling equipment goes down for an extended period.

Radiation monitoring posts in and around the Fukushima plant showed no abnormal readings, according to both Tepco and the government.

But the current problem pulls back the curtain on the unreliability of the cooling systems at the Fukushima plant.

Containing 1,533 fuel assemblies, the reactor 4 pool is the hottest of the four. Its water temperature was estimated at 30.5 degrees at 10 a.m. Tuesday, and would rise 0.368 degree per hour while the cooling system is out, Tepco said.

At 100 degrees, the water would boil and evaporate. If all the water was lost, the fuel assemblies would melt down and the pool collapse, releasing vast amounts of radioactive material into the environment.

Tepco now plans to transfer all the fuel assemblies from the reactor 4 pool to the sturdier common pool by the end of this year.

But the cooling system for the common pool was also shut down by the recent power loss.

It is expected to take more than three decades to decommission the three troubled reactors at the Fukushima complex, which has six reactors. It has not been decided what will happen with the rest of the crippled plant. Tepco will have to keep the cooling systems running throughout the long process to prevent further meltdowns of the still-hot reactor cores.

Ono said that for now at least Tepco believes the makeshift switchboard either lost current or surged, tripping other switchboards and equipment connected to the network, and cutting power to the cooling systems.

Asahi - Shadow Units (7 & 8)

March 20, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (8): SDF unit commander angered at lack of warning at Fukushima No. 1 plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303200010>

By HIDEFUMI NOGAMI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the eighth part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

* * *

After surviving the explosion at the No. 3 reactor of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on March 14, 2011, Col. Shinji Iwakuma, a unit commander within the Central NBC Weapon Defense Unit, headed for the central government's off-site command post.

First, Iwakuma had to undergo the decontamination process in the building next door. But he was fortunate to have escaped injury in the blast.

One of his unit members suffered a cracked spine, which would require one month to heal. Three other personnel suffered bruises. It was only later that Iwakuma learned that the unit member who was exposed to the highest radiation level totaled an exposure of 27.4 millisieverts.

After entering the off-site center, located five kilometers southwest of the plant, where a local response headquarters had been established to deal with the nuclear accident, Iwakuma was checked for radiation a number of times at the entrance. Even after showering eight times, he was unable to completely rid his body of radioactive materials.

A worker who was handling the radiation measurement suggested to Iwakuma that he wear protective gear, not to protect him from further exposure, but to prevent him from bringing the radioactive materials into the center.

Tables were arranged in a U-shape fashion in a large conference room. Iwakuma sat in the seat reserved for the individual with the least authority. The meeting began with six to seven participants, including Motohisa Ikeda, the senior vice minister of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, who was serving as head of the local response headquarters.

In addition to the protective gear, Iwakuma also wore slippers reserved for patients at a medical facility. He was the only one at the meeting dressed in that manner.

Officials of the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency and Tokyo Electric Power Co. spoke in a businesslike manner. While there was a brief mention of the explosion at the beginning of the meeting, most of the discussion focused on the situation at the reactor core and how to cool it.

Iwakuma was the last one allowed to speak.

He had spent many years in research and development of chemicals. His slim frame and the glasses he wore gave him the appearance of a quiet scholar. So, he took the others by surprise when he said in a stern tone, "It was my subordinates who were injured. Did you know beforehand that an explosion was possible or did it occur because of an error in how things were handled? Tell me which is it!" Silence fell over the meeting.

The meeting ended without any reply to Iwakuma's question.

Immediately thereafter, a TEPCO official ran up to Iwakuma and bowed. "I am truly sorry for the terrible thing that has happened," the official said.

The decision to have Iwakuma and his unit head for the No. 3 reactor was made earlier that morning. Ikeda made the request. "The situation is one which requires water to be pumped in immediately," he said. "The Self-Defense Force is the only one we can ask."

Before leaving for the reactor, Iwakuma asked TEPCO officials about the situation at the reactor. Although the details were unclear and radiation levels were high, a TEPCO official would guide the unit. The explanation was also made that workers were still at the site.

That led Iwakuma to conclude that the possibility of an explosion was low. Because of the urgency of the matter, his unit headed to supply water in a lightly equipped vehicle.

According to a recording of a TEPCO teleconference that was only released much later, white haze had formed at the No. 3 reactor from the afternoon of March 13, 2011. Because a similar chain of events occurred at the No. 1 reactor before an earlier explosion there, TEPCO officials were on the alert for an explosion at the No. 3 reactor.

However, that important piece of information was never given to Iwakuma.

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (7): Reactor explosion heavily damaged SUV driven by SDF personnel

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303180005>

By HIDEFUMI NOGAMI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the seventh part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

The six personnel of the Ground Self-Defense Force's Central NBC Weapon Defense Unit were exposed to radiation as a result of the hydrogen explosion at the No. 3 reactor of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on March 14, 2011.

They showered at the Fukushima prefectural environmental medical research institute in an attempt to wash away the radiation. Specialists from the National Institute of Radiological Sciences checked radiation levels in the room next to the showers.

"The radiation level still has not fallen," one specialist said.

The SDF member returned to the shower room for another round of washing and scrubbing.

"It's still high. One more time."

The soldier took another shower.

"Still not enough. There is still a lot of radiation around your face."

The unit commander, Col. Shinji Iwakuma, ended up **showering eight times**.

Because he had no clothes to wear, he put on new protective gear while wearing nothing underneath.

He looked around at the other personnel in his unit. While there was a soldier who was injured, they were all talking, so a relieved Iwakuma said, "I am glad to see that everyone is all right."

Iwakuma described the reactor explosion to Lt. Col. Kazunori Hishinuma, another unit member.

Iwakuma explained that to supply water to the No. 3 reactor to prevent a meltdown of its reactor core, he and another member headed for the Fukushima No. 1 plant in a retrofitted Pajero SUV, manufactured by Mitsubishi Motors Corp. The four other personnel followed in two five-ton water tankers.

At around 11 a.m., the group stopped next to the water supply pump near the No. 3 reactor. As they were about to open the door, the explosion occurred.

In addition to the blast, the force from the explosion blew the Pajero to the side. Chunks of concrete came raining down, cracking the vehicle windows and smashing through the canvas roof. Some of the larger chunks were 30 centimeters long. Gray smoke swirled in the area.

Iwakuma kicked the door out to escape the vehicle. The dosimeter was blaring away, a warning that accumulated radiation levels exceeded 20 millisieverts.

They tried using their radio to contact the off-site center, but could not get through.

"We will become exposed to radiation if we remain here for long," Iwakuma told the other personnel. "We are leaving the area."

Abandoning their vehicles, they walked back along the road they had traveled. There were a dozen or so plant workers also walking unsteadily away.

They spotted an abandoned truck with the keys still in the ignition. They loaded the plant workers onto the truck and received permission to have an SDF member drive it away.

They left the truck at the main gate because they felt they should not take the vehicle off the plant grounds. They hitched a ride in another truck that happened to pass by and finally reached the off-site center.

After Iwakuma concluded his explanation to Hishinuma, he said sternly, "Tokyo Electric Power Co. officials explained that the situation was not so dangerous that an explosion would occur. I wonder if TEPCO officials knew about the danger of an explosion. It would be a major problem if they had us go to the plant knowing about that danger."

* * *

"The plant has not yet been stabilized"

March 20, 2013

ANALYSIS: Cooling failure brings renewed criticism of lax TEPCO

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303200086>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tokyo Electric Power Co. is facing sharp criticism both for its **delay in resolving the loss of cooling functions** at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and for the lax practices that led to the scare.

The blackout cut power to cooling equipment at several nuclear fuel storage pools and had **the potential to become catastrophic**. With the cooling functions shut down, the temperature of the fuel rods in the pools could have risen enough to evaporate the cooling water, possibly leading to a meltdown of the fuel.

"This clearly shows that the plant has not yet been stabilized," said Shiro Izawa, who on March 10 became mayor of Futaba, one of the municipalities that hosts the plant.

TEPCO officials apparently were not seriously concerned by the possibility of a meltdown of fuel rods in the pools.

Though the company has taken measures to provide several backup electricity sources for the cooling of the reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 plant, it has not implemented such measures for the cooling equipment used in the storage pools. One reason is that utility officials apparently believe the rise in water temperatures in the event of a temporary blackout would be slower than that for reactors, meaning they will likely have more time to deal with a loss of power to the storage pool cooling equipment.

But at a March 19 news conference, Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, said TEPCO needed to take measures to ensure backup power sources for the cooling equipment.

At the same time, Tanaka indicated **there was a possibility of similar blackouts occurring in the future because the high radiation levels at the plant made it difficult to conduct reinforcement work**.

"What will be important is to implement measures to prevent fatal events from happening," he said.

Cooling functions at the No. 1 and No. 4 reactor storage pools were restored between noon and the evening of March 19, but resumption of cooling at the No. 3 reactor storage pool only came at about 10:40 p.m. Cooling of the common storage pool, which contains 6,377 fuel assemblies, the most of any storage pool at the plant, resumed at about 12:10 a.m. on March 20, some **29 hours after the blackout occurred.**

TEPCO officials believe the blackout, the longest since the March 2011 accident at the plant, was likely caused by a malfunctioning temporary switchboard. The switchboard is connected to the cooling systems for the No. 3 and No. 4 reactor storage pools and the cooling equipment for the common pool.

The malfunction also affected the switchboards used for the cooling equipment for the No. 1 reactor pool and a separate cooling system for the No. 4 reactor pool.

TEPCO officials said March 20 they found a charred terminal on the temporary switchboard believed to be the cause of the blackout. While a further investigation will be conducted to determine what caused the burning, officials suspect an overcurrent occurred.

To restore cooling functions, TEPCO had to bypass the temporary switchboard to route electricity to various equipment.

Because the switchboard is situated outside, its usage environment is less stable than ones used indoors. For that reason, TEPCO officials had planned to convert some of them to indoor switchboards by the end of March.

But such temporary equipment is still in use at the plant for other functions beyond the supply of electric power.

Local government leaders, meanwhile, criticized TEPCO for the slow manner in which it dealt with the blackout.

Katsunobu Sakurai, the mayor of Minami-Soma, located north of the plant, called TEPCO officials to the municipal government building and asked for an investigation into the cause of the incident, the rapid resumption of electricity and a speedy transmission of information.

"There were many people who were shaken by the news they heard," Sakurai told utility officials. "There is the possibility that some people who thought of returning in the new fiscal year will not be able to do so."

The Fukushima prefectural government also submitted a request to TEPCO to conduct a thorough investigation, restore electricity, diversify power source equipment and provide information on problems at the plant.

The longest previous blackout at the plant was about 10 hours. There have also been planned blackouts in the past when electricity was temporarily shut down to inspect switchboards.

For TEPCO it was just an "event", not an accident

March 21, 2013

Editorial: TEPCO must build system to prevent accidents

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130322p2a00m0na010000c.html>

On the evening of March 18, a major power cut hit Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, disabling nine facilities at the plant including equipment to cool pools of spent nuclear fuel. It took over 19 hours for all equipment to be restored to order.

The power outage is believed to have been caused by a short circuit that occurred when a rat found its way into a temporary switchboard. After more than two years following the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami that crippled the plant, why has TEPCO not managed to create a system that could defend itself against such an incident? Apart from local residents, many other members of the general public were no doubt left wondering whether the power company should be left to handle the nuclear crisis.

TEPCO labeled the power cut an "event," not an "accident," but the international community has a strong interest in the state of pools containing spent nuclear fuel, and the issue is of concern to residents. We call on TEPCO to quickly step up measures to prevent a recurrence.

The pools whose cooling systems were knocked out contain some 9,000 rods of spent nuclear fuel. If the pools aren't cooled the water temperature rises. Left unchecked, this will eventually cause the water to evaporate, and, in a worst-case scenario, could lead to a meltdown.

The switchboard that short circuited had been brought in immediately after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis in 2011 and placed on the bed of a truck. Since it takes some time for the temperature of the water in spent fuel pools to rise, TEPCO had not prepared a backup system like those in place to inject water into reactor cores. Officials at the utility had planned to adopt measures this month.

The Fukushima nuclear crisis showed us the importance of having multiple layers of protection and diverse protection methods in place at nuclear plants. Officials were lax in not preparing a backup system. Many pipes, tanks and other equipment at the Fukushima No. 1 plant are merely temporary, as workers are still busy responding to the disaster. Officials must move to quickly upgrade this peripheral equipment.

In the latest incident, the temperature of the pools for spent fuel were kept below the prescribed level, but if officials are lax in maintaining some equipment on the grounds that it is merely peripheral, it could result in a major, unforeseen accident.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) has set up a panel to screen the Fukushima decommissioning plans. The panel and TEPCO should use the power outage as a lesson to re-examine whether there are any holes in safety measures at the plant.

TEPCO is due to set up an "international advisory team" in the near future to gather technical advice and other recommendations from overseas experts on the decommissioning process. There is great significance in having third parties with experience and technical expertise check the decommissioning plans, and in publicly disclosing problems in an easily understandable format.

At the same time, TEPCO's delay in publicly announcing the power cut cannot be overlooked. The utility alerted the NRA soon after the outage, but waited an hour before reporting the problem to the Fukushima Prefectural Government and over three hours before telling the media. Does TEPCO answer to the public, or only to regulatory authorities? The latest incidents have probably only served to fuel residents' distrust in TEPCO. We want to see a response that places priority on the disclosure of information.

Has TEPCO find a loophole

March 22, 2013

Decontamination law loophole?

Tepco snubs ¥10.5 billion cleanup tab

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/22/national/tepcosnubs-%C2%A510-5-billion-cleanup-tab/#.UUxo5Tf1tEs>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. is ¥10.55 billion in arrears to the Environment Ministry over work to decontaminate land around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, government officials said Friday.

The sum is part of a total ¥14.9 billion the ministry asked Tepco to pay by February, based on a special law on decontamination enacted after the March 2011 meltdowns. **But its provisions do not clarify the extent to which the utility is obliged to pay back the money.**

Tepco has not yet agreed to pay back the ¥10.55 billion, with one of the company's officials saying it "cannot judge whether it is a demand based on the special law."

"We will continue to demand that (Tepco) pay the bills," Environment Minister Nobuteru Ishihara told a news conference Friday.

In November, the ministry demanded a combined ¥7.6 billion in decontamination costs through last August, but Tepco has only stumped up ¥1.7 billion for cleanup work the government has been directly in charge of.

The remaining ¥5.9 billion was used to subsidize work conducted by local governments and publicity-related expenses, but Tepco has yet to repay it.

The ministry then requested another ¥7.3 billion in February, for decontamination costs incurred between last September and November, but the utility has put a payment of ¥4.65 billion on hold.

The special law stipulates that Tepco will pay the costs for decontamination procedures. While the state initially pays for the work using taxpayer money, Tepco will ultimately be billed for the costs. However, indirect costs arising from the cleanup process are a gray area.

The law also calls on Tepco to make the payments swiftly after receiving a request. The ministry has continued to bill Tepco for the costs once the decontamination work is complete.

The Environment Ministry requested ¥199.7 billion for decontamination work in the supplementary budget for fiscal 2011 and ¥372.1 billion in the fiscal 2012 budget. **It is seeking a whopping ¥497.8 billion in the budget for the next fiscal year, which starts April 1.**

Separately Friday, Tepco agreed with the city of Kashiwazaki, Niigata Prefecture, home to its largest nuclear plant, to pay a spent nuclear fuel tax to the city for the next five years from fiscal 2013, which starts in April, the city said.

According to the city, revenue from the tax will mount to about ¥2.87 billion in the five years. The tax, at ¥480 per kg, is a key revenue that the city can use at its discretion.

Apologies - again

March 22, 2013

TEPCO apologizes for delay in reporting plant power outage

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130322p2a00m0na012000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) apologized on March 21 for a delay of around three hours in reporting a power outage at the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant that left it unable to cool spent nuclear fuel.

"We sincerely apologize. We are deeply regretful over the delay in reporting the incident and for causing anxiety to residents," said Yoshiyuki Ishizaki, representative of the TEPCO Fukushima recovery headquarters, at a press conference at the prefectural office in Fukushima.

The power outage occurred at 6:57 p.m. on March 18, stopping cooling systems for facilities including the number 1, 3, and 4 reactors' spent nuclear fuel pools. By 12:12 a.m. on March 20, power had been restored.

TEPCO notified the Fukushima Prefectural Government and the governments of 13 municipalities near the plant of the outage around one hour after it occurred, but it did not contact the media until around three hours after the outage.

"We were focused on finding out what was going on at the site, and did not think enough about prefectural residents. In the two years since the accident we thought we had prepared ourselves to quickly make announcements, but we will do so from now," said Ishizaki.

Meanwhile, the Nuclear Regulatory Agency on March 21 decided that it will call on TEPCO to speed up the implementation of additional power sources, installing long-term equipment, and improving its ability to recovery from power outages. The agency will consider specifically what to instruct at a meeting of experts on March 29, after receiving a report from TEPCO.

The agency took around three hours to announce the power outage after being notified of it by TEPCO, and has said that it will "endeavor to appropriately release information" from now on.

So many problems remain unresolved

EDITORIAL: Latest failure shows Fukushima crisis far from resolved

March 22, 2013

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201303220053>

A power blackout at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant resulted in a long stoppage in the circulation of water that cools spent fuel in several pools.

If the blackout had continued for days, the heat that the spent fuel constantly emits could have caused water in the cooling pools to evaporate, potentially resulting in accidents such as meltdowns and hydrogen explosions.

Fortunately, power was restored before it was too late, and the rise in water temperature did not go beyond 6 degrees at most.

But many people must have been alarmed.

The incident drove home the reality that even two years after the March 2011 disaster, the accident is still not over. Anxiety will continue until all fuel is removed. This is to be expected in a nuclear disaster.

Once again, the government and TEPCO are urged to step up efforts to eliminate unstable factors one by one.

The crippled nuclear reactors themselves have been fitted with backup power sources because even a short shutdown of cooling systems could cause them to return to the state of two years ago. But the fuel pools have no backup power sources.

Although the cause of the blackout has yet to be established, the possibility has arisen that a small animal, such as a rat, short-circuited a switchboard.

In building management, it is common practice to cover electrical systems with special nets to protect them from rodents. Such measures were not taken for the temporary switchboard, which was installed in May 2011, that caused the blackout.

Radiation levels in the nuclear complex remain high. The dose near the accident site is about 300 microsieverts per hour and workers are required to wear special protective clothing and full-face masks. Their work hours are restricted.

Priority is given to urgent work such as reinforcing pipes to cool reactors. Lower-priority tasks are inevitably put off.

But that is all the more why "such situations can happen again in the future," as Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, put it.

We must learn lessons from the incident so that we can deal calmly with future emergencies, by being prepared with a specially formed task force equipped with response measures.

What is troublesome is that conditions at the site change daily because of the various maintenance projects under way. This time, too, the blackout had a greater impact because two power networks that are usually independent from each other had been connected together. This was because of ongoing work to reinforce tsunami preparedness.

When multiple maintenance projects take place simultaneously, the risk of accidents rises. Therefore, what is indispensable is a system to constantly monitor the entire nuclear power plant as a whole.

Be that as it may, why did it take as long as three hours for TEPCO to inform media organizations about the blackout? Although the company had immediately reported the situation to the relevant central and local governments, if it is to inform the public at nighttime, it needs to do it through the media.

The mayor of Minami-Soma requested that TEPCO promptly pass on information.

The nuclear crisis is still ongoing. TEPCO should not forget that many people are watching closely.

--The Asahi Shimbun, March 22

Asahi - Shadow Units (9)

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (9): SDF members told to hold their ground

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303220007>

BY HIDEFUMI NOGAMI / Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the ninth part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

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The explosion that went off in the No. 3 reactor at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on the morning of March 14, 2011, caused serious damage to the neighboring No. 2 reactor as well.

The electrical circuits were destroyed, making it impossible to let steam out of the reactor. Pressure inside the reactor core rose, while the water level fell. If the water level kept sinking, fuel rods would become exposed, possibly causing a core meltdown.

At 4 p.m. on March 14, Maj. Gen. Yuki Imaura, 54, vice commander of the Ground Self-Defense Force's Central Readiness Force (CRF), arrived at the disaster-stricken plant's off-site center, a facility used as an operational base for dealing with emergencies.

The off-site center, located five kilometers southwest of the plant, was used to house the government's nuclear emergency response headquarters. It served as the local headquarters for the battle against the galloping nuclear crisis.

Around the time Imaura arrived at the facility, the No. 2 reactor was in an increasingly dangerous situation. Exactly at 4 p.m., the prime minister's office became aware of the possibility that fuel rods in the reactor could become exposed.

As it turned out, Imaura stayed at the off-site center for only 18 hours until the government's crisis response headquarters were moved to the Fukushima prefectural government's building the following morning. The GSDF major general would never forget the stormy night he spent at the off-site center amid the chaos of responding to the nuclear disaster.

According to records left by Imaura, at 6:45 p.m., he went to the office of Motohisa Ikeda, senior vice minister of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, who supervised the headquarters. The office was a private room on the second floor of the building.

Ikeda convened an emergency meeting of top officials in the room. Besides Ikeda and Imaura, the meeting was also attended by Masao Uchibori, vice governor of Fukushima Prefecture; Shinichi Kuroki, deputy

director-general for nuclear power at the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency; and Akio Komori, a managing director at Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the crippled nuclear plant.

“The No. 2 reactor is in a dangerous situation,” Komori said to Ikeda. “We are worried that the nuclear core may have started melting down” at the reactor. “The worst possible case could occur four hours from now,” he warned.

Komori’s dire warning prompted the attendees to consider moving the headquarters to a safe location. They chose the Fukushima prefectural government’s building, 60 kilometers from the plant, as the evacuation site.

But they didn’t determine when to start the evacuation and decided instead to dispatch an advance unit led by Uchibori to start preparations for the relocation.

The people who were at the meeting also heard the report that some 350 local residents appeared to be still within 20 kilometers from the Fukushima plant. But they didn’t discuss the evacuation of the residents.

At 8 p.m., a general meeting of all those working at the off-site center was held in a large room. Ikeda informed the staff of the decision about evacuating. Immediately after the meeting, Uchibori headed off to the prefectural government building.

At 12:30 a.m. on March 15, a radiation warning was announced over the facility’s public address system. “Radiation levels are rising. Put on a protective suit and a protective mask immediately,” the announcement said.

When SDF personnel asked TEPCO employees about radiation levels, they were told that the readings were 700 microsieverts per hour within the building and 1 millisievert outside.

At 2 a.m., the headquarters staff was instructed to take potassium iodine pills that could protect their thyroid glands if taken before or shortly after exposure to radiation.

After the advance unit left the off-site center, it was found that many people other than the members of the unit had also gone.

In a general meeting held before dawn on March 15, Ikeda raised his voice and said some people other than those who had been assigned to the unit had lost their nerve and left the facility.

“We have not decided to abandon this place yet,” he said. “Hold your ground and do your jobs,” he yelled.

* * *

Leaks about official inspections, misinformation and cover-up

March 23, 2013

Fukushima cleanup contractors told workers to lie about pay in 'surprise' inspections

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303230057>

Contractors were tipped off about “surprise” inspections of decontamination work around the stricken Fukushima nuclear plant, giving them time to order workers to lie about hazard pay they weren’t receiving, The Asahi Shimbun learned.

One company official warned that failure to mislead the inspectors could cause every worker to lose financially.

The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare has inspected about 110 companies and confirmed that 11 withheld hazard pay from their workers. The ministry's inquiries came after The Asahi Shimbun reported on Nov. 5 that contractors in the radioactive cleanup work were apparently pocketing the taxpayer-funded daily hazard allowance of up to 10,000 yen (\$106).

The number of confirmed nonpayment cases could increase.

The labor ministry plans to question contractors and other parties connected to the suspected cover-ups, which may constitute a violation of the Labor Standards Law or "coercion" as defined in the Penal Code.

The ministry also plans to review the inspection methods to prevent further information leaks.

"It would be a problem if there was a cover-up," said an official with the ministry's Labor Standards Bureau. "We will be conducting full and true snap inspections in the future."

The Asahi Shimbun obtained a document that Maeda Corp., a general contractor that won a contract for cleanup work in Naraha in Fukushima Prefecture, distributed to its subcontractors on or around Nov. 12. It states clearly that inspectors of the Tomioka Labor Standards Inspection Office would visit on Nov. 15 and directly ask workers if they were receiving the hazard pay.

The document mentioned "eight lunchboxes," an apparent reference to the eight inspectors expected.

On Nov. 14, officials of different subcontractors were summoned to a Maeda conference room on the work site. They were told to instruct the cleanup workers to tell the inspectors that they were receiving the special allowances, an official with one of the subcontractors said.

The subcontractors were also told which company would come under heavy scrutiny, the official added.

The information in the document was accurate. Eight inspectors arrived at the decontamination work site around 10:30 a.m. on Nov. 15.

All 20 or so workers said they were receiving the hazard pay.

One worker told The Asahi Shimbun that a subcontractor instructed him to tell the labor standards inspectors that he was receiving the allowances, although he was not.

At least one other worker said he had a similar experience.

Tatsuo Ito, director of the Tomioka Labor Standards Inspection Office, said he was the one who told Maeda about the planned inspection.

"I informed Maeda officials verbally about a week in advance to have them prepare the necessary documents," Ito said. "It was inappropriate for them to learn about our intention to interview the workers directly."

A Maeda representative acknowledged the company created the document but denied Maeda employees ordered a cover-up.

Information also leaked on a supposedly "surprise" inspection by the Koriyama Labor Standards Inspection Office in Tamura on Dec. 6.

"The leak probably occurred on the day of the inspection, after we had arrived at the work site," said a representative of the Koriyama Labor Standards Inspection Office.

A worker recorded the words of an official of one subcontractor after he summoned about 30 workers just before the inspection began. The official offered specific advice on how the workers should misinform the inspectors.

"You workers will likely be interviewed on an individual basis," the official was recorded as saying. "I'd be pleased if you told (the inspectors) the full amount, not the actual amount you are receiving. Your take-home pay does not include fees for room and board. The correct answer is 15,700 yen, which is the minimum wage plus the allowances."

The official also implied that all jobs would be lost if the illegal siphoning-off practice came to light. "Each of you may have your own questions, but I hope you will behave in consideration of what could happen to other people," the official said.

The subcontractor in question said the matter is "under review."

Subcontractors were earlier found to have been cutting corners in the decontamination project by dumping radioactive debris back into the environment.

(This article was written by Miki Aoki and Tamiyuki Kihara.)

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It was a big mistake

March 25, 2013

Ministry ignored call to enhance Fukushima off-site center

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130324002698.htm>

The industry ministry failed to improve nuclear protection at an off-site center (OFC) of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant at the request of the internal affairs ministry because it assumed a similar crisis at the plant was not possible, according to government sources.

The Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry pointed out two years before the outbreak of the nuclear crisis at the plant in March 2011 that the OFC, which is supposed to serve as a control center during a nuclear disaster, had such flaws as insufficient protection against radioactive substances.

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry instead prepared a list of anticipated questions and planned answers to emphasize the safety of the OFC, according to documents released by the ministry after an information-disclosure request by The Yomiuri Shimbun.

An OFC is meant to serve as a countermeasure headquarters in the event of a nuclear crisis. OFCs have telecommunications equipment and computer terminals with systems for simulating nuclear accidents. The OFC of the Tokyo Electric Power Co. plant became inoperative after the crisis due to high radiation levels.

As the ministry's inaction relied on the "myth of nuclear plant safety," questions are emerging as to the laxness of safety standards and responses at the time.

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Myth of safety

In February 2009, the internal affairs ministry asked the industry ministry to improve nuclear safety measures at five nuclear plant OFCs within 10 kilometers of the Fukushima plant, Tohoku Electric Power Co.'s Onagawa plant, Chubu Electric Power Co.'s Hamaoka plant, Hokuriku Electric Power Co.'s Shika plant, and Shikoku Electric Power Co.'s Ikata plant.

The ministry pointed out that as the OFCs did not have ventilation systems with air-cleaning filters, there was a risk that radioactive substances could flow into the facilities during a nuclear disaster.

According to one document from March 2009, the industry ministry's defunct Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) discussed how to respond to the internal affairs ministry's recommendation.

At the time, NISA officials used as a reference the government's nuclear disaster prevention guideline, which mentioned the 1986 disaster at Chernobyl nuclear power plant in the former Soviet Union. The disaster, in which a massive amount of radiation was scattered, was designated a Level 7 nuclear crisis, the most severe rating for nuclear accidents at the time.

As the guideline stipulated that Chernobyl "was an accident that occurred at a nuclear plant with different design concepts from Japan's," **the then economy ministry concluded "Japan does not need to assume" the possibility of a nuclear accident on a similar scale.**

Six months after the internal affairs ministry's request, the economy ministry replied that "ventilation [of the OFCs] would be halted to keep the inside airtight," on the assumption that radioactive discharge would occur for a short time even if a nuclear incident occurred.

The economy ministry's explanation of the safety of the OFCs was aimed at alleviating concerns from officials of local governments hosting nuclear power plants. The planned answers included such phrases as "filters aren't needed," and "the OFCs have no flaws."

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'It was a big mistake'

In the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, radiation levels rose in the Fukushima No. 1 plant's OFC about five kilometers away, as the facility's backup generator had been damaged by the preceding earthquake on March 11, 2011.

NISA and other officials who were stationed in the OFC evacuated to the city of Fukushima, about 60 kilometers from the plant, four days after the outbreak of the crisis.

Incorporating lessons learned from the disaster, in September 2012, the government set a new guideline making the installation of radiation filters and other safety equipment mandatory for OFCs-- improvements that were already pointed out by the internal affairs ministry.

"The safety guideline at the time stipulated that 'It is very unlikely that an accident similar to the Chernobyl disaster will occur,'" a former NISA official told The Yomiuri Shimbun. "We followed the view. However, it was a big mistake."

The OFCs were set up in the wake of a 1999 criticality accident caused by JCO Co. in Tokai, Ibaraki Prefecture.

Sixteen OFCs were set up in 16 commercial nuclear power plants and six in other nuclear facilities, such as a reprocessing plant for spent nuclear fuel.

Asahi - Sadow Units (10)

March 25, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (10): SDF general left food for pets at Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303250001>

By HIDEFUMI NOGAMI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 10th part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

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At dawn on March 15, 2011, Maj. Gen. Yuki Imaura, vice commanding general of the Ground Self-Defense Force's Central Readiness Force, was in the dining room on the first floor of the off-site center for the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant when he twice heard a loud boom and then felt the room shaking.

As it turned out, the explosions occurred in the No. 4 reactor at the crippled plant.

At 6:40 a.m., top officials at the headquarters gathered in the room of Motohisa Ikeda, senior vice minister of economy, trade and industry, who was leading the crisis response task force.

Imaura proposed compiling a list of conditions that should trigger a withdrawal of the headquarters staff from the off-site center, which was being used as the operational base for the government's nuclear emergency response headquarters.

Ten minutes later, Akio Komori, managing director of Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant operator, presented to the top officials a piece of paper on which three sentences had been scribbled down.

1. Pressure levels within the No. 2 reactor's pressure vessel and containment vessel exceed the design limits.

2. Radiation levels in areas surrounding the off-site center rise above 500 microsieverts per hour.

3. An explosion, a fire or other emergency situation takes place at the No. 2 reactor.

It was decided that the entire headquarters staff would be evacuated from the off-site center to the Fukushima prefectural government's building if all the three conditions were to occur.

At 8:35 a.m., someone shouted that the three conditions were all met.

"We are withdrawing now and going to the prefectural office," Ikeda shouted in the large room.

TEPCO employees and officials from the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency working at the off-site center moved quickly. Who should get on which vehicle had been determined in advance.

Imaura saw Ikeda, sitting in the backseat of a van, salute him.

The vehicles left the facility around 9 a.m., if Imaura remembers correctly.

Imaura remained at the center.

In the dining room, he found half-eaten canned provisions and chopsticks abandoned in the middle of breakfast. He put them in a garbage bag and walked around the center, turning off lights.

As his last act, Imaura placed a cardboard box outside the center building. Inside the box were four days worth of portable emergency provisions for five SDF officials, including Imaura.

He decided to leave the food for dogs and cats that had been left behind. He himself kept a dog, a miniature dachshund. It was painful for him to see many now homeless dogs and cats strolling around deserted towns and villages within 10 kilometers of the disabled nuclear power plant.

Imaura opened one pack of sukiyaki so that animals could recognize the provisions as food.

At 10 a.m., Imaura and four other SDF members left the off-site center in a converted Mitsubishi Pajero SUV.

As they were traveling through the town of Futaba, where part of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant is located, a man in his 70s came out of a private residence and called to them. The man said he and his wife had failed to escape with other residents of the town. Both of the old couple were carrying one large piece of baggage each.

Imaura put some equipment in the vehicle down onto the road and let the two elderly residents get into his vehicle and transported them to an evacuation center.

Imaura and his team arrived at the Fukushima prefectural office at 4 p.m., just 24 hours after he had pulled up to the off-site center.

NRA wants to start charging for documents

March 24, 2013

Criticism arises over nuclear agency's fees to view documents

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130324p2a00m0na006000c.html>

Criticism has arisen over a decision by the secretariat to the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) to charge a fee to view nuclear power-related documents that were previously free, in a move that goes against the agency's policy of information transparency.

The change occurred in September last year when the agency was created and inherited the documents -- around 40,000 binders of files such as application forms for the construction and operation of nuclear plants and safety evaluation forms -- from a nuclear power resource center that it replaced. The center had made the documents available for browsing by the public, but under the NRA secretariat they are now kept in storage and have to be specifically requested to be seen.

According to the NRA secretariat's general affairs department, the Tokyo building the agency resides in lacks the facilities to accept visitors wanting to see the documents, and in order to allow them to be read, it followed procedures under the Freedom of Information Act that designated the resources as "administrative documents," which cost money to view. Those wanting to view the documents have to write their name and address on a request form and pay a 300-yen fee. In addition to users having to specify the documents they want, it can take up to 30 days until they are able to see them.

At the time of its founding, the agency decided on a policy of transparency, saying it would "voluntarily release information without waiting for requests from citizens."

An official of the agency's general affairs department said, "The charging of fees was due to the absence of facilities for visitors and was unavoidable, but we apologize. We would like to quickly set up the necessary facilities, but there is no prospect for it."

Yukiko Miki, head director of an NPO that seeks information transparency, said, "The NRA secretariat's actions and its stated policy do not match. They should quickly secure the budget and administrative means to publically release the documents."

Over 10 billion yen in unpaid decontamination expenses

March 23, 2013

TEPCO owes over 10 billion yen to gov't in unpaid decontamination costs

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130323p2a00m0na010000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) owes 10.5 billion yen to the Ministry of the Environment in unpaid expenses for decontamination of radioactive materials emanating from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, it has been learned.

TEPCO is required under a special measures law to shoulder the costs for the decontamination work. The Environment Ministry has asked the utility to pay 14.9 billion yen in decontamination-related expenses, but most of the amount remains outstanding.

"It is necessary to scrutinize whether the (ministry's) request is in accordance with the law," TEPCO was quoted as telling the ministry.

The central government has on behalf of TEPCO been paying the costs of decontamination work carried out by the central and local governments. In November last year, the Environment Ministry demanded TEPCO pay a total of 7.6 billion yen -- including 1.7 billion yen in expenses for decontamination work in specially designated areas -- but TEPCO has thus far paid only the 1.7 billion yen.

Although the ministry filed an additional payment request of 7.3 billion yen with TEPCO in February this year, the utility has paid only 2.6 billion yen and has reportedly held back payment of the remaining amount.

See : <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/22/national/tepcosnubs-%C2%A510-5-billion-cleanup-tab/#.UUxo5Tf1tEs>

Puppet show orchestrated by TEPCO

March 25, 2013

'Housewives' educating children on energy linked to TEPCO PR firm

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130325p2a00m0na010000c.html>

A puppet theater troupe advertising itself on its website as "started by a group of housewives concerned about energy" was in fact founded by staff from Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)'s PR firm, the Mainichi has learned.

According to the website of the puppet theater troupe in question -- Kappa no Kawataro Ichiza -- in 2000 a group of housewives set up an online "energy club" to exchange their views on energy after taking their "children to visit a nuclear power plant and discovering the great efforts being taken to supply energy to private households."

The puppet troupe was launched after club members decided they "wanted to pass on the importance of energy to (their) children," the website continues. In 2002, the troupe was certified as the Japan Industrial Location Center (JILC)'s "energy theater caravan nonprofit organization project."

According to a leading member of the group, however, **all five members of the troupe belong to a research firm doing publicity work for TEPCO. Their PR work involves holding parties at their homes for fellow housewives and informing participants of the necessity of nuclear power. One troupe member threw approximately 300 such parties at her home.**

Upon hearing from participants at the parties that they wanted their children to learn the same information, the group responded to a JILC call for theater troupes to educate young children about energy. Group members said they made a presentation at the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy -- which commissioned the JILC competition -- before the public competition, and were promised assistance on the spot. The members did not explain, however, whether they went to the agency on their own initiative or were encouraged by another party to do so.

One puppet show plot entails "kappa," a creature from Japanese folklore, receiving a letter from a polar bear asking for help. The kappa set out to find that melting ice has separated a baby polar bear from its mother. While the mother and cub are reunited, the kappa are dumbfounded to hear about global warming. Another of the group's shows features a trip to the Edo period (1603-1868) in a time machine to get a glimpse of life without electricity and an understanding of how convenient life has become because of it.

Through 2005, the troupe received up to 2.5 million yen a year in assistance as part of the agency and JILC program, **performing at schools in areas hosting nuclear power stations, and at events in the Tokyo metropolitan area.** Each member received 7,000 yen per performance. After financial assistance subsequently plummeted to 600,000 yen per year, however, the group chose to cut off its affiliation with the project. Since the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, the troupe has performed for children at the request of the Atomuseum in Niigata Prefecture.

The members admit to some feelings of discomfort with their dealings with TEPCO PR officials.

"TEPCO employees sometimes come to our parties for training, but they say they want us to keep their presence a secret from the people we've invited," one member said. "There are things (TEPCO) won't tell even us."

Some will never learn

March 25, 2013

Utilities gave money to group led by atomic energy commissioner even after Fukushima disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130325p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Power industry entities such as Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan (FEPC) have extended large sums of money to a nonprofit organization led by Etsuko Akiba, a commissioner of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC), the Mainichi has learned.

The nonprofit group, ASCA Energy Forum, based in Tokyo's Chuo Ward, has received at least 18 million yen from TEPCO, the FEPC and others even after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The revelation comes after the resignation of Akira Omoto, a former TEPCO executive, as a JAEC commissioner for having accepted advisory fees from TEPCO even after the Fukushima disaster triggered by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. Omoto, 64, stepped down after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said it was hard for his government to gain the public's understanding of Omoto's action.

Akiba, 64, established ASCA Energy Forum in 2001 when she was a consumer advocate. The group acquired NPO status in 2003 and Akiba quit as its chief after assuming a JAEC commissioner post in January 2010. However, she has stayed on with the NPO as an adviser.

In business reports submitted to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, ASCA Energy Forum posted 20-40 million yen in annual revenue from fiscal 2009 to 2011, mainly from TEPCO, the power federation and related sources, according to ASCA officials. Even after the Fukushima catastrophe, ASCA registered revenue of over 22.8 million yen in fiscal 2011, including over 6 million yen from the federation, over 1.63 million yen from TEPCO and about 2.5 million yen from the Japan Atomic Energy Relations Organization (JAERO).

JAERO is an incorporated foundation created by the atomic power industry and academia to promote public understanding of nuclear power. It is now headed by a former executive of Chubu Electric Power Co. and its executive director is a former official of Kansai Electric Power Co.

In fiscal 2012, ASCA has received at least 18 million yen from the utilities industry, including more than 6 million yen from the power federation and about 1.5 million yen from JAERO. Despite its status as a nonprofit organization, ASCA chalked up net assets of over 38 million yen at the end of fiscal 2011.

Armed with these funds, ASCA has conducted study session primarily aimed at housewives on nuclear power plants and radiation, and published a journal. It was entrusted with consumer questionnaires from TEPCO, for which it received 800,000 yen a month through May 2011 and 9.6 million yen annually in fiscal 2009 and 2010.

In addition, ASCA has received an order for subcontract work to foster public understanding of high-level nuclear waste as an entity authorized by the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry, getting about 10 million yen in fiscal 2011. Certain details about the subcontract deal have been made public, but ASCA has not disclosed funds received from TEPCO, the power federation or JAERO.

ASCA's secretariat says it cannot identify its partners but has briefed these partners on the ASCA's projects while releasing business reports. It also says it has provided venues for neutral study and its activities do not reflect the intentions of the power industry.

The secretariat also says Akiba works with no remuneration and is consulted only in a pinch because of her in-depth knowledge and network.

JAERO says it has entrusted ASCA with activities within the scope of funds it has given the nonprofit group, while TEPCO and the power federation declined to comment on individual dealings. Akiba has declined to respond to repeated requests for comment.

ASCA & nuclear waste project

March 26, 2013

Atomic energy bigwig's NPO favored for nuke waste disposal project

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130326p2a00m0na011000c.html>

A nonprofit organization set up by Etsuko Akiba, commissioner of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC), has received exclusive orders from a government-authorized corporation for a nuclear waste disposal project she played a part in introducing, it has been learned.

The scheme -- called "high-level nuclear waste workshop project" and run by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization of Japan (NUMO) -- was deliberated on and introduced by a government energy committee when Akiba was a committee member before she joined JAEC. Her NPO group, ASCA Energy Forum based in Tokyo, has received exclusive orders from NUMO, a corporation authorized by the minister of economy, industry and trade.

Because NPOs cannot accept orders directly from NUMO, ASCA Energy Forum has received orders for the project by way of a third-party contractor. Despite a change in original contractors, however, ASCA Energy Forum has continued to receive the orders as a sole subcontractor. The amount of the order totals more than 140 million yen over the past six years.

The revelation comes in the wake of the disclosure that power industry entities such as Tokyo Electric Power Co. and the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan have extended large sums of money to Akiba's NPO.

The nuclear waste workshop project was brought forth after the Kochi Prefecture town of Toyo withdrew its application in April 2007 for a feasibility survey for setting up a nuclear waste final disposal site in the town following residents' protests. In November that year, the nuclear waste subcommittee under the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy's Advisory Committee for Natural Resources and Energy recommended the introduction of the project, citing the necessity of creating a venue for learning about nuclear waste disposal at grass-roots level. At the time, Akiba was serving as a member of the nuclear waste subcommittee and supported the project initiative, stating at a meeting in September that year, "I was disappointed at the Toyo town's withdrawal. I want public relations for the entire nation to be enhanced." At the time, Akiba was also doubling as a member of NUMO's committee for adjusting disclosure of information.

According to NUMO and other sources, the project was launched in February 2008 and was on a free contract basis with planning competitions among two to five corporate applicants a year until fiscal 2010. Although NPOs cannot apply, the ASCA Energy Forum joined hands with the Japan Productivity Center (JPC), a public interest incorporated foundation, to receive the order, **with JPC serving as an original contractor and ASCA as a subcontractor**. In fiscal 2011 on the heels of the Great East Japan Earthquake, **JPC and ASCA were jointly awarded the project order without competition**.

After JPC withdrew from energy projects in fiscal 2012, ASCA teamed up with an advertisement company in Tokyo, with the latter successfully bidding for the project at some 40 million yen.

Under the project, the original contractor secured venues for workshops on nuclear waste while the NPO solicited participants through its networks and took charge of event proceedings. According to sources close to ASCA, it received some 10 million to 20 million yen a year in operating expenses.

"Basically, the project utilizes the networks of NPOs. Because JPC had affiliations with ASCA, we received its application for the project," said a representative of NUMO. Asked why ASCA continues to exclusively receive the orders, the representative said, "It is possible that past achievements are taken into account during screening. The ad agency (that participated in the fiscal 2012 bid) may have also thought it would be able to carry out the project with confidence if it teamed up with ASCA."

Meanwhile, the secretariat of ASCA Energy Forum said, "There were no advance consultations or prearrangements with NUMO." Akiba has declined to respond to interviews by the Mainichi.

See also :

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130325p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Asahi - Shadow Units (11)

March 27, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (11): You're specialists, shoot water into the reactor

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303270012>

By HIDEFUMI NOGAMI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 11th part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

On March 15, 2011, when the government's nuclear emergency response headquarters was moved to the Fukushima prefectural government's office, it also ushered in a new phase for dealing with the galloping nuclear crisis by both the prime minister's office and the Defense Ministry.

Early in the morning of that day, Prime Minister Naoto Kan stormed into Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s head office in Tokyo and set up integrated government and TEPCO headquarters for responding to the nuclear disaster, triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Around that time, the United States was urging Japan to make truly national efforts to contain the crisis, including the use of Self-Defense Forces, instead of leaving it to the utility to bring the emergency under control.

The "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force's (GSDF) Central Readiness Force (CRF) were to play the leading role in the government's response to the nuclear disaster.

The 1st Helicopter Brigade of the CRF was deployed to spray water on the overheating reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant from the sky. On March 16, the brigade was forced to abort the operation to dump water onto the No. 3 reactor. But the unit succeeded in its mission on the morning of the following day, March 17.

That day, attempts were also made to spray water on the reactor from the ground.

Kan, 66, asked Tokyo Gov. Shintaro Ishihara, 80, to deploy the Tokyo Fire Department for emergency operations at the Fukushima nuclear plant.

The Metropolitan Police Department dispatched a riot police unit on a high-pressure water-cannon truck. The SDF unit assigned to the dangerous mission was the Central Nuclear Biological Chemical Weapon Defense Unit, under the command of Lt. Col. Kazunori Hishinuma.

A total of 11 SDF fire engines had been moved to Fukushima from around the country. Of the 11 vehicles, Hishinuma picked five that had the capability of shooting water over a longer range.

On the evening of March 17, the SDF fire engines left the J-Village, a sports complex being used as a base for operations to deal with the crisis, accompanied by chemical protection vehicles. Equipped with an air cleaning system, these vehicles can move freely even in polluted areas.

From the window of the fire engine, Hishinuma saw an eerie landscape. Towns and villages were totally deserted, with no lights or people to be seen.

The landscape reminded Hishinuma of the scene following the sarin nerve gas attack against the Tokyo subway system, perpetrated by the Aum Shinrikyo doomsday cult, on March 20, 1995.

On that day, Hishinuma, clad in a chemical protective suit, rushed to the Kodenmacho Station of the subway Hibiya Line and sprinkled a decontamination agent onto the platform and train cars and then scrubbed them with a brush.

It was eerily silent within the station. As Hishinuma remembered the profound silence, strangely, calmness descended upon him.

On the night of the day, Hishinuma's unit arrived at the disaster-stricken nuclear power plant and entered the crew room near the front gate. There were three TEPCO employees wearing white protective suits with their family names written on their left chest.

When he asked them how to access the reactor, they said there was no way to approach the reactor because the entire area was strewn with rubble.

It was decided that the SDF fire engines would line up from some 100 meters from the No. 3 reactor and move close to the reactor one by one to spray water at point-blank range.

When a fire engine sprays water on the reactor, it would be flanked by two chemical protection vehicles serving as a shield from radiation.

The fire engines would be manned by Ground, Maritime and Air Self-Defense Force members trained for fighting fires aboard SDF aircraft. In the crew room, Hishinuma gave them instructions.

He told them that there was no doubt a hole on the building housing the No. 3 reactor.

"You are firefighting specialists, so spray water precisely into the hole," he told them.

At 7:35 p.m., water nozzles were raised and directed toward the reactor building from one of the fire engines. The loudspeaker of a chemical protection vehicle blared, "Shoot."

As the fire engine shot water toward the reactor, the crew saw steam rise from the building.

"Back down," the loudspeaker cried out.

At 8:09 p.m., the fifth and last fire engine finished spraying water on the reactor. Thirty-five tons of water had been released from the five vehicles.

New investigation by NRA could take decades

March 27, 2013

Japanese regulators to investigate nuclear crisis

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303270097>

THE ASSOCIATEDPRESS

Japanese government regulators say they'll conduct their first investigation into the country's nuclear crisis to address key unanswered questions.

Several groups have published findings of their own investigations into the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which was ravaged by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Previous investigations have largely blamed the disaster on botched crisis management, government-industry collusion and the tsunami.

But questions remain, and experts still suspect that the quake, not the tsunami, may have triggered a meltdown at the plant. This is a key point that could affect anti-quake measures at nuclear facilities nationwide.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority said on March 27 that its investigation will start by the end of April and **could take decades** because parts of the plant are in such poor condition.

Another NPO offering pronuke propaganda

March 29, 2013

KEPCO-funded NPO seen as nuclear power propaganda tool

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130328p2a00m0na010000c.html>

Kansai Electric Power Co. (KEPCO) pays over 20 million yen a year to support the activities of an Osaka city NPO that appears to spread nuclear power propaganda, it has been learned.

The NPO is called "Josei Shokuno Shudan WARP-LEENET," and was founded in July 1993, mostly by housewives who participated as public monitors in a KEPCO PR event. It achieved corporate status in July 2001.

Every year, the NPO holds educational lectures for groups of around 100 people, and it advertised them in newspapers and on an informational website set up by KEPCO geared mainly for housewives until the site was shut down in February.

The newspaper ads tout the lectures as being about energy resources, including bus tours and cooking classes using electric cookers. The ads mention nothing about nuclear plants, but according to the blog of

someone who participated, they toured nuclear plant facilities in Fukui Prefecture, and were also served luxury Japanese cuisine on the tour.

For people who finish taking the lectures, the NPO offers a chance to join more in-depth study groups on nuclear power, radiation and other such themes. According to the NPO's representative, Chiiko Inoue, KEPCO covers over 20 million yen of its annual expenses of around 45 million yen.

"Receiving requests to handle certain duties and receiving money for those duties as we do is no different than what an advertising agency does. The lectures are not only about nuclear power, and we do not show favor to nuclear power, either," Inoue says. However, the NPO's website heavily featured nuclear power-related events, and soon after a Mainichi reporter pointed that out in January this year, the site was taken down.

Inoue was also a member of a committee that worked on a nuclear power policy outline passed by a Cabinet decision in October 2005. In August the same year at a public hearing on the outline in Fukui, a few dozen senior members of the NPO attended, and one spoke out and called for more pro-nuclear power advertising.

A representative of KEPCO's PR office said the company agrees with and supports the NPO's educational activities, saying, "We are providing a proper amount of funds in accordance with our support." However, the representative also said that as the company is in the middle of streamlining its finances, it could reconsider the funding.

Inoue complained, "The funding might be cut, and if that happens, we won't be able to hold the lectures."

Yes, nuclear power IS expensive

Idled reactors still cost utilities 1.2 tril. yen per year: gov't

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130329p2g00m0dm031000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Japan's nine utilities that own nuclear power plants need a total of 1.2 trillion yen a year just to maintain their idled reactors, a government estimate showed Thursday.

Anti-nuclear lawmakers disclosed the estimate by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry at a meeting in Tokyo. The power companies cannot avoid huge costs associated with the nuclear plants, even if they are offline, as they are unable to slash personnel expenses and allowances for depreciation immediately.

In the estimate, compiled at the request of the lawmakers, the ministry did not reveal the amount of money each utility needs for the maintenance of idled reactors.

In any case, the nine regional firms include nuclear-related expenses in their bills, meaning that **consumers ultimately have to shoulder such costs.**

Currently, 48 of Japan's 50 functional commercial reactors are offline amid heightened concerns over the safety of nuclear energy in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima disaster.

See also:

Idled reactor upkeep bleeding utilities by ¥1.2 trillion

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/29/business/idled-reactor-upkeep-bleeding-utilities-by-%C2%A51-2-trillion/#.UVXJ6Df1tEs>

The nine utilities that own nuclear power plants need a total of ¥1.2 trillion a year just to maintain their idled reactors, according to the latest government estimate.

Antinuclear lawmakers disclosed the estimate, which was developed by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, at a meeting Thursday in Tokyo.

The power companies can't avoid the huge costs associated with their nuclear plants as they are unable to immediately slash personnel expenses or write off depreciation fees.

In the estimate, compiled at the request of the lawmakers, METI did not break down how much money each utility needs to maintain the reactors.

All nine firms include nuclear-related expenses in their billing, meaning consumers ultimately have to shoulder such costs.

Forty-eight of Japan's 50 functional commercial reactors are offline amid heightened concerns over the safety of nuclear energy in light of the Fukushima triple-meltdown disaster, which started in 2011. The reactors also face new safety standards.

Asahi - Shadow Units (12)

March 29, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (12): Should SDF really take over fire department's task?

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201303290006>

BY HIROYOSHI ITABASHI / Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 12th part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense

Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

* * *

A week after the March 11 Great East Japan Earthquake, the site of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant was a scene of utter chaos.

The grounds were clogged with fire engines, heavy machinery, transport vehicles and other types of machines and vehicles belonging to police, the fire department, the Self-Defense Forces and Tokyo Electric Power Co.

The compound was also teeming with people from these organizations.

On March 17, 2011, the previous day, the SDF and police had carried out operations to spray water on the overheating No. 3 reactor from the ground. High-pressure water cannon trucks were used for the operations.

In order to prevent the crippled reactors from spiraling out of control, various organizations had deployed a broad array of vehicles and machinery to the Fukushima plant.

But there was no one who was supposed to take command of all the organizations to lead the efforts to contain the nuclear crisis.

Concerned about the situation, the prime minister's office on that day issued a directive that the SDF should supervise the operations at the plant.

The principal reason for the government's decision was that the SDF had accumulated much experience in responding to disasters and other emergencies, including such situations overseas.

Maj. Gen. Masato Taura, 51, vice commanding general of the Ground Self-Defense Force's Central Readiness Force (CRF), was appointed as head of the on-site coordination. It was decided that Taura and Maj. Gen. Yuki Imaura, who was also the CRF's vice commanding general, would take turns directing operations at the plant on a five-day rotating basis.

Taura had commanded SDF operations in Iraq and also in Haiti following the devastating earthquake in 2010.

The first thing he did was to convene a general meeting of top officials of the organizations involved.

In front of the top officials, Taura deliberately took a lower seat in a display of deference. He thought things would not work well if the SDF tried to exert strong control over the proceedings.

"I've been appointed to serve as a coordinator," Taura said, indicating his intention to work behind the scenes, and smiled.

He soon faced the first test of his ability to handle this delicate situation.

Shortly past 10 p.m., the grim-faced chief of the Tokyo Fire Department unit deployed to the disabled nuclear power plant was on the phone, apparently getting a dressing-down.

The fire department's mission to spray water on the No. 3 reactor had been delayed by about five hours, as huge amounts of debris were blocking fire engines from approaching the reactor.

The fire chief was being berated for the delay by an official at the government's nuclear emergency response headquarters who had called the chief.

"What are you doing?" the caller roared. "If you can't do it right now, let the SDF do it."

As Taura took the phone from the fire chief, the caller was also replaced by an SDF officer on the other end.

Taura asked the officer whether headquarters was really demanding that the SDF take over the mission.

"Yes, they are demanding that."

Taura thought that headquarters didn't understand the situation at the plant. If the SDF took over the mission, that would damage the morale of the firefighters of the Tokyo Fire Department.

Taura explained the situation at the plant to the SDF officer on the phone.

Roads in the site were littered with debris, making it impossible for two vehicles to travel past each other. There was no detour, either. It would take at least three hours for the SDF unit to make the necessary preparations to spray water on the reactor. In addition, the fire department could deliver more water on the target than the SDF. After describing the situation, Taura said to the SDF officer, "Ask headquarters again whether we should still take over the mission."

Headquarters withdrew the order.

The Tokyo Fire Department's unit succeeded in spraying water on the reactor before dawn on March 19. After hearing the news, Taura shook hands with the fire brigade chief and noticed tears in his eyes.

Insiders at public hearings, fake e-mail scams

March 28, 2013

Kyushu Electric made 150 insiders attend public hearing on nuclear policy in 2005

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130328p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Kyushu Electric Power Co. had a total of 150 of its workers attend a government-sponsored public hearing on the country's nuclear energy policy guidelines in August 2005, it has been learned.

The 150 people account for more than 80 percent of the total number of people who attended the public hearing held in Saga, Saga Prefecture.

In what was called a "fake e-mail scam," Kyushu Electric was found to have urged its employees and other related people to send comments to a TV program supportive of restarting nuclear reactors at the Genkai Nuclear Power Plant in Saga Prefecture in 2011. A Kyushu Electric spokesperson said of the latest case, "We think that the same thing as the e-mail scandal was done at the public hearing. We are reflecting on it seriously."

The public hearing was officially called the "public hearing to listen to opinions on a draft guideline for nuclear energy policy." The Japan Atomic Energy Commission sponsored such hearings at five locations across the country from Aug. 18 to 26, 2005, to incorporate citizens' opinions into the country's nuclear energy policy guideline. One of the hearings was held at a hotel in Saga, Saga Prefecture, on Aug. 22, 2005. Of the 21 people who stood up and expressed their opinions at the hearing, 11 were suspected to have come from Kyushu Electric, and therefore the Mainichi Shimbun tried to confirm it with the utility. The company consequently conducted an in-house investigation.

The probe found that all of the 11 people were Kyushu Electric's employees (one of them is currently a retiree), and most of them belonged to the company's Saga branch. Through its nuclear power department and public relations department at the company headquarters, the utility urged its employees and employees of its subsidiaries to attend the public hearing. According to internal data kept at the company,

a total of 150 employees of the utility and its subsidiaries attended the hearing. That means that of the 179 people who attended the hearing, 83 percent were people related to Kyushu Electric.

The 11 Kyushu Electric employees expressed their views in favor of the draft guideline for the country's nuclear energy policy at the public hearing such as "Nuclear power is needed to maintain standards of living," and "There is no solution to the energy problem other than nuclear power." Kyushu Electric looked into whether the company had instructed its employees to express such views at the hearing, but there was no mention of whether such an instruction was given in the internal document prepared at that time. Kyushu Electric said it could not say whether the company had in fact instructed its employees to express such opinions because they said they "don't remember."

On top of that, Kyushu Electric acknowledged that the latest case was the same as the "fake e-mail" scandal. The utility commented, "With respect to our calls for our employees to take part in government-sponsored symposiums and so on, we regard it constitutes a lack of consideration of the intent of such events. We will ensure transparency of our corporate activities, improve our organizational climate and prevent a recurrence (of such misdeeds)."

In October 2005, the government adopted the country's nuclear energy policy guidelines at a Cabinet meeting. The guideline covering the next 10 years said nuclear power would account for 30 to 40 percent of the country's total power supply and the nuclear fuel cycle program would be promoted the way it had been.

The then president and chairman of Kyushu Electric resigned to take responsibility for the "fake e-mail" scandal in which the utility had urged its subsidiaries and its clients to send a government-sponsored TV program aired on June 2011 their comments in favor of the reactivation of nuclear reactors at the Genkai Nuclear Power Plant in Saga Prefecture. Kyushu Electric was also found to have allocated prepared questions to its employees and had them ask the fixed questions at a public debate on "pluthermal" energy generation plans sponsored by the Saga Prefectural Government in December 2005.

TEPCO's changed its mind : it is guilty after all...

March 30, 2013

Japanese utility takes blame for nuclear crisis

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130330p2g00m0dm009000c.html>

TOKYO (AP) -- The utility that operates Japan's crippled atomic plant said Friday that it deserves most of the blame for the country's nuclear crisis, in its strongest remarks about its own shortcomings.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. acknowledged in a report that it was not adequately prepared to deal with the massive earthquake and tsunami that ravaged northeastern Japan in March 2011. The twin disasters cut power at TEPCO's Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant, causing meltdowns at three reactors. Massive radiation leaks contaminated air, water and soil around the plant, forcing about 160,000 residents to evacuate.

"Our safety culture, skills and ability were all insufficient," TEPCO President Naomi Hirose told a news conference. "We must humbly accept our failure to prevent the accident, which we should have avoided by using our wisdom and human resources to be better prepared."

The report said TEPCO's equipment and safety provisions were inadequate and that the meltdowns should have been avoided. TEPCO said it was complacent about safety measures and delayed upgrading them until after the accident. It also said TEPCO didn't adequately inform the public of risks and troubles at the plant.

The acknowledgement is a major reversal from TEPCO's initial investigation report.

In the June 2012 report, TEPCO maintained that the tsunami was mostly to blame for the world's worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986. It defended its crisis management and criticized excessive interference from the Prime Minister's Office.

After the company's reluctance to come to terms with its responsibility triggered public outcry, it launched an internal reform task force, led by Hirose, to reinvestigate the crisis. The task force was overseen by a five-member committee of outside experts, including former U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission chief Dale Klein.

In October, TEPCO acknowledged that it underestimated the tsunami risk and could have mitigated the impact of the accident if it had backup power and cooling systems and trained employees with practical crisis management skills. Friday's report urged TEPCO to introduce effective training programs and oversight by outside experts.

Klein said the nuclear industry has to "expect the unexpected and have margins of safety."

"I do think it would have been appropriate for TEPCO have thought about what they would have done if there would have been a large tsunami and that would have mitigated a lot of actions," he said. "We are unable to turn the clock back in time and stop the accident. What is important for the reform committee and TEPCO is to move forward, learn from mistakes and make sure that never happens again."

Critics have raised doubts as to whether TEPCO is seriously trying to change, and an extended blackout at the plant last week was a reminder that the crisis is not over.

The blackout occurred after a rat short-circuited an outdoor switchboard, but TEPCO waited three hours to make an announcement. The outage left four fuel pools without cooling functions for up to 30 hours. TEPCO officials denied Friday that the incident posed safety threats outside of the plant, but acknowledged they lacked sensitivity about how Fukushima residents felt about the loss of power and cooling.

"We learned that it only takes one rat, not even an earthquake or tsunami, to paralyze the plant," said Yukihiro Higashi, an Iwaki Meisei University engineering professor who is on a government nuclear regulatory panel overseeing Fukushima Dai-ichi safety.

"People in Fukushima are under constant fear of another serious incident that requires evacuation," Higashi said.

The full cleanup of the plant, which is still running on makeshift equipment, is expected to take decades. Officials said Friday that rats and snakes are frequently spotted at the plant, even inside its emergency command center. Rats are particularly a concern because they can chew on power cables and water hoses, said TEPCO official Kazuhiko Yamashita, adding that officials are considering further anti-rodent measures.

The reform plans aim to use the lessons learned at TEPCO's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in northern Japan. The cash-strapped utility wants to restart the plant, and officials say they have upgraded safety measures, although they have not specified any timeline.

Government, parliamentary and private groups have separately published the results of their investigations into the crisis, largely blaming the disaster on botched crisis management, government-industry collusion and the tsunami.

All in transparency's name

March 30, 2013

All seats in NRA's radiation council vacant since Sept.

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130330p2a00m0na006000c.html>

All the seats in the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA)'s Radiation Council have remained vacant since September 2012, apparently as a result of tougher membership requirements.

The NRA has stiffened requirements for council membership as the Japanese public places more scrutiny on atomic power policy in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear crisis that broke out in March 2011, NRA officials say.

The government, which is preparing to lift evacuation orders in some disaster-hit areas, is considering radiation-protection measures to help residents return home quickly. However, the current lack of Radiation Council members could certainly delay its deliberations on the issue, and adversely affect its efforts to speed up the overall disaster recovery effort.

The council, which previously operated under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, was transferred to the NRA, a highly independent body, in September last year under the previous administration led by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). However, the term of all 19 of its members, including Chairman Otsura Niwa, expired on Sept. 18, 2012. The NRA is now selecting candidates to fill the vacancy.

The NRA has stiffened the qualifications for membership in the Radiation Council to enhance its transparency and independence.

As a result, executives and researchers at companies operating atomic power plants are disqualified from serving as members of the council. Moreover, the NRA has decided to require all members of the council to report remuneration they receive from any single nuclear plant operator over a three-year period prior to their appointments when such remuneration totals 500,000 yen a year or more. They must also report donations extended to their research institutes over the same period. The NRA is set to fully publicize such information.

The government decided on March 7 to draw up measures to protect residents from radiation and lessen radiation contamination based on scientific knowledge in an effort to help evacuees to return home at an early date. It will also consider setting a new upper limit on annual radiation exposure in areas whose current cumulative dose is less than 20 millisieverts a year -- where the government is preparing to lift evacuation orders.

At the request of ministries and agencies concerned, the Radiation Council set upper limits on radiation exposure for workers engaged in decontamination efforts, as well as on levels of radioactive substances contained in foods, following the outbreak of the nuclear crisis.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said the government will clarify its basic view on measures to protect against radiation and lessen radiation levels in affected areas by the end of this year.

However, unless the council resumes its work at an early date, the government's efforts to allow residents of evacuation zones to return home at an early date could be stalled.

All set for re-born TEPCO

March 30, 2013

TEPCO to get watchdog division / Plans to establish new division specializing in enhancing nuclear safety

The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T130329003344.htm>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. is expected to establish a new division specializing in enhancing nuclear safety under the direct control of its board of directors, the company said in the final draft of its plan for nuclear power safety reform released Friday.

The utility also admitted to inadequate preparation and the weakness of its executives' risk management at the time of the crisis at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The draft was submitted to the Nuclear Reform Monitoring Committee, a third-party supervisory panel led by former U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chairman Dale Klein, and was approved by the panel on the day.

The draft said the company will invite an outsider to be chief of the new division, to be named the nuclear power safety observation office. The office is independent of TEPCO's other nuclear power-related

departments and will likely observe and provide advice on the company's actions aimed at improving safety.

Regarding the fact that TEPCO gave false explanations about the crisis at the plant to the Diet's Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission and that it took three hours for the company to announce a blackout at the plant on March 18, the draft concludes TEPCO was "insensitive to the feelings of people living near the plant and created anxiety among them."

To solve those problems, TEPCO will invite a public relations specialist from outside the company and set up a "social communication office" that aims to smoothly disclose information to the public and raise employees' awareness.

The draft also incorporates lessons learned from the confusion in the chain of command for the nuclear plant at the time of the crisis. It promises to greatly strengthen the power of the directors of nuclear power plants and to clarify the command structure to be used in cases of emergency.

March 29, 2013

Tokyo Electric compiles reform plan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/daily/english/20130329_22.html

Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, has compiled a reform plan based on lessons learned from the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

A third-party panel set up by TEPCO approved on Friday the plan drawn up by an in-house task force.

TEPCO launched the task force after it was criticized for defending its response to the accident in a report it put together following an internal probe.

The task force says the company should not put all the blame for the accident on the huge tsunami that hit the plant on March 11th, 2011. It concluded that the accident would have been preventable if the company had been fully prepared for the tsunami.

The reform plan includes 6 measures to address issues that came to light in the accident.

One measure is the creation of an independent, in-house supervising body to keep watch on the company's approach to safety. The task force criticizes the company for pursuing economic efficiency and not putting enough effort into risk management.

Another is to clarify the chain of command in case of an emergency. The number of people that one supervisor can manage will be limited to 7 people to make sure that everyone is up to date in the event of a crisis.

The task force also says the company was reluctant to disclose risks associated with nuclear power plants and it calls for assigning "risk communicators" who will advise the management and nuclear division chiefs.

The reform plan is an apparent effort to persuade authorities and the public to agree to allow it to resume operations of the Kashiwazaki Kariwa nuclear plant along the Japan Sea coast in Niigata Prefecture.

But TEPCO President Naomi Hirose ruled out speculation that the reform plan is intended to help restart the Kashiwazaki Kariwa plant soon.

Hirose promised to rid his company of arrogance and carry out drastic reforms to ensure nuclear safety. He said if the company fails to do this, it does not have the right to operate nuclear plants.

The head of the third-party panel, Dale Klein, said TEPCO has acknowledged its mistakes and come up with the reform plan so it will not cause a similar accident.

He said the company has just started a long journey for reform and that he and other panel members will keep watching its efforts.

Mar. 29, 2013 - Updated 10:59 UTC (19:59 JST)

See also :

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/30/business/tepc-to-set-up-independent-office-to-oversee-own-nuclear-safety-efforts/#.UVXKNDf1tEs>

Asahi - Shadow Units (13)

April 1, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (13): SDF members recruited for Fukushima mission brought emotional baggage

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201304010003>

By HIROYOSHI ITABASHI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 13th part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

The hasty manner in which the Self-Defense Forces firefighting unit was assembled near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant to spray water onto the overheating reactors concerned Maj. Gen. Masato Taura, the vice commander of the GSDF's Central Readiness Force, who was in charge of operations at the site.

The firefighting unit was made up of members assembled from the three branches of the SDF from various bases in Japan. For that reason, most members did not know one another, and there was little conversation among unit members.

In addition to the weak sense of solidarity within the unit, Taura was also worried about the physical and psychological stress that unit members had undergone.

On March 19, 2011, Taura gathered unit members in a room in J-Village, the soccer training complex that was serving as the operation base for the SDF mission to deal with the nuclear accident. He had unit members sit in a circle, and he took out a notebook to write down their comments.

"I want to know the process that brought you here and anything else you may have in mind," Taura said. With that, he opened the floor to the other unit members and concentrated on writing down what they said.

One member said his wife angrily opposed having him go to the Fukushima nuclear plant.

In trying to convince his wife, the member told her, "Let me go. If I don't go, I will regret it for the rest of my life, and it would only mean that someone else had to go."

Another member spoke up. "I am originally from Miyagi Prefecture," he said. "A relative in Sendai died. I volunteered for this mission because I felt that would help disaster victims."

A Maritime SDF member who was close to retirement age gave his take on why he came.

"Younger members have a long future before them," he said. "I came here because I thought this was an opportunity for older members. After the Persian Gulf War, that is what some of my seniors told me when they were preparing to leave for the overseas dispatch."

One SDF member revealed the conversation he had with his superior officer in requesting to be sent.

"I will go because I am single," the member told his superior. "Since you are a newlywed, I want you to remain behind. If something happened to you, I would never be able to face your wife."

Other members told about clashes that arose at their base over the selection of those to be dispatched to Fukushima.

At one base, members with families insisted that members who were single not go, while those single shot back, "Those with families have someone they have to protect. They should not go."

Another member told his superior officer, "Don't ask us what our wish is, but just tell us to go because you know we will go if you say so."

In the course of the meeting, some members began describing their thoughts at how the mission had fared so far.

"Because only 10 tons of water can be transported by a firetruck, that is all used up in under three minutes of spraying," one said. "I wanted to spray a much larger volume of water."

Another said, "We have to wear protective gear, goggles and a lead vest. The heat and weight of the gear saps our strength. Standing in front of the No. 3 reactor, I realized the seriousness of the situation. I cannot explain the reason, but tears welled up in my eyes."

TEPCO paid 1.8 billion yen to Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan in 2011

March 31, 2013

TEPCO paid membership fee to nuclear lobby group after Fukushima disaster

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201303310027

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Following the nation's worst nuclear accident in 2011 and while requesting governmental assistance to help it stay afloat, Tokyo Electric Power Co. paid 1.8 billion yen (\$189 million) to maintain its membership in a nuclear power lobbying group, The Asahi Shimbun has learned.

The payment to the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan came at a time the utility was seeking financial support from the government, while announcing a streamlining plan to come up with the funds to contain the nuclear crisis and compensate victims and evacuees.

The utility's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant was stricken by three reactor meltdowns in March 2011 following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

TEPCO's annual membership fee for fiscal 2011, which began in April 2011, was included in electricity rates as operating costs, which had been approved before the 2011 accident.

"We paid 1.8 billion yen as a membership fee for fiscal 2011 as we believe the federation's activities have a great significance," a TEPCO official said. "We plan to pay the membership fee from funds in the future that are not associated with electricity rates. And we are not in a position to tell how the fee was spent."

The federation, comprising 10 regional utilities, is the nuclear industry's lobbying group. Its stated mission is to educate and inform the public about nuclear energy and to formulate the industry's position statement, in addition to conducting various research concerning nuclear power.

It is a private association and is not obligated to release its budget, financial dealings, size of its staff and details of its operations.

This is the first time the amount of a member company's annual membership fee has come to light. An official with the federation declined to comment and to disclose details concerning its revenues and spending as well as individual operations, citing the privacy of its member companies and business partners.

In fiscal 2011, TEPCO asked the government to provide financial assistance to help it contain the nuclear crisis and to pay compensation to victims and evacuees, and announced a series of cost-cutting measures, including a reduction in remuneration of its board members and the sale of some properties.

Two months after the crisis began, the government approved a plan to assist the utility with the injection of public funds.

A government panel of experts, which began to look into the utility's management in June, concluded in a report in October that the membership fee to the federation is "not essential to the stable supply of electricity."

An advisory panel to the industry ministry examining a proposed electricity rate hike recommended in March 2012 that passing on the membership fee under operating costs should not be done.

In keeping with the recommendation, TEPCO did not incorporate the fee into its operating costs when it applied for a 10-percent rate hike two months later.

(This article was written by Satoshi Otani and Yo Noguchi.)

Asahi - Shadow Units (14)

April 3, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (14): SDF commander had to see for himself if order could be carried out

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201304030091>

By HIROYOSHI ITABASHI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 14th part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

A few hours after the meeting with the Self-Defense Force firefighting unit tasked with dealing with the Fukushima nuclear accident, Maj. Gen. Masato Taura received an urgent order from the central government's nuclear emergency response headquarters on the evening of March 19, 2011.

"Spray water from the ground onto the No. 4 reactor before the day is out."

A series of explosions had rocked the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant over the past week. Explosions hit the No. 1 reactor building on March 12, the No. 3 reactor building on March 14 and the No. 4 reactor building on March 15. Problems had also emerged at the No. 2 reactor, leading to the spewing of large amounts of radioactive materials.

There was concern about the large number of nuclear fuel rods stored in the pool of the No. 4 reactor building. Failure to maintain cooling of that pool could lead to a catastrophic problem.

Cooling of the reactors began with the dropping of water on the No. 3 reactor from an SDF helicopter on March 17. However, no spraying of water into the No. 4 reactor had been attempted until the March 19 order.

Taura had many questions related to the instruction, including if space could be obtained for the firetrucks to spray from, considering the amount of debris that had been scattered throughout the plant by the explosions.

On the previous night, a unit from the Tokyo Fire Department needed more than six hours to remove debris before its members could begin spraying the No. 3 reactor.

Those concerns led to hesitancy on the part of Taura in immediately replying to the government order.

He turned to a veteran member of the Air SDF firefighting unit who had just taken part in the meeting of all members.

"Do you think we can go ahead right now?" Taura asked.

The member replied frankly, "I am not confident we could do it."

He then added a comment that led Taura to consider the situation from a different angle.

"We could do it if there was space to turn the firetruck around in order to leave the scene in thinking about the worst-case scenario, including an explosion."

During the exchange between Taura and the ASDF member, an official with the central government's response headquarters called frequently, wanting to know when the water spraying operation would begin.

Taura felt he could only make a decision on whether to send the unit to the No. 4 reactor after checking conditions at the site.

"I will take a look," Taura told a subordinate.

Even though the subordinate said it was too dangerous, Taura refused to listen, and he got into the retrofitted Pajero SUV to drive to the Fukushima No. 1 plant, about 20 kilometers away. The headlights pierced the darkness, revealing the structural skeleton of the No. 4 reactor building. Debris lay scattered about from the various explosions.

Taura called the central government's response headquarters.

"Come morning, we will remove the debris to clear a space for spraying and for a possible escape in an emergency," he said. "We will then carry out the spraying, but we cannot do it tonight."

Those at headquarters agreed to the proposal, and spraying of the No. 4 reactor began from after 8 a.m. on March 20, 2011.

At about that time, reports were emerging of high radiation levels in the vicinity of Iitate, located between 30 and 50 kilometers northwest of the Fukushima No. 1 plant. This was despite previous reports that areas beyond 30 kilometers from the plant were considered safe.

Even as Iitate residents continued to stay in their homes despite the various concerns they held, they were joined by another SDF unit--the 1st Airborne Brigade. The brigade had been given the special mission of rescuing residents in the event of an emergency.

* * *

That will teach them, no doubt

http://www.tepco.co.jp/en/press/corp-com/release/2013/1226071_5130.html

Delayed reports and public announcements as well as the long hours spent on restoration in response to the power supply failure of Units 1-4 at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station that occurred on March 18th, 2013 has caused tremendous inconvenience and anxiety to the people of Fukushima and broader society.

Effective today, a decision has been made to implement the following disciplinary actions.

President Naomi Hirose: 5% salary cut for a one month period

Executive Vice President Zengo Aizawa: 5% salary cut for a one month period

Managing Executive Officer Akio Komori: 5% salary cut for a one month period

In addition to the above action, a severe warning will be issued to four other employees.

TEPCO sends its own employees to public hearings

April 5, 2013

TEPCO sent workers to public hearing on nuclear framework in Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130405p2a00m0na006000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) has launched an internal investigation to determine whether it had staff members make comments in favor of promoting nuclear power at a public meeting held in Fukushima in 2005 before the government formulated a basic outline for the nation's long-term nuclear policy.

It has emerged that the company, operator of the crisis-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, sent at least 35 workers, including its own staff members, to a public hearing that the Cabinet Office's Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) held that year in preparation for the establishment of its Framework for Nuclear Energy Policy.

TEPCO and commission officials said that at least 35 of the 135 participants at the hearing were employees of TEPCO or its affiliates. Six of the 23 people who gave opinions when asked about the pros and cons of nuclear power were associated with the utility.

"We are investigating the content of their statements, and whether those present were asked to make statements in favor of promoting nuclear power," a representative of TEPCO's Fukushima public relations division said, admitting that workers were sent to the hearing.

Public hearings were held in five locations across Japan in August 2005, with between 135 and 271 people present at each meeting. It has already emerged that 150 of the 179 participants at the hearing in Saga, or about 80 percent of those present, were dispatched by Kyushu Electric Power Co. Of these, seven spoke in favor of nuclear power. At the end of March, the AEC asked power companies to investigate whether there were any similar cases.

It was earlier learned that TEPCO asked its employees and members of subcontractors to attend a town meeting on the safety of nuclear power plants that the government held in Fukushima Prefecture in 2003, explaining to them in advance how to fill in questionnaires that were distributed at the meeting.

The impact of multiple layers between original contractor and cleanup workers

April 5, 2013

Deductions strip daily wage of nuclear cleanup workers down to 1,000 yen

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130405p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Dinner is a few boiled vegetables. At lights out, each person lies down to sleep in a space the size of two tatami mats, or just over three square meters. This is no prison camp scene, but the reality of workers cleaning up radioactive contamination from the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The central government has awarded contracts for most of this decontamination work to large construction companies, which have in turn hired sub-contractors, which have themselves hired third companies, and on down through several layers of firms to the people doing the actual cleanup job. **And these people, not counting their danger pay, are working for almost nothing.**

"We weren't treated like human beings," said one 59-year-old from Aomori Prefecture, who did a two-month stint as a nuclear decontamination worker in Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, starting in September last year. During his contract, he was billeted with three other men in a bungalow measuring just 12.4 square meters. The first dinner he ate there was a shock as well: a plate of boiled eggplant, green peppers and alfalfa sprouts. He complained to his employer, which eventually added "a couple of slices of ham" to the evening meal.

The man spent his days cutting grass on a hillside about 20 kilometers from the shattered Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. The lunch provided by his company consisted of plain rice balls and pickled vegetables, and there were no shops nearby where he could buy something extra. When the man approached the woman in charge of meals, she told him she'd been ordered by the company to keep breakfast costs at 100 yen and dinner costs at 200 yen per worker.

"We were treated almost unbelievably roughly, especially as we were doing hard physical labor," the man told the Mainichi. The conditions apparently proved too difficult for at least one man, a 54-year-old worker who died of a heart attack on the job in the village of Kawauchi in February this year.

The acquaintance who introduced the 59-year-old to the cleanup job told him he'd be "cutting grass along roadsides. You'll get a place to stay, plus two meals and 11,000 yen a day." The man actually got about that amount, but only after adding the daily 10,000 yen in danger pay provided by the central government. His company was paying him just 1,000 yen a day, or less than one-fifth of the prefecture's per diem minimum wage.

A month after he started the job, the man's employer sent him a new contract and told him to sign it. The space for the daily wage was blank. When he looked at a coworker's contract, he saw that the basic daily wage was 15,700 yen -- 10,000 yen in national government danger pay and 5,700 yen in wages from the company. However, the company then deducted 1,000 yen a day for food and 3,700 yen for accommodation, leaving 11,000 yen.

The firm, which is three layers of subcontracts below one of the construction companies hired by the government, told the Mainichi, "We did pay the workers danger pay in addition to their pay, but in the absence of a labor agreement with the workers concerning deductions, we subtracted costs for room and board."

This is the result of the subcontractor structure, putting multiple layers between the original contractor and the workers.

"Once the contracts got down to us, the danger pay had already been eaten away," one construction company representative told the Mainichi. The firm passed the entire work order off to another company run by a friend. "At that stage, you can't really turn a profit unless you hit the workers' wages or shave them down somehow. In the end, the whole system is designed to make money for the big construction companies at the top."

Asahi - Shadow Units (15)

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (15): SDF members in protective gear worried local residents

April 05, 2013

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201304050004>

By HIROYOSHI ITABASHI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 15th part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Despite the best efforts of the Self-Defense Forces to help local residents in the wake of the 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, unexpected barriers arose that delayed the work.

On March 16, 2011, the 1st Airborne Brigade of the Ground SDF's Central Readiness Force received an order to rescue residents from afflicted areas of Fukushima Prefecture. The brigade is the only parachute unit in Japan, but the approximately 1,700 brigade members were dispatched to Fukushima with a different mission.

At that time, a directive had been issued to residents living between a radius of 20 kilometers to 30 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 plant to remain indoors. Brigade members were instructed to rescue those residents who could not evacuate on their own in the event a major abnormality arose at the Fukushima plant.

The commander of the 1st Airborne Brigade was Maj. Gen. Tetsuro Yamanoue, 52. He issued instructions to compile a list of all residents, including senior citizens, who would be unable to evacuate by themselves. "Make preparations so we can rescue everyone without leaving anyone behind," Yamanoue told his subordinates.

Brigade members initially contacted local governments to obtain detailed information about residents, such as any illnesses they had, the level of elderly care required and whether caregivers would also have to be evacuated at the same time. The lack of information meant SDF members themselves had to visit individual homes to collect the needed data.

Lt. Col. Toshio Akabane, 54, was a regiment commander of the 1st Airborne Brigade. His regiment established its base in Iitate, about 40 kilometers northwest of the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

He had the 400 or so members of his regiment divide into groups of five to first visit homes in Minami-Soma to gather information about those requiring special assistance.

It was during such a visit that Akabane encountered some of the problems that arose in dealing with local residents.

An elderly woman wearing a jacket was walking by herself. Akabane got out of his dark green four-wheel-drive vehicle. In talking to the woman, the regiment commander tried to soften his tone.

"Hello," he said.

"Are you from the SDF?" the woman replied.

"That's right."

"We were instructed not to go outdoors, but that causes various problems."

Although it was Akabane who wanted to collect information from the woman, she fired questions at Akabane.

"Why are SDF members dressed like that?" she asked. "Is this area that dangerous?"

Akabane and his regiment members wore white protective gear and face masks to prevent inhaling radioactive materials or having them stick to their bodies.

Trying not to further alarm the woman, Akabane tried his best to reassure her there was no major danger to worry about. Still, he could not help but feel that he did not sound very convincing.

With the SDF members wearing protective gear and the local residents who had to be helped in everyday clothing, Akabane felt the situation should have been reversed.

The conversation was but one example of the difficulty of communication between the two sides. Not only was it becoming difficult to compile the list of residents in need of assistance, but the SDF members were spending most of their time trying to assuage the suspicions held by local residents.

Akabane felt a different approach was needed.

Asahi - Shadow Units (16)

April 8, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (16): SDF members take off protective gear to ease concerns of residents

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201304080001>

By HIROYOSHI ITABASHI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 16th part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

* * *

To change the way a list of individuals needing special assistance to evacuate from the nuclear accident was being compiled, Lt. Col. Toshio Akabane had Maj. Gen. Tetsuro Yamanoue, the commander of the 1st Airborne Brigade, see for himself what the situation was like.

Akabane escorted Yamanoue on March 19, 2011, to Minami-Soma, which lay in a radius between 20 and 30 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"Doesn't this seem like a very strange picture?" Akabane asked his superior.

The brigade was compiling a list of residents who would require special attention if an evacuation was needed because of the worsening situation at the Fukushima No. 1 plant. Akabane and other SDF members making the rounds of homes all wore white protective gear. Residents who came out to speak to the SDF members were dressed in ordinary clothing.

Facing the SDF members in their bulky outfits, many residents found it difficult to respond calmly and frankly.

Akabane had also received reports from his subordinates that they never got very far in questioning residents because they wanted explanations of just how dangerous the area was in terms of radiation.

Akabane asked Yamanoue, "Will you allow us to end the wearing of the protective gear?"

The rule had been to wear protective gear to guard against radioactive materials.

Reflecting on the situation, Yamanoue felt the large gap in appearance between SDF members and the local residents the members were supposed to help. The difference may be creating a wall between the two sides. Preparing for an emergency was an urgent task because there was no way of knowing when the situation at the nuclear plant would worsen.

Yamanoue decided on the spot, "OK, let's stop wearing the gear."

However, to prepare for a possible emergency, SDF members still had to carry their gear with them. Removing the protective outfits helped in gaining valuable information from local residents. Still, visiting each and every home was time consuming. It was worse when residents were not at home because there was no way of knowing if the resident had moved to an evacuation center, or had simply stepped out temporarily or could not respond because they were bedridden.

SDF members used whatever means they could think of, such as checking the electricity meters and peeking into the mailbox, to track down residents at home, often after repeated visits.

In the course of that work, SDF members began voicing concerns about radiation. To respond to those concerns, Akabane asked a senior officer who was knowledgeable about radiation control to lecture the regiment members.

The members had various concerns, such as "Will there be abnormalities in my sperm?" and "What are the effects on rainy days?"

The officer said, "Under the present circumstances, there will be no fundamental effect on sperm. On rainy days, it would be preferable to remain indoors if at all possible."

Akabane noticed the visible relief wash over the faces of his subordinates.

After March 20, 2011, the 1st Airborne Brigade divided into three units based to the north, west and south of the Fukushima No. 1 plant and continued with the work to confirm the status of residents. A list was compiled of about 400 residents who would require special help if evacuation became necessary.

"Obviously, the crisis is not yet under control"

Leakage increases doubt over TEPCO risk control

<http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0000114850>

[Takashi Ito / The Yomiuri Shimbun]

A recent string of operational issues at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant have called into question the company's risk management ability.

"We understand the gravity of the leakage of contaminated water," TEPCO official Masayuki Ono said somberly at a hastily arranged press conference Saturday.

The company had announced earlier that about 120 tons of water contaminated with radioactive substances had leaked from an underground storage pool at the plant.

This incident is just the latest in a series of accidents that have recently occurred at the Fukushima plant.

On March 18, the cooling system for storage pools containing spent nuclear fuel for three reactors was down for about a day. The accident was attributed to a rat that had caused a short circuit in an outdoor temporary switchboard.

To prevent a recurrence of such an incident, TEPCO on Friday began installing wire nets to protect the switchboards. On the same day, an operational error caused a loss of electricity from a switchboard. Furthermore, the trial operation of a new device to remove radioactive substances, called the Advanced Liquid Processing System, were suspended due to an oversight.

This string of accidents served to highlight the vulnerability of the equipment and devices that have been temporarily installed at the plant. It has also shone a light on TEPCO's impaired crisis management ability.

In the leakage of contaminated water, it took three days for TEPCO to start transferring the water after detecting signs indicating a problem, causing the extent of the leakage to expand.

Ono said, "It's difficult to completely prevent problems given the current situation at the Fukushima No. 1 plant."

Muneo Morokuzu, a former adjunct professor at the University of Tokyo and an expert in nuclear safety regulations, said, "TEPCO's handling of [safety] measures resembles a game of whack-a-mole."

"The required level of management for the Fukushima No. 1 plant may be beyond TEPCO's capability. It's time to review the overall decommissioning operation," Morokuzu said.

Ex-head of Diet panel probe say nuclear disaster still not under control

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130408p2a00m0na009000c.html>

The former head of the Diet investigative panel on the Fukushima nuclear disaster told a House of Representatives special committee on April 8 that the crisis has still not been brought under control.

Kiyoshi Kurokawa, former chairman of the panel, pointed out that a series of problems, including the leakage of water contaminated with radioactive substances from an underground water tank, have hit the plant and said, "Obviously, the crisis is not yet under control."

"There are also problems including contaminated water and a power blackout caused by a rat. Moreover, a response to victims of the crisis has not been progressing," Kurokawa said. "The world is paying close attention to how the government will respond to problems pointed out in a report compiled by the panel.

Kurokawa is one of nine former members of the Diet's fact-finding panel on the crisis at the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant who have been summoned to testify at the lower house's special committee on nuclear power. The other former member, Kenzo Oshima who now serves as a member of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA), did not attend the session.

Lawyer Shuya Nomura urged the Diet to actively get involved in efforts to bring the crippled power plant under control. "Is it all right to leave the response to contaminated water and other problems to the discretion of Tokyo Electric Power Co. and the executive branch of the government? As representatives of the people, Diet members should have expertise and get involved in the response with the mindset of the general public."

The Diet special committee on nuclear power was set up in January this year with the aim of supervising the NRA and its secretariat.

In a report it issued in July last year, the investigative panel recommended that the Diet set up a standing committee on nuclear power on the grounds that the legislative branch should constantly supervise the government's nuclear power policy. However, it took nine months before the Diet convened the special committee on April 8 because of a conflict between ruling and opposition parties.

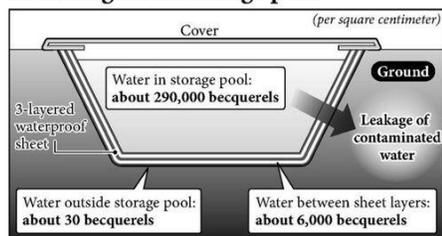
The report issued by the Diet's fact-finding panel in July 2012 recognized the accident at the tsunami-hit atomic power station as "a man-made calamity." It also criticized the now defunct nuclear regulatory bodies -- the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency and the Nuclear Safety Commission -- for being "captive to electric power companies."

TEPCO underestimates danger again - What credibility?

April 9, 2013

TEPCO 'underestimated' leak severity

Concentration of radioactive substances in underground storage pool



The Yomiuri Shimbun

<http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0000116890>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. may have underestimated by as much as 50 times the amount of radioactive

substances contained in water that leaked from an underground storage pool at its crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, according to experts.

The power company has estimated that the leaked water contains a total of 710 billion becquerels of radioactive substances.

However, TEPCO used the concentration level of radioactive substances contained in water trapped between a three-layered waterproof sheet that lines the pool as the basis for its calculation.

If the utility used the concentration of radioactive substances contained in water inside the pool as the basis of its calculation, the estimated figure would be about 50 times larger--about **35 trillion becquerels**. This suggests environmental impact of the leak could also be much bigger than TEPCO's estimate.

TEPCO announced the water leakage Friday. According to the utility, about 120 tons of contaminated water has seeped from the storage pool, the largest water leak since the government announced that the power plant achieved a state of cold shutdown in December 2011.

According to TEPCO, the concentration of radioactive substances contained in water trapped between the second and third layers of the protective waterproof sheet was about 6,000 becquerels per square centimeter.

Based on this figure, the power company estimated that about 710 billion becquerels of radioactive substances was contained in the 120 tons of leaked water.

However, if the calculation was based on the concentration level of radioactive substances contained in water inside the pool--about 290,000 becquerels--the total amount leaked would be about 35 trillion becquerels.

Prof. Hideo Yamazaki of Kinki University, who specializes in environmental analysis, said: "I cannot understand why TEPCO used a lower figure as the basis for this calculation. Such calculations should be conducted strictly from the viewpoint of ensuring safety."

A TEPCO spokesman said the water trapped between the second and third layers of the waterproof sheet were chosen because the contaminated water is believed to have leaked from there. The spokesman stressed that neither calculation method is wrong.

However, TEPCO said it is unclear why the concentration of radioactive substances in water from the waterproof sheet was lower than that of water inside the pool. If the decline of the concentration level was caused by an inflow of water from outside the pool, the total amount of water leaked through the sheet could be bigger than the initial estimate of 120 tons.

The water became contaminated when it was poured on damaged reactor cores at the nuclear plant to keep them from overheating.

Prof. Masanori Aritomi of Tokyo Institute of Technology, who specializes in nuclear reactor engineering, said: "There's a common understanding that such calculations should be based on the initial concentration of radioactive substances. I'm afraid TEPCO is underestimating the seriousness of this incident."

Construction checks 'insufficient'

The underground storage pool was exempted from the pre-operation checking required by the law on nuclear material and reactors when it was built by TEPCO late last year, according to sources. Safety inspectors stationed at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant inspected construction work on the pool, but their inspections were nothing more than a formality. Strict checking, such as confirming whether there were any errors in the construction work, was not conducted, the sources said.

According to the Nuclear Regulation Authority's Secretariat, the now-defunct Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency decided the storage pool would not be subject to the regulations of the Law on the Regulations of Nuclear Source Material, Nuclear Fuel Material and Reactors, as with other makeshift facilities built at the plant to speed up measures to deal with water contaminated with radioactive materials.

The agency hosted a hearing to ask the opinions of experts on the safety of the storage pool. At the hearing, TEPCO explained that leakage would be prevented by the three-layered waterproof sheet and a leakage detector, and the experts did not raise serious objections to the plan, the secretariat said.

The NRA, which took over the role of the agency, ordered safety inspectors to examine some aspects of the storage pool's construction in late last year. However, the inspectors merely confirmed the progress of the construction.

As the NRA was busy dealing with the transfer of operations from the agency, the NRA did not have time to assess the agency's evaluation of the pool's construction, the secretariat said.

However, the NRA said it believes the leakage from the storage pool has undermined the overall credibility of measures for dealing with the contaminated water. The NRA plans to discuss measures on dealing with contaminated water at regular meetings of NRA members and meetings of experts tasked with evaluating work at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The NRA plans to promptly draw up its plan to move contaminated water from the underground storage pool to tanks above ground, the secretariat said.

Clearly pro-nuclear panel criticised

April 9, 2013

Criticism, doubts greet new Diet panel on nuclear issues

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201304090066>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The Lower House established a committee to monitor nuclear power administration, but **the overtly pro-nuclear panel was immediately criticized as long overdue and doubts were raised about whether it would provide effective oversight.**

The Special Committee for Investigation of Nuclear Power Issues was created under the Abe administration following a recommendation from the Diet's investigation commission on the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"The accident has not been brought under control," Kiyoshi Kurokawa, who chaired the now disbanded Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission, told the inaugural session of the committee on April 8.

Former commission member Reiko Hachisuka, who heads the commerce and industry association of Okuma town, home to the Fukushima No. 1 plant, relayed the complaints of residents at the session.

“Disaster victims have been frustrated by the Diet’s response. Give us peace of mind,” she said.

In its 641-page final report released in July, the Diet investigation commission defined the nuclear accident as “a man-made disaster,” and called the responsibilities of the government and plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. into question.

The report recommended the establishment of a permanent committee on nuclear power issues at the Diet to monitor the work of regulatory authorities.

The Democratic Party of Japan, which was in power when the disaster unfolded on March 11, 2011, was reluctant to embrace the proposal, fearful that its own responsibilities would be pursued.

The committee was finally set up after the Liberal Democratic Party regained power in the Lower House election in December.

Kurokawa implicitly criticized the delay.

“I have been given an opportunity (to attend a session) nine months after submitting the report to the Lower House speaker,” he said.

Yasuhisa Shiozaki, an LDP member who sits on the committee, said, “We offer an apology on behalf of the Diet because it has taken so long.”

Former commission members said the Diet has its work cut out dealing with the Fukushima nuclear plant and overseeing regulations of an industry long criticized for its cozy ties and lax supervision.

Shuya Nomura, a lawyer, said the Fukushima No. 1 plant remains unstable, citing recent leaks of radioactive water.

“Can it be entirely left in the hands of TEPCO and the government to handle the crisis?” Nomura said. **“We urge the representatives of the people to oversee the situation in an independent manner and through the eyes of the public.”**

The Nuclear Regulation Authority, the government's nuclear industry watchdog, is compiling new regulation standards for nuclear power plants.

But **the NRA's draft standards have already been criticized as extremely insufficient.**

"We cannot say the world's top-class safety measures will be in place (as the NRA claimed)," said Katsuhiko Ishibashi, a seismologist.

The Diet investigation commission had also called on lawmakers to continuously monitor problems found during its investigation and ask the government to regularly report on the monitoring procedures.

But the Diet has not acted on these proposals.

"The Diet commission's report is not the end. It is the start," said Masafumi Sakurai, a former commission member and a former superintending prosecutor.

The LDP has traditionally promoted nuclear power. Under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the party plans to allow idled reactors to be brought back online based on the NRA's new regulation standards that take effect in July.

Of the 40 members of the Special Committee for Investigation of Nuclear Power Issues, 24 belong to the LDP. Six of the LDP members represent constituencies that host a nuclear power plant.

Some other members clearly support nuclear power generation.

"We avoided anti-nuclear lawmakers," said a senior official of the LDP's Diet Affairs Committee.

LDP lawmaker Taro Kono, a key member of a multi-party group of anti-nuclear lawmakers, wanted to join the Lower House committee, but he was snubbed.

The panel is also tasked with following up on the investigation into the causes of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Mitsuhiko Tanaka, a former commission member and a former reactor design engineer, dropped his plans for an on-site inspection of the No. 1 reactor building after a TEPCO official gave him false

information in February 2012. The official said the building was pitch black inside and too dangerous to enter.

“The new regulation standards will be toothless unless the causes of the accident are brought to light,” Tanaka said April 8. “We ask the Diet to inspect the site on its own.”

Some opposition members, including Akira Kasai of the Japanese Communist Party and Yasuko Komiyama of the People’s Life Party, supported Tanaka’s proposal.

But an LDP member said an investigation will be difficult.

Another pro-nuclear committee member was more frank.

“If we conduct an additional on-site investigation, the establishment of the regulation standards will be pushed back from July, delaying the restarts of reactors,” the member said.

A former commission member said: “The LDP has delayed the establishment of the committee but will try to do more than just that. It may apply pressure to loosen regulations, instead of overseeing the NRA.”

The Lower House has not yet scheduled the next session of the committee.

(This article was written by Shunsuke Kimura and Sachiko Miwa.)

TEPCO and its "corporate culture of underestimating risks"

Yoroku: Expert needed to judge if TEPCO's clean-up efforts good enough

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130409p2a00m0na016000c.html>

In a rakugo comic monologue, "Hatena-no Chawan," the value of a cheap teacup sharply rises to 1,000 ryo (a unit of Japan's Edo-Period currency) because of rumors that an expert had held it and shook his head at the same time. However, the expert shook his head simply because water was leaking from the bowl although there were no visible cracks in it.

What is interesting about the monologue is that the rumors further boosted the teacup's perceived value, pushing up the price of the bowl. Such support could help make a cheap, leaky bowl the value of a masterpiece.

In sharp contrast, the value of a water tank at the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant is very low. A massive amount of water contaminated with radioactive substances was leaking from an underground water tank on the premises of the atomic power station and a small amount of water was later found to have leaked from another tank. The trouble is quite serious because there are seven water tanks with the same structure at the power station.

The tanks in question hold concentrated saline water from which radioactive cesium has been removed but which still remains highly toxic. The tanks were makeshift ones created by digging the ground and laying a three-layer waterproof sheet in the area. Experts point to the possibility that the sheet's waterproof ability decreased because it was exposed to saline water.

Since workers at the power station are dealing with an accident that human beings had never experienced before, it is no wonder that they sometimes encounter unexpected developments. Still, a decline in the water level in the tank had been observed since last month and a small amount of radioactive substances had been detected around the tank. Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the power plant, was unable to respond to these changes apparently because of its corporate culture of underestimating risks.

In another example of recent trouble, a rat caused a power failure at the plant, showing that the plant is far from having been brought under control.

TEPCO needs an expert to judge whether the utility's work to bring the plant under control is appropriate. ("Yoroku," a front-page column in the Mainichi Shimbun)

Questions arise over whether poor workmanship or design led to leak of radioactive water

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130409p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), operator of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, appears to be at odds with construction company Maeda Corp. over what led to leaks of radiation-tainted water from an underground reservoir at the plant.

The tank was designed by TEPCO, which says it has experience with storage reservoirs, and constructed by Maeda Corp., which argues that it would normally not design a reservoir tank in such a way. The leaks have raised the possibility of either a design error or construction flaw, and both companies are likely to come under scrutiny to determine whether they gave the project sufficient consideration. A Maeda Corp. representative said the company is investigating the content of its discussions with TEPCO on the tank's design and construction.

TEPCO maintains that the leak may have stemmed from operating the reservoir with a leak-detection pipe piercing a reservoir sheet. It is possible that the weight of water in the reservoir tank pulled the sheet down, creating a gap that allowed water to escape.

The reservoir tank is lined with three waterproof sheets: two polyethylene sheets each measuring 1.5 mm thick, and a 6.4 mm thick bentonite sheet on the outermost layer. The leak-detection pipe is pushed through the two polyethylene sheets, with the top of it above the water level.

Speaking with the Mainichi on April 8, a representative of Maeda Corp. said the construction company would normally not implement such a design. Maeda Corp. says that to prevent gaps from appearing, leak-detection pipes would not normally be allowed to pierce any sheets. A representative of the construction company added that while the same types of sheets have been used to store industrial waste, they didn't have a proven record with water storage. Water-based experiments with TEPCO officials were conducted, however, and no water leaks were confirmed during these tests.

TEPCO, however, says that similar designs are used in farm reservoirs. It plans to improve the area around the pipe and continue using its underground reservoir tanks while it investigates the cause of the leaks.

At the same time, the company announced on April 8 that that it would bring forward plans to build aboveground tanks capable of storing roughly 126,000 tons of radiation-tainted water at the Fukushima nuclear plant, though it has not yet specified a construction date.

Roughly 400 tons of contaminated underground water accumulates each day at the nuclear plant. Regular tanks and underground reservoir tanks at the plant have a capacity of roughly 331,000 tons, but as of April 2 they held about 276,000 tons of contaminated water, leaving space for only about 55,000 tons.

So far leaks have been uncovered at two storage tanks. TEPCO suspects that contaminated water leaked from near the top of the reservoir tanks, when they were nearly full. It says that if the water level is reduced to 80 percent, then leaks will not occur. However, the radiation level outside the tank where the first leak was detected stood at 57 becquerels per cubic centimeter on April 7, even though the water level

was at 65 percent of capacity. This is the same figure as before the water level dropped, suggesting that water may still be leaking. TEPCO has explained that it may take some time for readings to fall.

Meanwhile on April 8, TEPCO announced that a silt fence designed to stop radioactive material spreading in the sea had been damaged in two places, apparently due to bad weather

Asahi - Shadow Units (17)

April 10, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (17): SDF 'suicide mission' considered for dealing with nuclear accident

April 10, 2013

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201304100006>

By HIROYOSHI ITABASHI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 17th part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

About two weeks after the Great East Japan Earthquake struck, the 1st Airborne Brigade had set up one of its bases at a sports park in Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture.

In the evening, Kiichi Takahashi, 63, a local resident, showed up at the base where brigade members were planning the evacuation of residents living in a radius between 20 to 30 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in the event of an emergency.

"This is from everyone," Takahashi said.

With that, he presented brigade members with "amazake," a sweet, low-alcohol beverage, as well as 10 kilograms of pork.

"When all of you came dressed in a very intimidating manner, everyone here became frightened that this was not a safe place to be," Takahashi said. "Now, everyone has calmed down and are confident everything will be all right, even if we have to evacuate."

Although almost the entire village of Iitate is located outside the 30-kilometer radius, SDF members visited homes to inquire about senior citizens requiring special attention.

The members also visited Takahashi's home and after talking with them, he gradually began to understand the objective of the 1st Airborne Brigade.

It was at about that time that Maj. Gen. Tetsuro Yamanoue, the commander of the 1st Airborne Brigade, received an order from Ground Self-Defense Force Chief of Staff Yoshifumi Hibako.

"Move the base immediately. The radiation levels in the vicinity of Iitate are high."

At the end of March 2011, radiation levels in Iitate were about 10 microsieverts per hour and there were localized hot spots of high radiation levels.

Yamanoue discussed the matter with Lt. Col. Toshio Akabane, the regiment commander in charge of the base at the Iitate sports park.

"We should remain here," Akabane said strongly.

The structure for a possible evacuation had just about been put in place. If the regiment left immediately, it would needlessly heighten the concerns of residents.

At the same time, Yamanoue also realized the importance of the reason Hibako had given for leaving, namely, the members might not be of use in an emergency.

Yamanoue called Hibako. "We will move after looking at the situation," he said. "Please give me more time."

Hibako replied, "Is that so? I understand."

On March 29, Hibako made an inspection visit to the base. The reasons for leaving the village were explained to Yamanoue and Akabane.

"We are concerned about radiation doses SDF members are exposed to because we want them to continue their mission in the vicinity of the nuclear plant until the very last minute," Hibako said.

He also revealed another plan that he had in mind.

"There might be the possibility we will have to ask brigade members to parachute toward the nuclear plant and scatter boric acid to suppress a nuclear fission."

Akabane was taken aback because he couldn't believe there was **a plan for a possible suicide mission**.

After Hibako left, Yamanoue and Akabane decided to strengthen measures for managing exposure to radiation.

On April 5, brigade members left Iitate and moved their base to the Kashima district of Minami-Soma, about 30 kilometers north of the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

TEPCO apologizes for leak

April 11, 2013

TEPCO president apologizes for radioactive water leaks at Fukushima plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130411p2a00m0na014000c.html>

NARAHARA, Fukushima -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) President Naomi Hirose apologized here on April 10 for a string of accidents involving underground tanks that had been found to be leaking at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, vowing to do his utmost to deal with the ever-increasing radioactive water.

At a news conference held at TEPCO's Fukushima Revitalization Headquarters in Naraha, Fukushima Prefecture, Hirose bowed deeply twice after saying, "We have been causing tremendous trouble. We are very sorry."

The revelations of the leakages of radioactive water from three underground cisterns followed a power outage in March, believed to have been triggered by a rat that touched a switchboard, disabling cooling systems for spent fuel pools at the Fukushima nuclear complex. The string of such mishaps has prompted observers to question the utility's ability to bring the nuclear disaster under control.

The news conference was attended by three top TEPCO executives, including Hirose and Executive Vice President Zengo Aizawa, an engineer by background. The news conference lasted for about 90 minutes -- far longer than the 30 minutes originally scheduled.

Hirose, with a drawn face, announced that the operator of the Fukushima nuclear power station would take measures to transfer contaminated water to newly-built tanks and other facilities, and at the same time check radiation levels of underground water, among other things. Hirose was bombarded with questions from reporters such as "Is there any possibility of the construction of new tanks being delayed?" and "Will sufficient steps against leaks be taken when transferring contaminated water to the tanks?" In his reply, Hirose vaguely said, "I fully understand your concerns. We will do our best."

Asked whether it is appropriate for one company alone to carry out the unprecedented task of bringing the disaster under control, Hirose said, "Those of us who know about the power station best will carry out our responsibilities."

In a drastic shift in its policy to deal with the problem, TEPCO decided to transfer all of the contaminated water in the underground tanks to aboveground tanks. But it will take about two months to build new tanks, and therefore there will be risks of further leaks until then. Such being the case, there are no prospects at all that the problem of the contaminated water will soon be resolved. There are seven underground tanks on the premises of the troubled nuclear power station, and three of them were found to be leaking.

TEPCO, worried about a lack of space to store the contaminated water, had planned to transfer polluted water from two of the three leaking underground tanks to aboveground tanks while continuing to use other underground cisterns. But the Fukushima Prefectural Government and others were fiercely opposed to the idea of using the other underground tanks while the causes of the leakages remained unidentified.

On April 10, TEPCO announced its new plan to transfer the contaminated water from all of the underground tanks to aboveground tanks, saying that the company found a site where it could build 38 new tanks, with a capacity of 500 tons each. The utility plans to prepare auxiliary tanks but it has yet to unveil the total capacity of such tanks.

Rats, snakes and makeshift equipment

April 12, 2013

Rat, snakes, leaks betray just how frail Fukushima No. 1 is

AP

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/04/12/national/rat-snakes-leaks-betray-just-how-frail-fukushima-no-1-is/#at_pco=cfd-1.0

A rat causing a power outage by short-circuiting a temporary switchboard. Another blackout occurring as workers install antirats nets. Holes in the linings of huge sunken reservoirs leaking radioactive water.

Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has run into a string of problems the past few weeks that highlight its precarious state more than two years after three of its six reactors melted down in the wake of a devastating earthquake and tsunami.

A makeshift system of pipes, tanks and power cables meant to carry cooling water into the melted reactors and spent-fuel pools inside shattered buildings remains highly vulnerable, Nuclear Regulation Authority Chairman Shunichi Tanaka acknowledged Wednesday.

"Fukushima No. 1 is still in an extremely unstable condition. There is no mistake about that," Tanaka said at a weekly meeting of the regulatory body's leaders. "We cannot rule out the possibility that similar problems might occur again. Whenever a problem occurs, it halts the plant's operations and delays the primary goal of decommissioning the plant."

The problems have raised doubts about whether the plant can stay intact through a decommissioning process that could take 40 years, prompting officials to compile risk-reduction measures and revise decommissioning plans. The regulatory watchdog said Wednesday it would add a ninth on-site inspector in order to better oversee the plant.

Just over the past three weeks, there have been at least eight accidents or problems at the plant, the NRA said.

The spate of problems started March 18, when a rat got into an outdoor switchboard — which was sitting on a pickup truck — powering the jury-rigged cooling system and several other key parts of the plant, causing a short-circuit and blackout that lasted 30 hours in some areas of the plant. Four storage pools for fuel rods lost cooling during the outage, causing Tepco to acknowledge that it had added backup power only to the reactors, despite repeated concerns raised over a pool meltdown.

The cause of the outage wasn't clear at the time, but Tepco later released a photo of the electrocuted rat, which had fallen on the bottom of the switchboard housing. The most extensive outage since the crisis started after the March 2011 disasters caused more Fukushima residents to even consider evacuation.

Two weeks later, a new water processing machine designed to remove most radioactive elements temporarily stopped after a worker pushed a wrong button. The next day, one of the fuel storage pools lost power again for several hours when part of a wire short-circuited a switchboard while an operator installed antirat nets. Tepco reported three other minor glitches on the same day, including overheating of equipment related to boron injection to the melted reactors.

Regulators acknowledge that rats and snakes are abundant at the plant, and Tepco has started to take steps to protect pipes and cables from rat gnawing. Replacement of parts and equipment to those of higher quality and long-term use is in progress.

In the latest development, three of the plant's seven sunken reservoirs are leaking. Tepco reported the first leak early Saturday, hours after the plant's second power outage. Within days, it was learned that three reservoirs were leaking, paralyzing the plant's storage plans for contaminated water.

Tepco says none of the about 120 tons of radioactive water that leaked was believed to have reached the ocean. Experts suspect the radioactive water has been leaking from the plant since early on in the crisis, citing high contamination in fish caught just off the plant.

The contaminated water is a headache for the plant, and by far the most serious of the recent problems because of its potential impact on water management and the environment.

The tanks are crucial to the management of contaminated water used to cool melted fuel rods at the plant's wrecked reactors. They have since stabilized significantly, but the melted fuel inside must be kept cool with water, which leaks out of the reactors' holes and ruptures and flows into basement areas.

"The contaminated water situation is on the verge of collapse," Tanaka said. But he said there was no choice but to keep adding water, while trying to seek ways to minimize the leaks and their risks.

To address local outrage over the recent problems and Tepco's failure to detect problems earlier, company President Naomi Hirose traveled to Fukushima and apologized Wednesday for the problems. He promised to expedite the construction of steel containers and move all the water there from the sunken reservoirs, at the request of industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi.

The reservoirs, all built by Maeda Corp., come in different sizes, including one the size of an Olympic swimming pool and similar to an industrial waste dump.

Asahi - Shadow Units (18)

April 12, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (18): Brigade commander faced crucial decision before reactor meltdown

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201304120005>

By HIROYOSHI ITABASHI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 18th part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

In addition to the Ground Self-Defense Force's Central Readiness Force, one of the "shadow units," another GSDF unit was deployed for operations in areas around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant immediately after the nuclear accident broke out at the plant.

On the day after the devastating earthquake and tsunami struck on March 11, the GSDF's 12th Brigade was hastily dispatched from Gunma Prefecture to Fukushima Prefecture for a mission to rescue disaster victims. Maj. Gen. Hidetoshi Horiguchi, 56, served as commander of the brigade in the rescue mission.

An explosion occurred in the building housing the No. 3 reactor at 11 a.m. on March 14.

The government had already issued an evacuation order for areas within 20 kilometers of the nuclear plant. But many of the residents had yet to move out of the zone. There were also reports about people left behind in hospitals and facilities for the elderly.

The headquarters of the GSDF's Camp Koriyama, where the 12th Brigade was based, was flooded with calls for help. Horiguchi responded by issuing one order after another.

"Transport patients (to hospitals)!" "Bring fuel and water (to victims)!"

Some 2,000 members of the brigade carried out his orders one by one.

The headquarters continued receiving requests for assistance well into the night. Brigade members ran around the areas, doing all kinds of tasks to help disaster victims.

Horiguchi wrote down detailed plans for operations and matters to be attended to, while looking at a map of Fukushima Prefecture spread over a table for operations planning.

"We've got to do what we've got to do," he said to himself, trying to keep his mind occupied with the task at hand.

A member of his brigade called out to Horiguchi.

"The deputy commander of the CRF wants you on the phone, sir," he said.

As soon as Horiguchi picked up the phone, the deputy commander hurriedly said to him, "There is a possibility of a meltdown in 90 minutes."

"A meltdown ...," Horiguchi repeated the words and wondered if it could really occur.

After he hung up, the brigade commander began to think about what he had just heard in silence without telling anyone.

He looked at his watch, which showed it was past 8:50 p.m. That meant an emergency situation could occur at 10:20 p.m.

A TV news program was reporting that the No. 2 reactor might have suffered a core meltdown.

A vision of the worst scenario flashed through his mind. During the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster, an explosion at a reactor that spiraled out of control released tremendous amounts of radioactive materials into the air.

Horiguchi faced a critical and urgent decision: Should his brigade continue its mission or abort it?

He took another look at the map in front of him.

Within 30 kilometers of the nuclear power plant, where the power supply had been cut off, legions of SDF personnel were busily engaged in a variety of tasks, such as supplying water, transporting patients and searching for missing people.

Given the time needed to communicate an order to the personnel and evacuate residents from the areas, he had to make the decision by 9 p.m. at the latest.

Horiguchi felt his stomach churning due to extreme tension.

"I've got to make the decision. I'm in charge of Fukushima Prefecture," he thought to himself.

Horiguchi called a brigade member in charge of communications and gave him the order.

"We launch a MOPP4 operation."

Asahi - Shadow Units (19)

April 15, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (19): Highest alert level ordered for first time since 1995 sarin attack

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201304150001>

By HIROYOSHI ITABASHI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 19th part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Japan's Self-Defense Forces use four levels of protective gear for operations in toxic environments, such as the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Such gear is collectively called "mission oriented protective posture," or MOPP. The highest level 4 of MOPP means that maximum possible protective gear should be used to be ready for the danger posed by nuclear, biological or chemical contamination.

A little after 9 p.m. on March 14, Maj. Gen. Hidetoshi Horiguchi, who was serving as commander of the Ground Self-Defense Force's 12th Brigade, issued an order for MOPP 4 protection at Camp Koriyama in Fukushima Prefecture. The brigade was engaged in an operation to help victims of the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 plant that had broken out three days before.

MOPP 4 required SDF personnel to wear thick protective suits over their camouflage fatigues and boots over their boots. They also had to wear protective masks.

Members of Horiguchi's brigade hastily donned all their protective gear in response to his order.

The brigade commander had been informed of the possibility of a core meltdown occurring at 10:20 p.m. He received that information from the GDSF's Central Readiness Force, which was responding to the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Horiguchi also ordered all brigade members to suspend their activities to help disaster victims and take refuge inside buildings. He also told them to urge local residents to get indoors.

To prevent human exposure to radiation as much as possible, Horiguchi walked around in the headquarters building, closing windows and doors.

But nothing occurred at 10:20 p.m., the time when a meltdown was expected to take place.

Horiguchi tried repeatedly to reach a director at the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency to find out whether the information he had received was accurate or not.

One hour later, he finally found himself speaking with the director over the phone.

While Horiguchi was drenched in sweat after working fervently in heavy protective clothing, there was no tension in the voice of the official at the other end of the phone.

"We have made no announcement of a meltdown," said the agency director. "The situation at the nuclear power plant has been improving."

"Are you telling the truth?" yelled Horiguchi. "That's not what I've heard. Give me a call after checking out the facts," he shouted as he hung up.

Half an hour later, Horiguchi received a call from the director. There had actually been danger of a meltdown, but the danger had been averted, according to the official's explanation.

Horiguchi lifted the MOPP 4 order at 12:15 a.m. on March 15, three hours after he issued it.

The actual situation, however, had been more serious than the director's explanation had suggested it to be.

Pressure within the containment vessel of the No. 2 reactor rose to a level that could trigger an explosion. Masataka Shimizu, president of Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the crippled plant, had asked the prime minister's office to allow the utility to evacuate its workers from the facility.

The Fukushima plant was in the most critical situation during several hours between the night of March 14 and the wee hours of the morning on March 15. Horiguchi was not provided with detailed information about these and other developments during that period.

Horiguchi immediately restarted his brigade's rescue operation, but the three hours of suspension had caused some unwanted effects.

An angry Koriyama Mayor Masao Hara called the headquarters of the 12th Brigade at Camp Koriyama. "As you suddenly stopped the water supply operations, residents are in big trouble," Hara said. "What are you doing?"

Horiguchi explained in great detail about the unfolding chain of events to update the mayor.

The order to use MOPP 4 protection issued by Horiguchi was the only second such action taken in the history of the SDF, and the first since the Aum Shinrikyo doomsday cult launched the sarin attack on the Tokyo subway system in March 1995.

But the order was issued amid great confusion without the public's knowledge.

Asahi - Shadow Units (20)

April 17, 2013

PROMETHEUS TRAP/ 'Shadow units' (20): TEPCO offered only a list of cellphone numbers

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201304170015>

By HIROYOSHI ITABASHI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the 20th part of a new series that has run in the past under the title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the secret missions assigned to the "shadow units" of the Ground Self-Defense Force when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

A strong earthquake registering a lower 6 on the Japanese seismic scale of 7 rocked Fukushima Prefecture on the evening of April 11, 2011.

The temblor was reminiscent of the devastating quake that had ravaged wide areas in northeastern Japan and triggered the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant just one month before.

The Ground Self-Defense Force's Central Readiness Force (CRF), a shadow unit, was engaged in operations to deal with the nuclear crisis, using J-Village, the soccer training complex in Naraha, a town in Fukushima Prefecture, as its operational base.

As he felt the intense shaking on the April evening, Maj. Gen. Masato Taura, deputy commander of the CRF, thought this time around his unit would really have to mobilize.

Taura barked out an order to the firefighting team to immediately prepare for a mission in a louder tone of voice than usual.

As massive injections of water into the crippled reactors to cool them using concrete pump trucks had started, the Self-Defense Forces had not been engaged in water spraying operations since the end of March.

Every time an aftershock had occurred, Taura had gotten members of the unit to stand by in fire engines, but he had not actually called out the troops so far.

Immediately after the major aftershock in April, Taura talked to a young employee of Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the stricken plant, who was serving as a liaison at J-Village.

“We are ready for watering operations. Are the reactors all right?” asked Taura. “I myself have no idea,” replied the TEPCO employee.

At that time, the makeshift pumps for cooling the No. 1–3 reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant had actually stopped, disrupting the injection of water into the reactor buildings. But no information about the situation had been conveyed to Taura.

The firefighting unit remained standing by, until, about an hour later, it received a situational report from the utility.

“The injection of water has been resumed, and there has been no other problem,” the report said.

The report came after steps to fix the problem had been taken.

Taura wondered what TEPCO had intended to do if an emergency had broken out while it had been working to fix the problem.

He remembered an incident that had occurred in late March, when TEPCO considered venting to reduce the mounting pressure within the reactors as a step to prevent hydrogen explosions.

Despite the utility saying it had decided against venting, rumors circulated that the company had taken the step.

Venting would have led to the release of radioactive materials into the atmosphere and exposed SDF personnel engaged in water-spraying operations to a health hazard.

As it turned out, TEPCO, in fact, didn’t carry out the venting. But the difficulty of gaining accurate information from TEPCO’s head office caused serious confusion at the front line of operations to deal with the nuclear crisis.

One month had passed since the nuclear crisis started, but the company was still unable effectively to cope with the situation.

Later, Taura asked a senior TEPCO executive to establish a clear chain of command for dealing with emergencies.

The only action the utility took in response to his request, however, was to send a list of the cellphone numbers of top TEPCO officials.

At that time, the Central Readiness Regiment, which belongs to the CRF, was preparing for a secret mission to rescue TEPCO employees at the Fukushima plant if the need arose.

Given the state of affairs at that time, the regiment would have to carry out the mission without accurate information about the situation at the plant. Taura decided to meet with the TEPCO official in charge of the company’s response to the crisis at the site.

On April 21, Taura called on Masao Yoshida, 57, then chief of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The nuclear village knows nothing about solidarity

Utility could seek 20 billion yen from TEPCO over nuclear disaster

April 24, 2013

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201304240064>

Solidarity clearly has no place in Japan's nuclear power industry.

That would seem to be the case as Tohoku Electric Power Co. prepares to seek compensation for lost business from Tokyo Electric Power Co. over the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Sources said April 24 that Tohoku Electric could seek more than 20 billion yen (\$203 million) from TEPCO, operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The damages arise from the accident at the plant triggered by the earthquake and tsunami disaster just over two years ago.

It is extremely rare for one electric power company to seek compensation from another since all the utilities have been united in promoting nuclear energy and other issues in the past.

Tohoku Electric provides electricity in Fukushima Prefecture. The reactor meltdowns triggered a mass evacuation of residents.

The evacuation, coupled with a sharp reduction in economic activity, led to a 10-percent decrease in electricity sold in Fukushima Prefecture in fiscal 2011.

Tohoku Electric's corporate performance has been hit hard as a result of the nuclear accident. In February, it submitted an application with the central government to raise electricity rates.

Tohoku Electric, fearing it could become the target of sharp criticism from customers as well as a possible lawsuit by shareholders, apparently decided that seeking compensation from TEPCO was the way to go.

Tohoku Electric could also seek compensation for its lost investment in a proposed Namie-Odaka nuclear plant in Fukushima Prefecture.

The utility had invested 18.5 billion yen to cover the purchase of land and other costs. But in March this year the company announced it was abandoning the project because of strong opposition from local municipalities in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear accident.

The proposed Namie-Odaka nuclear plant would have been constructed some 10 kilometers north of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Tohoku Electric also operated service centers in the Fukushima municipalities of Namie and Tomioka that served as bases for its engineers. However, those facilities were rendered unusable due to release of radioactive materials from the wrecked Fukushima plant.

In seeking compensation from TEPCO, Tohoku Electric will have to follow guidelines established by the central government and differentiate damages stemming from the nuclear accident from those caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

TEPCO has already paid out some 2 trillion yen to local residents in compensation for the nuclear accident. The figure is expected to increase.

Sources said Tohoku Electric officials would have to give careful consideration to the timing of its compensation request so it does not conflict with compensation payments to local residents.

A high-ranking Tohoku Electric official said discussions had already begun with TEPCO on compensation.

Asked for a comment, a TEPCO public relations official told The Asahi Shimbun that the utility was not aware of such talks.

Tohoku Electric and TEPCO provide electricity to each other on a daily basis because their supply areas are adjacent to each other.

At one time, the two companies closely cooperated on other matters.

The two companies jointly constructed the No. 1 reactor at Tohoku Electric's Higashidori nuclear plant in Aomori Prefecture as well as the No. 1 reactor at TEPCO's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture.

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

TEPCO and Environment ministry at odds over 10.5 billion yen

April 21, 2013

TEPCO rejects ministry's demand to pay 10.5 billion yen for decontamination work

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201304210011>

By FUKUKO TAKAHASHI/ Staff Writer

Tokyo Electric Power Co. refuses to pay 10.55 billion yen (\$106 million) for decontamination work around its crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, saying it is under no legal obligation to do so.

"We don't know whether those costs are covered by the special measures law," a TEPCO official said.

The Environment Ministry disagrees. It says the money is part of the 14.9 billion yen in decontamination costs that TEPCO is required to pay under that special measures law to deal with radioactive substances from the March 2011 accident at the Fukushima plant.

The ministry has not set deadlines for the payments, meaning there will be no delinquent charges. But if it cannot get TEPCO to pay the amount, the government might be forced to cover the costs with taxpayers' money.

The government allocated 372.1 billion yen for decontamination costs in the budget for fiscal 2012, which ended last month. In the budget plan for fiscal 2013, 497.8 billion yen has been set aside for the clean-up work.

Including amounts for subsequent years, the total decontamination cost is expected to swell to several trillion yen.

Based on the special measures law, the ministry in November 2012 demanded TEPCO pay 7.6 billion yen in decontamination costs for the period until August 2012. Of that amount, 1.7 billion yen is for the central government's work in "special areas" around the Fukushima plant, as well as 2.4 billion yen in central government subsidies paid to local governments that are cleaning up their own areas.

In addition, 1.94 billion yen was spent for advance research on the number of houses subject to decontamination work and their radiation levels. The remaining amount includes 960 million yen in publicity costs for the decontamination efforts.

"We will demand payment of all additional costs," the ministry told TEPCO.

TEPCO paid 1.7 billion yen to the ministry for the decontamination work in the special areas. But it says it won't pay the remaining 5.9 billion yen.

In February, the ministry again demanded, in written form, that TEPCO cover the remaining costs.

On Feb. 7, the ministry required TEPCO to pay an additional 7.3 billion yen in decontamination costs for the period from September to November 2012.

TEPCO plans to pay 2.65 billion yen of the amount, but it refuses to pay the remaining 4.65 billion yen.

“We understand that all of those decontamination costs should be shouldered by TEPCO,” Hiroyuki Eguchi, a ministry official, said. “We are now waiting for its reply.”

TEPCO public relations office declined to comment on the issue.

A lot of money to lose

May 1, 2013

TEPCO, 7 other utilities post combined loss of 1.6 trillion yen

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/economy/business/AJ201305010073>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Eight electric power companies reported a combined loss of 1.59 trillion yen (\$16 billion) for fiscal 2012 as the aftereffects of the Fukushima nuclear disaster continued to hammer their bottom lines.

With almost all of their nuclear reactors shut down, **the companies' fuel costs soared for thermal power generation to secure a stable supply of electricity.** They also had to spend large sums for maintenance of the idle reactors as well as for new measures to protect the nuclear plants against earthquakes and tsunami.

Four of the eight utilities posted record losses.

The electric power industry, which has been highly dependent on nuclear power, is banking on the Abe administration to approve the restarts of the reactors. However, new safety regulations could further delay such decisions, force the decommissioning of certain reactors or make nuclear power plant operations economically unfeasible.

Some power companies are raising electricity rates to get through this period of uncertainty.

By April 30, the nation's 10 regional electric power companies released their financial results for the business year that ended in March.

Only Okinawa Electric Power Co., which operates no nuclear plants, and Hokuriku Electric Power Co., which runs one nuclear plant but relies mainly on thermal and hydro power generation, posted profits for fiscal 2012.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, reported the biggest loss of 685.2 billion yen.

It was the beleaguered company's third consecutive annual loss, and it was compounded by 1.16 trillion yen in compensation paid to victims of the nuclear disaster, which started in March 2011 following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

"The difficult-to-return zone has been clearly defined, so we have raised the total amount of compensation," TEPCO President Naomi Hirose said. Evacuees will not be allowed to return to their homes in that zone near the stricken plant until at least March 2017.

Under its rehabilitation plan, TEPCO and its largest shareholder, the central government, plan to return the utility to the black for the year ending in March 2014. Creditor banks have also extended loans on the condition that TEPCO posts a profit for the current fiscal year.

But the rehabilitation plan is based on the assumption that TEPCO will be able to restart seven idle reactors at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture beginning in April.

It is unclear when those reactors will actually be able to go online.

The eight electric power companies said their fuel costs for thermal power generation totaled about 7 trillion yen.

Such outlays have been a particularly huge drain on the four companies that reported record losses: Hokkaido Electric Power Co. (132.8 billion yen); Kansai Electric Power Co. (243.4 billion yen); Shikoku Electric Power Co. (42.8 billion yen); and Kyushu Electric Power Co. (332.4 billion yen).

They had depended on nuclear power for around 40 percent of their electricity supply.

Only two of the nation's 50 nuclear reactors are operating—at Kansai Electric's Oi plant in Fukui Prefecture.

While the 48 idle reactors are not generating profits for the utilities, expenses are piling up. The nine companies that operate nuclear plants said they spent 1.2 trillion yen in maintenance for the reactors in fiscal 2012.

Additional expenses are expected.

Under planned government-mandated safety standards, the Nuclear Regulation Authority will instruct operators to take countermeasures against natural disasters, such as building levees to block tsunami and constructing buildings for emergency power systems that can withstand powerful earthquakes.

The nine nuclear plant operators have estimated near-term costs for such safety measures at 1.2 trillion yen.

In addition, 10 of Japan's 50 nuclear reactors started operations more than 35 years ago, raising questions about the wisdom of continuing to run such aging equipment.

Some reactors are believed to be sitting directly above active faults. If these geological features are confirmed, utilities will be forced to decommission those reactors.

Electric power companies must now decide whether to maintain their nuclear plants at potentially huge and continuing costs or take a temporary yet substantial loss by decommissioning the reactors.

The utilities plan to make up for some of their losses by charging more for electricity.

TEPCO increased its household electricity rates in September. Kansai Electric and Kyushu Electric followed suit from May.

Hokkaido Electric, Tohoku Electric and Shikoku Electric have applied to the government for permission to raise their electricity rates.

(This article was written by Takashi Ebuchi, Mari Fujisaki and Yuriko Suzuki.)

May 1, 2013

Tepco suffers ¥685 billion group net loss

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/01/business/tepco-suffers-685-billion-group-net-loss/#.UYAGWEpsFEs>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. reported Tuesday a group net loss of ¥685.29 billion for the business year ended in March, its third straight year in the red due to the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The utility did not release a forecast for this year amid uncertainties over its business conditions, but returning to a profit soon will be difficult under the 10-year restructuring plan authorized by the government last May.

The operator of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant lost less money last year after losing ¥781.64 billion in the 2011 business year.

Tepco registered an operating loss of ¥221.99 billion, compared with a loss of ¥272.51 billion the previous year.

Group sales increased 11.7 percent to ¥5.98 trillion, partly because the utility raised electricity rates for households and companies last year.

Other utilities also faced difficult business conditions amid the prolonging shutdown of many of their reactors.

Kansai Electric Power Co. posted its worst ever group net loss of ¥243.42 billion, while Kyushu Electric Power Co. also had its worst year ever, losing ¥332.47 billion.

Of Japan's 50 commercial reactors, only two operated by Kansai Electric Power are currently online.

The government's Nuclear Regulation Authority is not expected to accept applications for the resumption of any of the halted reactors until new safety requirements take effect in July.

Certainly not doing her job as a public servant

May 3, 2013

Atomic energy commissioner joined events run by power industry-backed NPO

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130503p2a00m0na003000c.html>

A member of the Cabinet Office's Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) has repeatedly participated in events organized by a nonprofit organization backed by the electric power industry, it has been learned.

Etsuko Akiba, 64, occasionally missed JAEC meetings and used a government car to attend events mounted by the Asca Energy Forum NPO, where she also serves as an adviser. Asca Energy Forum has received heavy financial assistance from power companies and related organizations, and the latest revelations point to continuing close ties between Akiba and the NPO.

Akiba launched Asca in 2001 to conduct awareness campaigns on energy issues and other projects, and served as president until she was appointed to the JAEC in January 2010. The NPO has received over 18 million yen in donations from the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan, Tokyo Electric Power Co. and other power industry players since the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and ensuing Fukushima nuclear crisis.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a news conference in March that there is no problem with Akiba giving advice to Asca even though she is a JAEC member.

However, Akiba has participated in at least 14 events organized by Asca since she was appointed to the JAEC, according to the commission secretariat. Moreover, she used a government car to go to Asca events held in Tokyo on March 11, 2011, Sept. 28, 2012 and March 8, 2013.

Of the 14 events, 11 were Asca workshops on radioactive waste commissioned by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization of Japan (NUMO) to win local understanding of the need to dispose of spent nuclear fuel.

Two others were social gatherings for workshop participants, and another was a study session on radiation. The JAEC secretariat said Akiba attended these events in her official capacity as a JAEC member. Akiba also moderated workshops held in three prefectures including Aichi in 2012. She furthermore looked after guest speakers and guided other attendees during an Osaka workshop in January this year. In two other workshops held in Miyagi and another area, she was tasked with inviting guest speakers.

Furthermore, Akiba skipped JAEC regular and extraordinary meetings in order to deliver a speech during a meeting organized by an Asca affiliate.

Akiba admitted that she went a little too far.

"It became necessary to urgently dispose of radioactive waste following the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis, and I was more frequently asked by NUMO for help. I worked hard to coordinate opinions between NUMO and ordinary people, but may have gone too far," she said. "However, I went through the proper procedures for being absent from a JAEC regular meeting."

Chuo University professor Shuya Nomura, who served as a member of the Diet investigative panel on the nuclear crisis, criticized Akiba for skipping JAEC meetings.

"Full-time members of the JAEC are special civil servants, and are remunerated handsomely with taxpayers' money. They should avoid any act that could be interpreted as supporting certain organizations," he said. "It's inappropriate for members to be absent from meetings simply because the meetings have achieved quorum. They should cite reasons that the public will accept."

Opening TEPCO's door

May 1, 2013

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/newsline/201305011804.html>

interview with Lady Barbara Judge who helped create a safety oversight organisation within TEPCO.

- letting foreigner and outside experts
- looking for advice and help

Nukes and the Yakuza

May 5, 2013

Yakuza links put nation at added nuclear risk

by Jake Adelstein

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/05/national/yakuza-links-put-nation-at-added-nuclear-risk/#.UYYMxkpsFEs>

On April 15, two alleged terrorists in Boston killed three people, injured more than 170 others and terrified a nation — for about \$100 it cost them to modify pressure cookers into bombs. We should be glad they didn't come to Japan, where they may have been able to explode a ready-made nuclear dirty bomb, kill untold thousands, render huge swaths of the country uninhabitable — and get paid by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Tepco) in the process.

I wish I were kidding. Japan has more than 50 gigantic nuclear “pressure cookers” ripe for exploitation by terrorists. And they wouldn't even have to lay siege to the facilities. Instead, they could just walk into a nuclear plant and leave with enough weapons-grade plutonium for a small atomic device — which later could be detonated wherever they chose.

How?

In Japan, getting access to a nuclear power plant is very simple: fill out a job application.

It is now more than two years since the start of the nuclear crisis following the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, and there are still no mandatory background checks for workers at its nuclear facilities.

After the three reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear complex in March 2011, it became clear that Tepco, the plant's operator, was allowing members of Japan's organized crime groups, the yakuza, to staff the well-paid cleanup — just as they had been allowed into plants long before then.

Indeed, members and associates of the Sumiyoshi-kai (Kanto) and Kudo-kai (Kyushu) mobs have been arrested for their roles supplying labor to Tepco and its Kansai cousin, Kepco. So the dirty secret that

yakuza-linked workers and companies have long sustained Japan's nuclear industry — along with yakuza members themselves, ex-convicts, wanted criminals, and drug addicts working there — is now public knowledge.

Although many yakuza groups claim to have a protective role in society, most of their members are sociopathic felons who would commit theft, assault or murder to make a little money. And if you consider the black-market value of a little plutonium, you may feel a tad uneasy knowing such people have long had access to it — and can still get their hands on nuclear materials.

Don't worry, though: Last month the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) said a panel will be set up to discuss atomic energy security issues, and it will consider introducing a system to investigate the backgrounds of workers to avoid acts of terrorism at nuclear plants.

Specifically, it seems the panel will examine ways to check whether nuclear facility employees are drug addicts or have a criminal record, among other issues, in order to screen out anyone who could potentially get involved in terrorism.

The panel will comprise NRA Commissioner Kenzo Oshima and outside experts. However, one expert who will not be on the panel is Haruki Madarame, former chief of the now-dissolved Nuclear Safety Commission. He is currently being investigated by prosecutors for alleged criminal negligence.

But hey, let's not dwell on the past. The good news is that the NRA is thinking about making nuclear plants safer in the future. They may even reach the same conclusions that the Nuclear Security Expert Commission of the Atomic Energy Commission announced ... in September 2011. Of course, why take action when you can spend more time debating about taking action?

The AEC makes recommendations for nuclear energy policy. However, that 2011 report, titled "Basic Nuclear Security Assurance," doesn't give a positive view of Japan's countermeasures.

There, the words "internal threats" appear five times in 14 pages of attached materials. And, in a section headed "Lessons of Fukushima," it notes: "It is clear there were defects in the management of those leaving and entering the site from the start of the accident. ... Licensed (nuclear facility) operators need to first strictly enforce measures to keep suspicious persons from sneaking into the facilities and strengthen countermeasures against threats from within."

The report, without irony, also notes that criminal acts such as the theft of nuclear materials to build a dirty bomb, or the destruction of facilities, "should be detected, prevented, and stopped so as to cause as little negative impact as possible to life, physical health, property, society and the environment."

It also recommends that law enforcement, regulators and the power plant operators share information to make sure that thieves, saboteurs or criminals do not have access to the plants or related facilities. But it stops short of mandating background checks.

The United States has long had a screening system in place, but Japan has delayed taking similar measures due to privacy concerns and “respect for human rights.” Meanwhile, Tepco is still unable to locate scores of workers who entered the disaster zone.

Maybe, though, we shouldn’t worry so about criminals gaining access to nuclear plants. After all, the National Diet of Japan’s Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission report in 2012 established Tepco’s responsibility for the triple meltdown. Then months later Tepco admitted it consciously ignored the threat of a tsunami-related disaster.

So perhaps the lesson to be learned is that the greatest threat of “nuclear terrorism” Japan faces is from criminally negligent power companies and a government that fails to punish them.

Come to think of it, maybe we shouldn’t worry at all about criminals gaining access to the nuclear power plants. As the Tokyo Prosecutor Office’s investigation into the top executives of Tepco for professional negligence resulting in injury and death grinds on, it seems more and more likely that criminals have been running the plants for a very long time — they just don’t all have tattoos.

When it comes to the nuclear security in Japan, the U.S. comics “swamp critter” Pogo Possum would tell you: “We have met the enemy, and he is us.” Let’s hope no other enemies decide to join the party — because if they do, Japan’s nuclear negligence may become the world’s problem as well.

Investigative journalist Jake Adelstein is the author of “Tokyo Vice,” a board member of Polaris Project Japan and a contributor to The Atlantic Wire and japansubculture.com. His email address is jakeadelstein@me.com.

Nukes and the Yakuza (2)

May 6, 2013

CROOKED CLEANUP: Yakuza taking slice of lucrative decontamination work

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201305060062>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Criminal organizations are engaging in **fraudulent practices amid a labor shortage and lax background checks by employers to pocket some of the trillions of yen from publicly funded cleanup work in nuclear disaster-stricken Fukushima Prefecture.**

On March 5, the Yamagata District Court handed down a suspended eight-month prison term to a 40-year-old former senior member of a yakuza gang.

The man, a Yamagata Prefecture resident, was charged with dispatching seven day laborers to decontamination operations in Date, Fukushima Prefecture, between November last year and January without a staffing agency license.

“The Yamagata case is just the ‘tip of the iceberg,’ ” said a Yamagata prefectural police official, asserting that the involvement of yakuza gangs in the decontamination work is widespread.

In the Yamagata case, although the court acknowledged that the convicted man's actions are a “malicious crime,” it gave him a suspended sentence on the grounds that he quit his criminal organization after the case surfaced.

When the accused was asked in court if he is aware that the decontamination work is funded by taxpayers' money, he said, “Yes, vaguely.”

According to prefectural police, the accused hit on the idea of cashing in on the extensive cleanup operations under way in Fukushima Prefecture in last November.

The central government expects to spend trillions of yen over several years to decontaminate communities that were polluted with radioactive materials after the crisis unfolded at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

The accused told police that he hired the men to work for a company based in Yamagata Prefecture that, as a third subcontractor, was contracted for a project commissioned by the Date city government.

“I expected that background checks would be lax because decontamination operations require large amounts of manpower,” he said. “I attempted to expand my business (by profiting from the work).”

The man approached an acquaintance in the construction industry to line up unemployed workers eager for work.

He offered to pay 12,000 yen (\$120) a day for a “simple job,” and at least seven workers came forward.

The man received wages for the seven from the subcontractor, and paid them after siphoning off between 100,000 yen and 200,000 yen.

Prosecutors said in court that he gave a cut to the criminal gang he belonged to at the time. The yakuza group is the largest in Yamagata Prefecture, with about 40 members.

At least one of the seven workers suspected that the man had a connection with the yakuza, according to police investigators.

The president of the third subcontractor, who became acquainted with the accused more than 10 years ago, told police that he did not question the gangster about his occupation although he suspected he was a gangster.

The accused was charged with violating the worker dispatch law, which carries a maximum one-year prison term or a 1 million yen fine.

But there are many cases such as his where the convicted person receives a suspended sentence.

“The law was set without anticipating the involvement of gangsters, so sentences tend to be light,” said a senior official with the Yamagata prefectural police.

The convicted man has refused to speak to The Asahi Shimbun despite repeated requests for an interview.

INVOLVEMENT OF CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS WIDESPREAD

Some workers in the cleanup operations admitted that they suspected yakuza members' involvement when The Asahi Shimbun interviewed them about allegations of slipshod cleanup work and intermediary exploitation.

But they have remained silent because of fears of retribution.

In the cleanup effort in Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, an individual working for a third subcontractor heard a senior official with a second subcontractor speaking of his background.

“I am in that line of business,” the man quoted him as saying, suggesting he had ties to the yakuza. “I go and make contributions (to the gang) every week.”

The gangster proudly spoke of his arrest record like it was a badge of honor, according to the individual.

A subcontractor in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, said that an official with another company pressured him to provide jobs by pointing out his affiliation with an underground criminal organization.

In Date, a man who worked in a separate cleanup operation said that his supervisor, who identified himself as a former gangster, threatened him and told him to follow instructions.

An official with another subcontractor said it is so short-handed that it will not be able to come up with enough workers if it must check prospective workers' backgrounds.

There are tens of thousands of subcontractors involved in cleanup programs awarded to general contractors as primary contracts by the Environment Ministry and local governments.

Day laborers are obtained for their efforts through conventional hiring practices in the construction industry, where small subcontractors across the nation do the recruiting.

However, if subcontractors send their laborers to the work site in the same fashion that temporary workers are dispatched by staffing agencies, that is illegal.

Subcontractors are required to provide their own equipment and oversee the safety of their workers, in contrast to a temporary work force that comes under the supervision of a client company, like their regular employees.

Layers of subcontractors often make it more difficult for law enforcement authorities to uncover nefarious activities.

The general contractor that was awarded the primary contract in the Yamagata case refused to discuss the former gang official who dispatched the seven day laborers, saying it has nothing to do with individual contracts.

Local governments are ill-equipped to deal with the issue.

“We had no knowledge of the second and third subcontractors,” said an official with the Date city government. “The name of the third subcontractor is not familiar.”

An official wrestling with the matter at the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare admitted the difficulty of weeding out involvement by criminal organizations.

“What we can do to confirm the background of prospective workers is limited,” the official said. “Police should do the job.”

The official also acknowledged the lack of enthusiasm in recent months to preventing a recurrence of such illicit activities.

Tomohiko Suzuki, a freelance journalist who investigated the connection between workers at nuclear facilities and criminal organizations, said the direct hiring of workers is the key to keeping out criminal organizations.

“Even if it is getting harder for second and third subcontractors to recruit people, they must make sure all their workers are employed directly,” he said. “Otherwise, it will be impossible to keep out gang members.”

(This article was written by Sachi Matsumoto, Momoko Jingu and Tamiyuki Kihara.)

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Please check related articles at (<http://ajw.asahi.com/tag/CROOKED%20CLEANUP>).

Regulators assemble behind closed doors

May 7, 2013

Nuclear regulators assemble for three-day meeting

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/07/national/nuclear-regulators-assemble-for-three-day-meeting/#.UYjQbUpsFEs>

Nuclear regulators from nine countries including Japan, the United States and South Korea gathered Monday in Tokyo for a three-day meeting to discuss their responses to the 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

The International Nuclear Regulators Association meeting, chaired by Shunichi Tanaka, head of Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority, will be held **behind closed doors to enable participants to communicate candidly**, according to officials.

On Wednesday, they are scheduled to inspect work to contain the crisis at the plant in Fukushima Prefecture, northeastern Japan, they said.

During the meeting, Tanaka was expected to report on Japan's new nuclear regulations based on lessons learned from the accident triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

The association's meetings are held in rotation among the nine participating countries, which also include Britain, France, Germany, Canada, Spain and Sweden. Japan previously hosted the event in 2004.

About the Turkish deal

May 3, 2013

Source : Bloomberg Businessweek

<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2013-05-03/mitsubishi-areva-set-to-sign-turkish-nuclear-plant-deal-today>

Mitsubishi, Areva Sign \$22b Turkish Nuclear Plant Deal (1)

By Selcan Hacaoglu and Tara Patel

Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. (7011) and Areva SA of France signed a \$22 billion agreement today to build a nuclear power plant in Turkey, the first major order for Japan since the Fukushima disaster in 2011.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan met in Ankara to oversee the signing of the accord for the building of Turkey's second nuclear plant in Sinop province on the Black Sea coast.

"We have reached agreement on a \$22 billion investment," Erdogan said at the televised signing ceremony today. "It will be built in 10 years, but we want to bring that forward."

Abe said in a news conference before the ceremony that Japan had a responsibility to meet "high expectations" for safety after the meltdown of reactors at Fukushima, Japan in 2011 following an earthquake and tsunami.

Turkey imported more than \$60 billion in energy last year and is seeking ways to improve energy efficiency, Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek said at a conference in Istanbul last month. A single nuclear plant would reduce Turkey's current-account deficit, the third-largest in the world last year, by about \$3 billion, he said. Turkey picked Russia's Rosatom Corp. and ZAO Atomstroyexport for its first facility at a cost of \$20 billion.

GDF Suez SA (GSZ) would operate the nuclear plant in Turkey with a local partner should the deal be finalized, Chief Executive Officer Gerard Mestrallet told reporters yesterday in Paris.

Energy Dependency

The plant won't have an impact on Turkey's energy dependency for at least a decade, according to Naz Masraff, a London-based analyst at Eurasia group.

"It is unlikely that Turkey will complete the project by 2023 as planned," Masraff said in a report on May 1. "The country's increased gas dependency trajectory, therefore, is unlikely to be altered in a meaningful way in the future."

The Japanese-French group plans to build four reactors with a combined capacity of about 4,500 megawatts on Turkey's Black Sea coast, Japan's Nikkei newspaper reported on April 4, citing unidentified people familiar with the matter. The first unit is scheduled to begin operations by 2023 following the start of construction in 2017, Nikkei said.

The Turkish reactor is still "years away" from construction as the country has yet to create a nuclear safety authority that will give building permits, GDF Suez's Mestrallet said yesterday.

Over Budget

The Franco-Japanese bid is being led by Mitsubishi Heavy, which together with Areva SA (AREVA), the French reactor builder, has developed a 1,100-megawatt model called the Atmea. The unit is a smaller, less-expensive version of the EPR, which is being built by Electricite de France SA in Normandy and Areva in Finland. Both projects are behind schedule and over budget.

"We are confident in the Atmea, Mestrallet said. "We wanted to build one in France." The Atmea has never been built anywhere after a project in France was canceled.

Mestrallet declined to provide specifics about any potential Turkish partners in the project or how long the utility could take before committing to development.

GDF Suez, which operates seven nuclear reactors in Belgium through its Electrabel SA unit, has long said it wants to push ahead with new projects outside France in countries such as the U.K. and possibly Brazil. Since the meltdown of reactors after an earthquake and tsunami struck Japan two years ago, French developers of nuclear technology have failed to win any orders. "This is a positive sign" that countries are willing to keep nuclear in their future energy mix, Mestrallet said.

All but two of Japan's 50 reactors remain shut for safety checks after three meltdowns and the release of radiation at Tokyo Electric Power Co. (9501)'s Fukushima Dai-Ichi plant. Abe told lawmakers in Japan on Feb. 28 that he'll restart some nuclear reactors once new safety measures are in place.

Not so transparent

May 9, 2013

New nuclear safety standards

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130509p2a00m0na007000c.html>

The Nuclear Regulation Authority has made public the draft of new safety standards for nuclear power plants and plans to put them into force in mid-July. If power companies want to restart nuclear power plants now offline, they must meet the new standards. Currently only the Nos. 3 and 4 reactors of Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture are in operation.

The NRA must make the process of writing the new standards transparent. It also must make the content and the application of the new standards clear-cut so that people's worries about the restart of nuclear power stations will be fully addressed.

After making public the draft, the NRA started collecting opinions from the public. The deadline for submitting opinions is Friday. It is regrettable that the public was given only a month to submit their opinions.

The draft is about 3,000 pages. It is extremely difficult for ordinary citizens to clearly understand so that they can express their opinion. Even after the deadline for accepting public comments passes, the NRA should explain important points of the draft in plain language so that ordinary citizens will understand them, and should continue open discussions with the public about the new standards.

The draft calls for such measures as installing filters to remove radioactive substances in case such substances are vented from reactor cores into the atmosphere during an emergency as well as setting up a seismically isolated emergency command center and an emergency control room to cope with emergency situations caused by a natural calamity or a terrorist attack.

It demands that each power company anticipate the highest possible tsunami and construct a seawall or a tide gate that will withstand such tsunami. It also prohibits construction of a nuclear power plant above a geological fault.

One problem with the draft is that **the work of anticipating the highest possible tsunami is left to each power company**. Another problem is that the NRA allows a **grace period of five years for installing the filter for a pressurized light water reactor** (on the grounds that the containment vessel of a pressurized light water reactor has a bigger capacity than the containment vessel of a boiling water reactor) **and for setting up an emergency control room for all types of reactors**. Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant uses boiling water reactors.

The NRA also plans to carry out a virtual preliminary review of the conditions of the Oi Nos. 3 and 4 reactors before the new safety standards take effect — raising the suspicion that the NRA is giving special treatment to the Oi plant to prevent power shortages this coming summer.

The NRA should make serious efforts to write adequate safety standards and apply them in a transparent manner to get back people's trust. Nuclear power generation should be a provisional power source. The government must set a deadline to abolish it.

Etsuko Akiba guilty of conflict of interest

May 10, 2013

Atomic commissioner's testimony reveals deeper ties between NPO, power industry

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130510p2a00m0na011000c.html>

Etsuko Akiba, a commissioner of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC), acknowledged May 9 that her nonprofit, ASCA Energy Forum, had received money from power industry entities even before her appointment as its chief in January 2010.

Akiba, 64, made the remarks during a session of the House of Councillors Environment Committee, which looked into the issue of ASCA having received large amounts of money from the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan (FEPC), Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and other industry entities even after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Her testimony revealed that these power industry entities had extended funds to ASCA while she served as its chief and maintained close ties with her.

Akiba set up the ASCA Energy Forum in 2001 when she was a consumer advocate. She served as its head until she was appointed a JAEC commissioner in January 2010. However, she has stayed on with the NPO as an adviser.

She appeared before the upper house panel as a government witness and gave the testimony in response to questions from Kenichi Mizuno, a lawmaker of the opposition Your Party.

When asked about the more than 18 million yen ASCA, based in Tokyo's Chuo Ward, received from the 10-member FEPC, TEPCO and others after the Fukushima nuclear disaster, Akiba replied that she does not know because she has not been involved in ASCA's operations after assuming the JAEC commissioner post. But she did admit that ASCA had received an unspecified amount of financial support from power industry entities while she was at the helm of the NPO.

Akiba declined to answer how much remuneration she had received as ASCA chief, although ASCA's business reports to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government said she had received a salary as ASCA leader.

During the upper house committee session, she admitted that she participated in at least 19 events sponsored by ASCA and related groups and used chauffeured official cars even after she became a JAEC commissioner. Akiba said she has not resigned as an ASCA member and has participated in study sessions organized by the NPO. She said she used chauffeured vehicles to give lectures as part of public duties.

Akiba's testimony represented her first comment on ASCA's receipt of money from the power industry. Akira Omoto, 64, a former TEPCO executive, resigned as a JAEC commissioner in March for having accepted advisory fees from TEPCO even after the Fukushima disaster triggered by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Illegal dispatches of workers to Fukushima Daiichi

May 12, 2013

Nagasaki firms warned for sending workers to stricken nuke plant

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/12/national/nagasaki-firms-warned-for-sending-workers-to-stricken-nuke-plant/#.UY5wXUpsFEs>

NAGASAKI – The Nagasaki Labor Bureau has recently warned three local staff agencies for illegally dispatching more than 500 plumbing workers to the crisis-hit Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant last year, it was learned Saturday.

Labor laws ban “multiple dispatches,” in which hired people end up working at places never mentioned in their initial contracts.

The three firms, Daiwa Engineering Service, Sowa Kogyo and Aguresu, all based in Nagasaki Prefecture, were involved in the illegal practice from July to August, the labor office said, adding that some workers also were paid less than they were promised.

The labor office has ordered the three firms to improve their business practices.

The case surfaced after a whistle-blower tipped off the labor office to the illegal dispatches.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the stricken plant, is struggling to secure the number of recruits needed to contain the crisis. The cumulative amount of radiation per employee is regulated by the government, and Tepco has been running out of workers.

May 11, 2013

Labor ministry disciplines 3 worker dispatch companies

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201305110061>

By TOSHIO TADA/ Staff Writer

The labor ministry warned three companies to get their act together after it emerged the firms illegally sent workers to the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

This was the first time that disciplinary measures have been handed out to companies dispatching workers to deal with the Fukushima nuclear disaster. The companies were ordered to improve their business activities.

The Nagasaki Regional Labor Bureau handed down the disciplinary measures to three companies based in Nagasaki Prefecture. They are Yamato Engineering Service and Sowa Kogyo, both of Sasebo, and Aguresu of Nagasaki city.

Between July and August 2011, Yamato sent 510 workers to install piping at the Fukushima plant, even though the dispatched workers law prohibits sending workers for such purposes.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the Fukushima plant, contracted the work to a subsidiary of Hitachi Ltd. Some of the workers involved in the project were dispatched from more than one company, another violation of the law.

"We gave instructions to Yamato to take measures to prevent a recurrence, but it was difficult to investigate the employment conditions for subcontractors," a Hitachi official said.

Of the 510 workers, Sowa Kogyo dispatched 169 to Yamato and Aguresu sent the remaining 341. Another four companies were also involved, but they were not subject to administrative disciplinary measures apparently because they had not completed the proper paperwork required of companies that dispatch workers.

Although several thousands of people work on any given day at the Fukushima plant, only a small number are TEPCO employees. Most of the workers come from all over Japan through various subcontractors.

There are a number of subcontractors that have not complied with the law. For example, Yamato in the past was temporarily banned from taking part in public works projects because a former company executive was found to have associated with gangsters in 2009.

The latest incident came to light after a worker from Nagasaki Prefecture notified the labor ministry in July 2012 through the Labor Lawyers Association of Japan about the shady practices.

"It took close to a year for disciplinary measures to be handed down. The central government was slow in responding," said Yosuke Minaguchi, association secretary-general. "Although TEPCO also had responsibility since it commissioned the work, it was unable to resolve the issue."

This is the first time the labor ministry has released the names of companies that are being disciplined.

In December, the ministry issued instructions to eight companies to change how they were doing subcontracting work. Workers used by those companies used lead covers on dosimeters to conceal the actual levels of radiation to which they were exposed.

Unfair, says Japan Atomic Power

May 16, 2013

Japan Atomic Power calls NRA determination of active fault unfair

by Kazuaki Nagata
Staff Writer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/16/national/japan-atomic-power-calls-nra-determination-of-active-fault-unfair/#.UZPmYkpsFEs>

Although a Nuclear Regulation Authority panel judged Wednesday that the D-1 fault running under reactor 2 at Japan Atomic Power Co.'s Tsuruga nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture is active, that decision is premature and unacceptable, the operator's president, Yasuo Hamada, claimed the same day.

At a press conference after the panel's meeting where its decision effectively doomed any chance of restarting the reactor, Hamada slammed the NRA for not giving his firm enough opportunity to explain and discuss the matter, claiming the panel's decision was not based on objective data and facts.

He added that it was unfair that the panel did not even invite Japan Atomic Power to observe Wednesday's meeting where the five experts presented their report on their probe of the fault at the Tsuruga plant, even though it concerned the operator.

This is "really an inappropriate action taken by the regulator, which exercises public power," Hamada said.

Nuclear plant operators are not allowed to build or operate reactors and other critical safety equipment directly above active faults, which means the Tsuruga plant's reactor 2 must be decommissioned. This will deal a heavy blow to Japan Atomic Power's management.

Hamada and other Japan Atomic officials said they are confident the D-1 fault is not active and will keep stressing this point. The firm is conducting its own research and will compile a report by July, hoping to get the NRA to reverse its decision.

Reporters repeatedly asked Hamada what his company will do if the NRA stands firm. He kept saying his company still believes it can restart reactor 2 and thus has not resorted to Plan B.

Japan Atomic Power is funded by regional utilities and has three reactors, all of which are idle, mainly because of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdown catastrophe and looming new NRA safety requirements. The NRA has also effectively lengthened the historical span in geological time for determining whether a fault is active.

Construction began on reactor 2 in 1982 and it started operations in 1987

"Could be hit hard ... financially"

INSIGHT: NRA finding puts Japan Atomic Power on cusp of crisis

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201305160063

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A finding that an active fault line runs directly underneath the No. 2 reactor of the Tsuruga nuclear power plant in the western Japan prefecture of Fukui could deal a fatal blow to plant operator Japan Atomic Power Co., which may be forced to shut the facility permanently.

The conclusion, made in a report issued May 15 by an expert panel of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, could also have widespread ramifications for other major electric power companies.

This is because Japan Atomic Power is financed by the nation's nine leading utilities, which all operate nuclear power plants. If Japan Atomic Power goes bust, they, too, could be hit hard financially.

The report is expected to be approved by the NRA on May 22. This means Japan Atomic Power will almost certainly be required to decommission the No. 2 reactor, which is currently idle. It will mark the first time in Japan that the country's nuclear watchdog has refused to approve the restart of a nuclear reactor.

On the evening of May 15, Japan Atomic Power held a news conference to contest the finding.

Its president, Yasuo Hamada, expressed strong indignation on grounds that "discussions based on scientific data were not held" by the NRA's expert panel.

"It is not necessary to decommission the reactor," he added.

Japan Atomic Power intends to release the results of its own studies in early July to show that the fault under the No. 2 reactor is not active.

If the Nuclear Regulation Authority pays no heed to the report, Japan Atomic Power could file a lawsuit against the NRA.

“Even if Japan Atomic Power cannot overturn the NRA’s conclusion, it will dispute the finding, saying, ‘If we take appropriate safety measures, we can restart the No. 2 reactor,’” said an electric power industry source.

Decommissioning of the No. 2 reactor would not only endanger Japan Atomic Power’s management, but also affect the entire electric power industry.

Japan Atomic Power stands to suffer a financial loss of 100 billion yen (\$1 billion) if it is forced to decommission the No. 2 reactor.

As an asset, the reactor would have zero value. Also, the company would have to shoulder unseen costs for decommissioning in addition to the amount already reserved for that work.

Japan Atomic Power operates two other reactors: the No. 1 reactor at the Tsuruga plant and the single reactor at the Tokai No. 2 nuclear power plant in Ibaraki Prefecture.

However, Japan Atomic Power faces high hurdles in trying to restart them. The No. 1 reactor at Tsuruga has already exceeded the 40-year span for safe operations. It began operating in 1970. Also, reactivating the Tokai No. 2 plant faces strong opposition from local residents.

If these two reactors are also decommissioned, Japan Atomic Power’s losses will likely to swell to 250 billion yen, which would wipe out the company’s net assets of about 160 billion yen, including capital. The company would not be able to recover the loss even if it sold off all assets.

If the company’s deficits exceeds its assets, Japan Atomic Power’s management will become untenable. In 1957, the nation’s main electric power companies jointly established Japan Atomic Power to promote nuclear power generation. At that time, they provided the capital to start the company.

At present, 90 percent of the company’s capital--120 billion yen--is covered with funds from nine major electric power companies, except for Okinawa Electric Power Co.

If the Japan Atomic Power’s management plunges into crisis, those electric power companies will be required to offer the appropriate financial support. The huge outlays required for decommissioning could severely damage those companies’ bottom lines.

In addition to the No. 2 reactor at Tsuruga, NRA also plans to check five other sites. One of them is the No. 1 reactor at the Shika nuclear power plant in Ishikawa Prefecture, which is operated by Hokuriku Electric Power Co.

Several experts have already pointed out that an active fault likely run directly below the building housing the reactor. If the NRA concludes that the fault is indeed active, the No. 1 reactor cannot be restarted.

The other four sites are the Oi and Mihama nuclear power plants, also in Fukui Prefecture and operated by Kansai Electric Power Co.; the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor in Fukui Prefecture, which is operated by Japan Atomic Energy Agency; and Tohoku Electric Power Co.'s Higashidori nuclear power plant in Aomori Prefecture.

Experts have also said that all four sites appear to have been built atop active faults. They, too, will remain shut down permanently if that is the case.

Of Japan's 50 reactors, 10 have been operated for more than 35 years. The NRA says that, in principle, nuclear reactors that have been operated for more than 40 years should be decommissioned.

In instances where the NRA approves an extension beyond the 40-year period, operators will be obliged to adopt stricter safety measures.

In 2012, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry said that if all 50 nuclear reactors in Japan are decommissioned, electric power companies will suffer a combined loss of 4.4 trillion yen.

Of those companies, Hokkaido Electric Power Co., Tohoku Electric Power, Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Japan Atomic Power would find their deficits exceed their assets.

The nation's nuclear power plants were shut down in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster triggered by the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake. Currently, only two nuclear reactors are operating.

(This article was written by Mari Fujisaki and Takashi Ebuchi.)

May 16, 2012

Troubled Tsuruga reactor could force utilities to shoulder enormous financial burdens

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130516p2a00m0na016000c.html>

The utility companies that hold major stakes in Japan Atomic Power Co. could be forced to shoulder enormous financial burdens if JAPC were to collapse due to the possible shutdown and decommissioning of the No. 2 reactor at its Tsuruga Nuclear Power Plant in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture.

A panel of experts appointed by the Nuclear Regulation Authority concluded on May 15 that the No. 2 reactor at the Tsuruga nuclear power station in western Japan is located right above an active fault that could undermine its safety, increasing the likelihood the unit would be shut down permanently. The power companies, major shareholders of JAPC, have already decided to extend support to JAPC until April next year, but there are no viable plans yet to restore its finances.

In the case of ordinary bankruptcies, shareholders' losses are limited to the amounts of their investments. But of all the power companies that buy electricity from JAPC, four -- Kansai Electric Power Co., Chubu Electric Power Co., Hokuriku Electric Power Co., and Tohoku Electric Power Co. -- guarantee JAPC's debts totaling about 100 billion yen. Therefore, if JAPC cannot repay its debts, the four power companies will be forced to shoulder them.

Furthermore, JAPC puts aside money for future costs to reprocess spent nuclear fuel and decommission its nuclear reactors, but if the company goes bankrupt, the accumulated funds will certainly run short. A senior government official said, "There is a possibility that the power companies will have to shoulder a total of 500 to 700 billion yen." That would further upset the power companies that have already incurred heavy losses due to higher fuel costs as a result of the shutdown of their nuclear reactors.

For this reason, "The private sector alone cannot handle the costs," said a senior power company official. Therefore, the utility companies have been negotiating with the government behind the scenes to reduce their financial burdens for decommissioning their nuclear reactors and other costs. But the government has been cautious about fresh fiscal support measures that will require the public to shoulder extra financial burdens.

As long as the utility firms' financial support helps keep JAPC running, JAPC, which insists on reactivating the No. 2 reactor at the Tsuruga plant, and the Nuclear Regulation Authority will likely continue to square off. But some utility firms say that they are barely managing their own finances. Due also in part to a backlash from users, it remains to be seen whether the power companies will be able to extend financial support to JAPC beyond April next year. In the end, the public may have to shoulder the costs of decommissioning the reactor and other expenses.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. holds a 28.23 percent stake in JAPC, while Kansai Electric has 18.54 percent, Chubu Electric 15.12 percent, Hokuriku Electric 13.05 percent, Tohoku Electric 6.12 percent, Electric Power Development Co. 5.37 percent, Kyushu Electric Power Co. 1.49 percent and Chugoku Electric Power Co. 1.25 percent.

Trading with Middle East

May 13, 2013

Source : Smart Planet

<http://www.smartplanet.com/blog/bulletin/realpolitik-japan-trades-nuclear-tech-to-middle-east-in-exchange-for-oil/19535?tag=main%3Briver>

Japan trades nuclear tech to Middle East in exchange for oil

By Mark Halper | May 13, 2013, 6:25 AM PDT

Japan has been paying enormously for importing fossil fuels to replace shuttered nuclear power plants. And its future supply of oil remains in doubt, posing possible grave economic consequences for the country.

So in a stroke of *realpolitik* - *realgeopolitik*, really - Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has returned from a tour of the Middle East where he has, you could say, bartered one form of energy for another in order to help secure a stable future for his natural resource-thin island nation.

Abe secured a deal with the United Arab Emirates earlier this month in which Japan will provide technology to help the UAE build four nuclear power plants, already under South Korean supervision. At the same time, the UAE and Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum "also agreed to extend an oil concession agreement with Japan's Abu Dhabi Oil Co., adding a new zone," the Japan Times reported, citing UAE's WAM news agency.

The Japanese leader hopes to negotiate a similar agreement with Saudi Arabia, where he began his visit and where China already has a nuclear foothold. Abe "is emphasizing cooperation with Japan's Middle East partners to ensure Japan will continue to receive stable deliveries of oil from the region," the Japan Times wrote.

Japan's economy has suffered following the country's decision to close almost all of its nuclear reactors after the Fukushima disaster. Nuclear had provided about 30 percent of the country's electricity. The cost of importing fossil fuels like liquefied natural gas has already hit the country hard, and the price is effectively rising amid a current weakening of Japan's currency, the yen. The expenditures recently pushed Japan's trade deficit to an all time high.

Some Japanese economists have warned that Japan could ultimately lose its supply of oil as the U.S. becomes more energy independent and potentially grows less interested in maintaining Middle East stability.

Under a push by Abe, Japan is also expected to begin restarting some of its close nuclear reactors, although the likelihood of returning to a 30 percent nuclear scenario is uncertain. By exporting nuclear technology, Japan is looking after growth in a key area of its technological expertise. Japan this month also won an agreement to help Turkey build a new nuclear power station.

NRA's mission is to ensure the safety of nuclear facilities

May 18, 2013

EDITORIAL: Kansai Electric Power should end resistance to tougher nuclear safety standards

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201305180030>

Overly optimistic assumptions about the safety of nuclear power plants can result in huge damage if a disaster actually takes place. That is one of the most important lessons that should be gleaned from the devastating accident that occurred in 2011 at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA), which has been created to improve the nation's nuclear safety regulations in line with the lessons learned, is completely right in demanding that nuclear power facilities be prepared for the greatest safety risks that can be assumed based on latest scientific knowledge.

But Kasai Electric Power Co. is behaving in a way that is difficult to understand because it goes against this point of view.

The utility is showing reluctance to comply with the nuclear watchdog's requests concerning the safety of the No. 3 and 4 reactors at the company's Oi nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture. The two reactors are the only ones in Japan that are currently online.

There are two seafloor faults near the Oi plant and also an inland fault about 10 kilometers from the facility. Recent research has pointed to the possibility that the three faults can be linked within a bay located at a halfway point between them.

If linked, the three faults, which are all active, have a total length of 63 kilometers and could cause a more powerful earthquake than previously assumed.

The No. 3 and 4 reactors at the Oi plant are scheduled to remain in operation until September under provisional safety standards set after the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The NRA, which plans to introduce tougher nuclear safety standards in July, has asked Kansai Electric Power to review the current estimates of the strength of possible quakes that could hit the Oi plant, under the assumption that an earthquake can be caused by movements occurring simultaneously along all the three faults. The utility, however, has rejected this request, which was made in line with the basic principles of the new regulatory standards.

Kansai Electric claims that its own research has shown there is little possibility of a quake involving all three faults.

But an independent expert who was consulted by the NRA said the possibility of such a quake cannot be ruled out.

Before the two reactors at the plant were restarted last year, Kansai Electric, on the instructions of the government, estimated the magnitude of a quake linked to all the faults.

The utility says the estimated magnitude was not large enough to raise concerns about a severe accident. Now that new safety standards are to be introduced, however, there is a strong case for re-evaluating the risk just to be doubly sure.

There are also safety concerns about other nuclear power plants due to possible earthquakes on multiple faults.

The safety inspection of the two reactors at the Oi plant is drawing attention of other utilities as well because it is seen as a precedent.

That only reinforces the case for strictly dealing with the issue according to the NRA's safety-first policy, which adopts the principle of erring on the side of safety. This principle should be firmly established through the safety inspection of the Oi plant.

Moreover, the decision to restart the two reactors at the Oi plant was a special measure taken in consideration of Kansai Electric's heavy dependence on nuclear power generation in ensuring a stable power supply.

At that time, the president of the utility promised to take additional steps to confirm the safety of the plant according to new safety standards when they were introduced. The company should act responsibly and make every possible effort to match words with actions.

NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka has indicated his intention to suspend the operation of the Oi plant if a problem that raises serious safety concerns is discovered.

Although the summer season of peak demand for electricity is approaching, the NRA should not forget that its mission is to ensure the safety of nuclear facilities.

The nuclear watchdog should carry out a rigorous safety inspection of the plant while giving thought to the efforts of Japanese people to cut power consumption.

--The Asahi Shimbun, May 18

Industry ministry's "highly questionable behavior"

Industry ministry behind private panel's push for reactor restarts

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201305190024

By SHIN MATSUURA/ Staff Writer

The government's Agency for Natural Resources and Energy engaged in highly questionable behavior by helping a private panel calling for restarts of nuclear reactors to draft recommendations that were submitted to the prime minister.

In its "urgent proposal" titled "Rebuilding of responsible, nuclear policy," the panel called on the government to bring idled reactors back online and step up reactor exports.

It was submitted to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in February.

The 5-page proposal also blasted the Nuclear Regulation Authority, a new watchdog established after the March 2011 disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, for its emphasis on adhering to safety regulations and approach to suspected active faults running underneath nuclear sites.

"Discussion has yet to take place based on using the highest level of wisdom and information available," the proposal said in reference to the NRA.

The private panel is led by Akito Arima, a former education minister and nuclear physicist. Twenty-nine people are listed as supporters of the proposal. None of them are heads of electric utilities.

However, the list included Harufumi Mochizuki, previously the highest ranking bureaucrat in the industry ministry and now an outside director of Hitachi Ltd., a leading maker of nuclear facilities, and top officials of key players in the nuclear industry as well as trading houses.

The agency is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which promotes nuclear energy.

The Asahi Shimbun obtained computer files that contained the gist and draft of the proposal.

The files were produced under the name of the ministry's Information Systems and Welfare Division, which manages documents created through its computer system.

According to the ministry, all the documents created through the ministry's computers bear the name of the division.

In an interview with The Asahi Shimbun, a senior official with the agency acknowledged that bureaucrats in its Nuclear Energy Policy Planning Division produced the draft proposal.

The official also said the head of the Nuclear Energy Policy Planning Division and other agency bureaucrats attended meetings of the panel as they worked on a set of draft recommendations.

Agency officials also frequently contacted the panel secretariat through e-mail exchanges in the process of compiling the recommendations.

The panel's secretariat, with Mochizuki's help, came up with the outline late last year, according to a well-placed source who said ministry officials then produced it on the computer.

The source also said ministry officials arranged a meeting between Abe and panel members.

Mochizuki acknowledged his role, saying, "The secretariat and I put together the view espoused by supporters" of reactivating idled reactors.

An official with the General Policy Division under the ministry's Director-General's Secretariat defended the agency's involvement.

"Producing memos and providing materials for discussion itself is not a problem," the official said. Arima, who also served as president of the University of Tokyo, denied the agency played a role in drafting the proposal.

"The proposal is based on the consensus among members of the panel," he said. "It is impossible for a third party to come in and tinker with such things."

The revelation came as the Abe administration forges ahead with reactor restarts as a means of shoring up the economy, despite widespread skepticism about the safety of nuclear facilities. Of the nation's 50 reactors, only two are online.

Gov't has its priorities mixed up

May 25, 2013

Strict radiation reference levels shunned to stem Fukushima exodus

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201305250053>

By SHINICHI SEKINE/ Staff Writer

The government avoided setting stringent radiation reference levels for the return of Fukushima evacuees for fear of triggering a population drain and being hit by ballooning costs for compensation, an Asahi Shimbun investigation shows.

The revelation could rekindle debate over the government's safety standards as many evacuees prepare for their eventual return. They were displaced by the nuclear disaster more than two years ago.

In December 2011, the government led by the Democratic Party of Japan decided to lift the evacuation order for areas with residual doses of up to 20 millisieverts per year.

The government was regrouping areas in Fukushima Prefecture to pave the way for the return of some evacuees based on radiation doses as of November that year.

But minutes of ministerial meetings and accounts by meeting participants show that government officials initially sought a 5-millisievert cutoff line to ensure evacuees' safety.

The number was later eased to 20 millisieverts as some Cabinet members insisted on responding to local officials' concern that the tougher yardstick could spur population flight. They also factored in the possibility that costs of compensation for evacuees could significantly rise if they were unable to return home in the contaminated areas for a prolonged period.

The proposal for an annual radiation dose of 5 millisieverts was floated at an unofficial meeting of ministers concerned on Oct. 17, 2011, about seven months after the nuclear disaster unfolded at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Goshi Hosono, the minister in charge of the nuclear disaster, insisted on that figure at the meeting. Industry minister Yukio Edano and Tatsuo Hirano, the reconstruction minister, were among other government officials present.

Hosono argued that a 5-millisievert yardstick is appropriate because there is a wide gap between 20 millisieverts, on which the government's initial evacuation order was based, and 1 millisievert, the goal the government set to declare contaminated areas safe after cleanup efforts, according to the minutes.

When the government set a planned evacuation zone outside the 20-kilometer no-entry zone around the crippled plant right after the disaster unfolded, it adopted the 20-millisievert cutoff line.

It is the toughest of the 20-100 millisieverts per year range set for the emergency phase in the 2007 recommendation by the International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP).

Five years after the 1986 Chernobyl accident, a dose of 5 millisieverts was used as criteria for relocating residents for safety reasons.

In Japan, a site measuring more than 5.2 millisieverts per year is designated as a radiation controlled area.

There has been a case of a Japanese worker who developed leukemia after having an equivalent dose of radiation while working at a nuclear power plant being recognized as patient of work-related illness.

With these factors in mind, the ministers agreed on setting the safety limit around 5 millisieverts at the meeting.

But at a meeting on Oct. 28, joined by Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura and Tatsuo Kawabata, internal affairs minister, participants appeared reluctant to approve a yardstick other than 20 millisieverts.

It apparently reflected their concern that the 5-millisievert standard could lead to a surge in evacuees as parts of the prefectural capital of Fukushima and Koriyama, a major city, come under this category.

The areas falling in the range of 5 millisieverts represented 13 percent of the land space of the prefecture.

“The prefectural government could not function with population drain under the 5-millisievert scenario,” said a state minister who attended the meeting. “In addition, there were concerns that more compensation money will be needed, with an increase in the number of evacuees.”

At the meeting on Nov. 4, the participants informally settled on the 20-millisievert proposal, saying it is difficult to draw a clear line between 1 millisievert and 20 millisieverts.

The current government is working toward the return of evacuees based on this policy.

One of the participants acknowledged that the 20-millisievert proposal was lax, while the 1-millisievert idea would result in the pullout of all the residents in the prefecture.

“So we weighed the 5-milliseivert yardstick, but we could not settle on it due to the argument that it would raise the number of evacuees,” said the official.

The DPJ government produced a report in December 2011 that the 20-millisievert cutoff line would be appropriate despite some experts’ objections to it.

Although the DPJ government emphasized safety, it did not explain that government officials arrived at the figure after giving consideration to a potential rise in the number of evacuees under the 5-millisievert scenario.

The Abe administration in March decided to release by the end of this year a set of protection measures for evacuees returning to areas with doses of up to 20 millisieverts.

The move is apparently aimed at setting the stage for return of evacuees even if decontamination operation fails to achieve the target of 1 millisievert.

In fact, many local governments admitted that cleanup efforts have yet to produce the intended results.

Fukushima Prefecture Governor Yuhei Sato has suggested the target of 1 millisievert is not realistic.

It will be difficult to attain the goal of “zero evacuees in 2020” as things stand today.

But critics say the central and local governments will come under fire for **putting priority on the return of evacuees over their safety.**

Safe, cheap and reliable or a "bottomless pit"?

May 26, 2013

Is it safe? Ruling party pushes nuclear village agenda

by Jeff Kingston

Special To The Japan Times

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/05/26/commentary/is-it-safe-ruling-party-pushes-nuclear-village-agenda/#.UaDiJ9hBpg4>

In July 2011, then Prime Minister Naoto Kan ordered stress tests on all Japan's 50 nuclear reactors to assess their safety. By May 2012, they were all idled and for the first time in 40 years the nation was not generating a single kWh from nuclear energy.

Controversially, on June 16, 2012, Kan's successor, Yoshihiko Noda, approved the restart of two reactors. This sparked mass protests that involved a million demonstrators through a summer that saw Japan's largest civil protests since the turbulent 1960s.

Noda faced strong opposition to his plans to hasten the restart of reactors due to widespread safety concerns. Haruki Madarame, chairman of the Nuclear Safety Commission, reinforced those anxieties when he announced in March 2012 that the stress tests were not sufficient to ensure the operational safety of reactors. The government then hastily cobbled together a provisional set of safety guidelines. As it turned out, the two reactors at the Oi nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture that had been restarted met only 20 out of the new 30 safety criteria. Furthermore, the power they generated was unnecessary even during one of the hottest summers in memory.

This April, the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) began assessing whether the two Oi reactors meet new safety standards slated to go into effect in July. There are three active fault lines near the Oi plant on the Sea of Japan coast, but it will not have a remote command center ready until 2015 and its raised sea wall will not be completed until March 2014. The new safety guidelines also require that utilities equip reactors with filtered venting systems to reduce radioactive releases in the event of an emergency, but they are granted a five-year grace period before these must be in place.

Consequently, the reactors are now operating based on the hope that these countermeasures will prove unnecessary; Fukushima demonstrates the folly of wishing risk away.

The findings of three major investigations into the Fukushima accident were released in 2012, detailing the absence of a culture of safety in the nuclear industry in Japan and cozy, collusive relations between regulators and the utilities that compromised safety.

All three investigations assert that the meltdowns were preventable, and they all refuted the claims made by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Tepco), the operator of the Fukushima No. 1 plant, that the massive tsunami was an inconceivable event that caused the three reactor meltdowns and hydrogen explosions there.

In fact, tsunami risks should have come as no surprise to Tepco, as the Tohoku coastline has been battered by major ones in 1611, 1677, 1793, 1896 and 1933. Indeed, there are tsunami stones dotting the Tohoku coastline warning future generations to heed the perils. Tepco's own researchers warned about the tsunami risk in Fukushima, and clearly the one triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, was no black swan, once in a 1,000-year event. But the utilities and the government ignored the risks and sited reactors in tsunami-risk zones.

The Diet investigation concludes that what's termed "regulatory capture" — regulators regulating in favor of the regulated — was at the heart of the nuclear accident, and it blasts the absence of a culture of safety. Moreover, it outlines an institutionalized culture of collusion, complacency and deceit involving regulators and utilities that explains why Fukushima in particular, and the nuclear industry in general, settled for inadequate safeguards.

Finally, in October 2012, Tepco admitted it erred in not adopting stricter safety measures and confessed that it could have prevented the nuclear crisis had it done so. Refuting its own whitewash report issued in mid-2012, Tepco now acknowledges that it downplayed tsunami risk and opposed adoption of international safety standards. It also admits that employees were not properly trained to operate emergency equipment and lacked crisis-management skills.

The utility further concedes that it did not manage risk properly because it feared that any measures to improve safety at the Fukushima plant, or to conduct evacuation drills, would stoke the anti-nuclear movement, interfere with operations, raise costs and create legal and political problems.

These mea culpas are an extraordinary development that highlights shortcomings of the so-called nuclear village — a term commonly used in Japan to refer to nuclear advocates, and beneficiaries, in the utilities, regulatory agencies, the Diet, big business, the media and academia.

Just as it appeared in mid-September 2012 that Noda's Cabinet had officially sanctioned the phasing out of nuclear energy, major business lobbies publically protested and persuaded the Cabinet to reverse course. Against steep odds, the nuclear village ensured that Fukushima did not become a game-changing event.

The election of the pro-nuclear Liberal Democratic Party to power in December 2012 was not about energy policy, but has revived prospects for the nuclear village; citizens may favor phasing out nuclear

energy, but they will not get to decide. Hitachi, Toshiba and Mitsubishi tie-ups with General Electric, Westinghouse and Areva mean that Japan stands at the nexus of the global nuclear-energy industry. The recent award of a \$22 billion contract by Turkey to a Japanese-led consortium indicates how high the stakes are, explaining why domestic firms' nuclear-policy preferences are fully reflected in government policy.

If Japan terminated nuclear power, the pain would extend beyond the utilities and vendors; lenders and investors, including Japan's major banks and insurance firms, would also face huge losses. Pulling the plug on nuclear power could also drive some of Japan's 10 utilities into insolvency. In addition, there have been strident voices from the political right calling for the retention of nuclear energy because it leaves available the nuclear-weapons option.

Washington, too, has warned Tokyo that phasing out nuclear energy would harm bilateral relations because it would raise concerns about Japan's large stockpiles of plutonium and uncomfortable questions about the consistency of U.S. nuclear non-proliferation efforts targeting Iran and North Korea.

The NRA established in September 2012 has conducted on-site inspections indicating that some reactors are sited on active fault lines, but has not made a decision about shutting them down permanently. It has, however, moved to close the problem-plagued Monju fast-breeder reactor, a non-commercial experimental facility that sits atop an active fault line.

Additionally, the NRA has signaled its intention to not approve restarting a reactor at the Tsuruga plant in Fukui, and there are several other candidates for closure; Tepco's Kashiwazaki plant with six reactors is sited near an active fault line as proven in the 2007 earthquake there, but the utility's business plan depends on restarting this facility. There are some tough calls ahead.

There has also been no conclusion declared as to whether or not seismic damage compromised cooling-system pipes at the Fukushima plant in the interval before the tsunami hit. This is an important issue because if the earthquake caused the meltdowns, all Japan's reactors would require extensive safety upgrades that would further undermine their financial viability. In any event, The Economist magazine has concluded that nuclear power is simply not economically feasible.

The NRA is set to adopt stricter safety regulations in July, but the key will be the implementation and monitoring of compliance. Problematically, there are only nine inspectors overseeing the 3,000 workers engaged in decontamination and decommissioning efforts at Fukushima, a bungled operation that has been left to the discretion of Tepco.

The utility decided against bringing in outside experts and failed to anticipate the problem of what to do with massive volumes of radioactive waste water that are accumulating at the plant. The improvised responses have proved inadequate, while the touted “solution” involves dumping the toxic water into the ocean. The Tokyo-based New York Times reporter Martin Fackler concludes that Tepco is “lurching from one problem to the next without a coherent strategy ... a cautionary tale about the continued dangers of leaving decisions about nuclear safety to industry insiders” (NYT 4/29/2013).

Despite this and other red flags on nuclear safety, the political pressures on the NRA to resume business as usual are intensifying.

Proponents of nuclear power have long argued that it is safe, cheap and reliable. The 150,000 residents who remain displaced from the vicinity of Tepco’s Fukushima plant, along with local farmers and fishermen, must wonder about that claim. So too should all Japan’s taxpayers, as the nationalization of Tepco in July 2012 means we now own its vast liabilities.

One year ago the Wall Street Journal estimated that taxpayers were already \$45 billion in the hole, and at the end of 2012 the utility requested a further ¥697 billion (ca \$8.2 billion) from the government to cover rising compensation payments.

The Fukushima plant looks to be a bottomless pit, with the tab set to grow as decontamination and decommissioning will take decades. And, how much will it cost to deal with all the radioactive waste accumulated at Japan’s 50 other reactors and where will that be stored?

Jeff Kingston is Director of Asian Studies, Temple University Japan.

Any accident should be reported

May 26, 2013

Researchers hurt at Ibaraki nuclear facility

JJI, Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/26/national/researchers-hurt-at-ibaraki-nuclear-facility/#.UaDgIthBpg4>

At least six researchers suffered internal radiation exposure when an experiment involving elementary particles went awry and up to 24 more are feared to have been similarly exposed, the Japan Atomic Energy Agency said Saturday.

Radioactive substances leaked following the accident Thursday in the Hadron Experimental Facility of the Japan Proton Accelerator Research Complex (J-PARC) in Tokai, Ibaraki Prefecture, the government-affiliated agency reported.

Officials from the Ibaraki Prefectural Government raided the complex Saturday afternoon to investigate the delay in reporting the incident. A malfunction occurred at 11:55 a.m. Thursday during an experiment to produce elementary particles by aiming a proton beam at a target made of gold, the agency said.

An alarm went off shortly afterward and the experiment was halted. But a researcher in charge of the equipment restarted it at 12:08 p.m., despite not having pinpointed the cause of the alarm, sources familiar with the investigation said.

As a result, the proton output jumped unexpectedly, causing part of the gold to evaporate and the generation of radioactive substances that leaked out of the controlled area, according to the agency.

It said the radioactive leak has stopped, but not before at least six male researchers suffered internal radiation exposure. Four of them received doses of up to 1.6 millisieverts.

Later Saturday, the agency reported that another 24 researchers may have been similarly exposed to internal radiation. A total of 55 people were working in the facility at the time of the accident.

All work at the Hadron Experimental Facility has been suspended.

Agency officials said they initially thought there had been no leak outside the radiation-controlled area and therefore did not report the accident to the Nuclear Regulation Authority. The leak was only discovered Friday night and **the NRA was informed at 10:15 p.m.**, the officials said.

When radiation readings rose during the experiment, researchers released radioactive substances outside the facility through a fan on the assumption that they would quickly decay, the agency explained.

The level of radioactive contamination at the facility stands at as much as **40 becquerels per square centimeter**, it said.

The research complex is jointly run by the atomic energy agency and the High Energy Accelerator Research Organization.

The agency's president, Atsuyuki Suzuki, resigned earlier this month over its failure to conduct a proper inspection of its Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture.

Science minister Hakubun Shimomura criticized the agency for its delay in reporting the accident to the prefectural and central governments, and the NRA. The delay indicates that the agency "lacks a sense of urgency and crisis," Shimomura said, stressing that **it is required to report any accident, regardless of its severity.**

May 25, 2013

Radiation leak reported day after incident at Ibaraki laboratory

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130525p2g00m0dm004000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Radioactive substances were released into the atmosphere Thursday outside the controlled area at one of the Japan Atomic Energy Agency's nuclear physics laboratories in Ibaraki Prefecture, the Nuclear Regulation Authority's secretariat said early Saturday morning.

Fifty-five researchers and others who were engaged in experiments and other work at the laboratory may have been exposed to radiation as a result of inhaling the substances, but none were taken to hospital, the government body said. Four have so far undergone checkups and the highest radiation dose detected was 1.6 millisievert.

No impact from the radiation is expected beyond the premises of the accelerator laboratory in Tokaimura.

The NRA secretariat said it received a report on the incident at the laboratory of the Nuclear Science Research Institute from the JAEA at around 9 p.m. Friday. The incident occurred at 11:55 a.m. Thursday.

Officials of the JAEA said in a press conference held early Saturday in Tokyo that it failed to report the incident to the NRA immediately because it believed the leak had been confined to the laboratory.

The Ibaraki Prefectural government said it was notified at around 9:40 p.m. Friday, adding that it will conduct an on-the-spot inspection of the facility Saturday afternoon.

The latest incident follows the resignation of the president of the state-run JAEA last week. Atsuyuki Suzuki resigned over the agency's failure to conduct a proper inspection of its Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture.

The researchers at the lab in Ibaraki were engaged in an experiment to generate particles by applying a proton beam to gold. The equipment they were using suffered a malfunction, causing it to overheat, which resulted in the evaporation and release of radioactivated gold, the authorities said.

Contamination within the laboratory building is estimated at 40 becquerels at most, they said.

The JAEA initially thought that the leak had been confined to the lab area and that the radiation was within acceptable levels. As a result, workers switched on the ventilation fan, which eventually caused radioactive substances to escape into the outside atmosphere.

All work at the facility has been suspended, they said.

It's too easy to apologise after the event

May 25, 2013

Initial reaction to radioactive leak in question

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130525_25.html

The Japan Atomic Energy Agency says negligence in radiation checks caused a delay in reporting nuclear leakage at its laboratory in Tokai Village in Ibaraki Prefecture, northeast of Tokyo.

The accident occurred around noon on Thursday, when a piece of equipment malfunctioned while researchers were bombarding gold with proton beams to generate elementary particles.

The accident created an unexpected amount of radioactive substances. At least 6 workers, aged between 22 and 45, were exposed.

The agency became aware that the facility had been contaminated with radioactive substances around 5 PM on that day, but it only carried out simple tests to measure nuclear substances on the researchers' clothes, and allowed them go home.

It was not until Friday morning that the agency offered internal radiation checks. It has found that the 6 received internal doses of up to 1.6 millisieverts.

More people are expected to be found to have been exposed. The agency is measuring the dosages of

those who were at the facility at that time.

It is believed that the nuclear substances leaked out of the facility because exhaust fans were turned on twice after 3 PM on Thursday to lower the radiation dose that had increased in the experiment room.

However, the agency did not measure radiation levels around the facility, and it was not until after 5:30 PM on Friday that workers noticed that the level at the monitoring post next to the facility had risen.

As a result, the agency did not notify the Nuclear Regulation Authority or the prefectural government of the nuclear leakage until around 9:30 PM on Friday, or more than 30 hours after the accident.

The agency has apologized for the delay in reporting the accident to the central and local governments. It admitted that it failed to respond appropriately right after the accident, and says it will verify the problem in detail and study countermeasures.

A case of labour malpractice?

May 27, 2013

Subcontractor chided for sacking Fukushima decontamination work whistleblowers

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130527p2a00m0na009000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- The Fukushima Labor Standards Inspection Office has ordered a subcontractor engaged in the Fukushima nuclear disaster cleanup to correct its labor practices for firing three male employees without prior notice, the Mainichi Shimbun has learned.

The three men allege that they were fired by the subcontractor, based in Sapporo, after they approached the project's prime contractor and blew the whistle on alleged corner-cutting. The allegations surrounding their sacking led the labor standards office to issue a rectification order to the Sapporo firm on suspicion of violating the Labor Standards Act.

The city of Fukushima, which has contracted out decontamination work, is looking into the case, sources say.

According to the labor standards office, the prefectural capital placed an order with a joint venture formed by two local firms to conduct decontamination work in the city's Matsukawa district. But the subcontractor dismissed the three workers without prior notice on May 23.

After being contacted by the three fired workers, the labor standards office checked with the Sapporo firm which on May 24 admitted to firing the three men. The office advised the subcontractor to take corrective action and the subcontractor subsequently paid the three an average wage of about 330,000 yen each.

The Labor Standards Act stipulates that workers must be notified of dismissal more than 30 days in advance, or if an employer dismisses them effective immediately, they must be paid more than 30 days of an average wage.

Fukushima Municipal Government regulations governing the decontamination contract state that vegetation for incineration should be separated from soil to help reduce waste.

The labor standards office says the three workers were employed on May 20 and were ordered by the subcontractor to put both soil and vegetation together in bags on May 21 and 22. The three workers were fired one day after notifying the joint venture about the work procedure.

The labor standards office quoted the three as saying they were fired because they told the prime contractor about the order. The office said the subcontractor, however, maintains it fired the three because of their work behavior.

Safety can be fabricated

May 28, 2013

South Korea idles 2 nuke plants after cable tests faked

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/korean_peninsula/AJ201305280117

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SEOUL, South Korea--South Korea has idled two nuclear power plants after finding that test results for crucial control cables were falsified in a new blow to an industry mired in a graft scandal and safety lapses.

South Korea's trade and energy ministry said on May 28 a company contracted to conduct tests fabricated the results for cables that failed to meet international standards for capacity to withstand changes in voltage and pressure. It warned that the plant shutdowns would result in summer power shortages.

The cables control valves that are responsible for cooling nuclear fuel or preventing the release of radioactive materials during an emergency. Another four nuclear reactors that were either shut down for scheduled maintenance or under construction were also using cables that had failed the tests.

"If these control cables do not operate well during an emergency, we viewed that it would not guarantee to cool nuclear fuels or to shut off radioactive materials," South Korea's Nuclear Safety and Security Commission said in a statement.

It said the cables, which were in use since December 2011, failed nine of 12 tests pertinent to their operation in a "loss of coolant accident."

Han Jinhyun, vice trade and energy minister, declined to name the company while the government's investigation is ongoing. The ministry will sue the company and also ask prosecutors to launch a probe, he told a press conference.

The revelations add to public worries about nuclear safety and power shortages during the summer when demand is at its peak. They are a new blow to South Korea's ambitions to export its nuclear technology.

With the shutdown of the Shin-Kori No. 2 and Shin-Wolsong No. 1 reactors to replace cables, a total of 10 nuclear plants are now offline.

The minister said it would take around four months to replace the cables and warned "unprecedented power shortages" are expected in coming months.

"There is no means to increase power supply in the short term, so we expect we need to lower demand considerably to weather the crisis," he said.

Last year, the South Korean nuclear industry was rocked by revelations that thousands of components used in nuclear plants had falsified quality certificates. Dozens of employees at state owned nuclear power plant operator, Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power Co., were prosecuted for taking bribes from contractors to accept substandard parts and machinery.

The investigation into the cable problems began after the nuclear safety commission received tips through a whistleblowing channel that was set up in the wake of last year's scandal.

"This incident is more serious than previous scandals because it is wrongdoing by a company that is supposed to oversee products," said Kim Ik-jung, a medical professor at Dongguk University who has become prominent as an anti-nuclear activist since the government decided to build a nuclear waste dump in Gyeongju city where he lives.

"Corruption is widespread in the nuclear industry because there is no agency that can truly regulate Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power," he said.

South Korea has 23 nuclear power plants which supply about 30 percent of its energy and plans to add another 11 reactors by 2025.

South Korea Halts Operations at Reactors Over Faked Certificates

By CHOE SANG-HUN

Published: May 28, 2013

Source : The New York Times

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/29/world/asia/south-korea-turns-off-nuclear-reactors.html?_r=0

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea said on Tuesday that it was turning off two nuclear power reactors on Tuesday and delaying the scheduled start of operation at another two, after its inspectors discovered that the reactors used components whose safety certificates had been fabricated.

South Korea's nuclear power industry has been plagued by a series of forced shutdowns, corruption scandals and mechanical failures in recent years, undermining public confidence in atomic energy even as the country's dependence on it for electricity is expected to grow in coming years.

A anonymous whistle-blower led government investigators to uncover the latest problem, in which control cables had been supplied to four reactors with faked certificates even though the part had failed to pass a safety test, the country's Nuclear Safety and Security Commission said on Tuesday. The control cable is used to send electronic signals to a reactor's control system in the event of an accident.

The commission halted operations at two reactors on Tuesday so the problematic cables could be replaced. The planned start-up of two other reactors — one under a routine maintenance shutdown and the other a newly built reactor waiting for operational approval — will be delayed for the same reason.

South Korea currently has 23 reactors, and Tuesday's decision meant that 10 reactors are temporarily offline for safety concerns, maintenance and other reasons, raising the risk of power shortages in the coming summer, when electricity consumption peaks.

The two reactors shut down on Tuesday are on the southeastern coast of South Korea and each has a capacity of 1,000 megawatts. The recurring scandals have damaged the reputation of South Korea's nuclear power industry, which supplies one-third of the country's electricity needs and aspires to become a global exporter of reactors.

Despite increasing public concern, however, the government remained determined to push ahead with its aggressive nuclear power program; by 2030, the country plans to add 16 more reactors.

Last year, South Korea was forced to shut down two reactors when it was revealed that thousands of substandard parts had been supplied with fake warranties for over 10 years. The country resorted to various power-saving measures to avoid blackouts. Several nuclear power engineers and parts suppliers were later jailed for involvement in the scandal.

Japan Atomic Energy Agency under fire... again

May 28, 2013

Japan Atomic Energy Agency pressed to reform

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130528_23.html

Science Minister Hakubun Shimomura says he will soon launch a taskforce to study sweeping reforms for the trouble-hit Japan Atomic Energy Agency.

The organization co-manages a research facility north of Tokyo where a radiation leak occurred last week during a particle physics experiment. More than 30 researchers were exposed to a small amount of radiation.

The Japan Atomic Energy Agency has also come under fire for failing to inspect vital equipment at the Monju fast-breeder reactor in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture.

Shimomura told reporters on Tuesday that these incidents were caused by the organization's poor safety awareness.

He said the proposed taskforce will study how the Japan Atomic Energy Agency should reform its organization and operations so that it will put safety first.

The minister suggested that he will also ask the agency to urgently carry out a review of its safety measures and report the results.

Abe on nukes - A victory for a powerful lobby

May 31, 2013

Abe to intensify efforts to restart nuclear power plants

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201305310087

By TOMOYA FUJITA/ Staff Writer

Score a victory for Japan's powerful business lobby.

Despite deep-rooted public distrust of nuclear power generation in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster in 2011, the Abe administration is set to push restarts of idled nuclear reactors as an integral engine of policy to spur economic growth.

The Asahi Shimbun obtained a copy of the government's draft growth strategy that is expected to win Cabinet approval as early as June 14.

The decision represents a marked turnaround from the previous government. There are concerns it could set off a fresh outcry from the public, which has lingering doubts about the safety of nuclear reactors following triple meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Business groups have been pressing the government to seize the nuclear initiative because of the humongous financial battering Japan has absorbed as a result of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The government's decision to continue to rely on nuclear power will be presented to the Industrial Competitiveness Council, a government panel tasked to draw up a growth strategy, on June 5 for formal approval.

As such, the government will put the nation on notice that a reliance on nuclear power generation will be fundamental to growth prospects on a mid- to long-term basis.

In January, Abe suggested continued reliance on nuclear power. He pledged to conduct "zero-based review" of the energy policy set by the previous administration, led by the Democratic Party of Japan, which aimed to phase out nuclear power by the end of the 2030s.

The draft underscores a need to help business circles by addressing potential shortfalls in power supply after the nuclear disaster forced all the nation's reactors, except two, to go offline.

Nuclear energy represented roughly 30 percent of overall power supply before the 2011 disaster.

The draft also stresses that an increase in electricity rates as a result of ballooning fossil fuel costs to operate more thermal power plants to make up for idled reactors should be kept in check.

The use of nuclear power, the draft says, is an answer to energy woes, along with the implementation of proposed reform of the electric power system and the introduction of highly efficient thermal power generation.

The draft also states that the government will restart reactors whose safety was cleared by the Nuclear Regulation Authority, a nuclear industry watchdog that was established after the accident.

It goes on to say that the government will "make utmost efforts" to win the understanding of and cooperation from local communities hosting nuclear power plants.

Abe's Liberal Democratic Party had pledged earlier to draw up a mid- to long-term energy policy within 10 years while cutting Japan's reliance on nuclear power as much as is deemed feasible.

However, the Abe administration made an about-face amid calls for reactor restarts from major utilities and other industries, which cited mounting fuel costs and potential risks of power shortages.

Earlier this month, 40 or so LDP lawmakers formed a group to push for restarts.

Abe reiterated his resolve on restarts at an Upper House Budget Committee session on May 15, saying, "We want to achieve (reactor restarts) at the earliest possible time."

Many members of the Industrial Competitiveness Council who are from the industrial sector strongly support nuclear energy.

"Japan should maintain a certain percentage of nuclear energy as a national strategy by bringing reactors back online soon," said Sadayuki Sakakibara, chairman of Toray Industries Inc.

Some members, such as Heizo Takenaka, a professor of economics at Keio University, called for caution but were unable to win over their colleagues.

The results of "deliberative polling," a combination of conventional public opinion polls and discussion meetings, on nuclear power last August showed that half of the participants from the public backed a phaseout of nuclear energy by 2030.

All of Japan's 50 remaining reactors were shut down by May 2012.

But two reactors at the Oi plant in Fukui Prefecture were brought online two months later.

What about peace, stability and safety?

June 1, 2013

Problematic pact with India

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/06/01/editorials/problematic-pact-with-india/#.UajWN9hBpg4>

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Wednesday agreed to accelerate talks to conclude a pact that would allow Japanese firms to export nuclear power-generation technologies and equipment to India, which is struggling to secure stable electricity supplies to sustain its economic growth. The agreement came when **the United States, France, Russia and South Korea are fiercely competing to get orders for nuclear technologies and equipment from India.**

A Japan-India nuclear cooperation pact is problematic especially in view of the fact that India is not a party to the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). India plans to build some 20 new nuclear power plants and to increase the share of nuclear power in total electricity supply from the current 4 percent to 25 percent by 2050. The value of India's nuclear power market is estimated at \$150 billion (about ¥15 trillion).

Mr. Abe has already signed agreements with the United Arab Emirates and Turkey to enable the export of Japan's nuclear power technologies and equipment to them. It is deplorable that he is pushing such exports to India, paying little attention to the danger of nuclear power generation and the need to prevent nuclear weapons proliferation.

Mr. Abe appears to ignore the sober fact that Japan has suffered from the crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Some 150,000 people from Fukushima Prefecture are still forced to live away from their homes in areas contaminated with radioactive substances from the plant.

India carried out nuclear explosion tests, repeated test launches of missiles that can be tipped with nuclear weapons, and is not a signatory of the NPT. India and its neighbor Pakistan, a nuclear armed nation that is not a member to the NPT, have been engaged in an arms race. These stark facts should not be forgotten.

India has no comprehensive safeguard agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency to let the nuclear watchdog inspect nuclear-related equipment and fissile materials in a signatory nation and have the nation provide relevant data.

But in 2008, under the pressure from the U.S. Bush administration, the Nuclear Suppliers Group, including the United States, Britain, France, Germany and Japan, decided to allow exports of nuclear power technologies and equipment to India, giving it exceptional treatment. In exchange, India pledged unilateral and voluntary moratorium on nuclear weapons tests and joining a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty to ban the further production of fissile material for nuclear weapons.

But India has called for insertion of a clause in a Japan-India nuclear pact, which ensures that the pact will not hamper India's nuclear weapons program. It also wants the right to reprocess spent nuclear fuel from Japanese nuclear power generation equipment. Japan should never accept these Indian demands.

Japan should rethink its approach to India because a Japan-India nuclear pact could trigger a further arms race between India and Pakistan, thus undermining Japan's and India's joint goal to ensure peace and stability in the whole of Asia.

S. Matsuura appointed head of Japan Atomic Energy Agency

May 31, 2013

Cabinet OKs ex-senior nuke regulator for atomic energy agency's presidency

JJI

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/01/national/cabinet-oks-ex-senior-nuke-regulator-for-atomic-energy-agencys-presidency/#.UajVethBpg4>

The Cabinet approved plans Friday to appoint former senior nuclear regulator Shojiro Matsuura as president of the scandal-shaken Japan Atomic Energy Agency.

Matsuura, 77, will fill the post vacated by Atsuyuki Suzuki, who quit in May to take the blame for flawed safety checks at the agency's Monju fast-breeder nuclear reactor in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture.

The appointment will take effect Monday.

Science and technology minister Hakubun Shimomura praised Matsuura for his deep insight into nuclear safety regulations and his management skills.

He is “the best person to initiate reforms at the agency, whose safety culture is found to be deteriorating,” Shimomura said.

Matsuura joined the Japan Atomic Energy Research Institute, a predecessor of the JAEA, in 1961 after graduating from Kyoto University. He was head of the institute between November 1998 and March 2000.

In April 2000, Matsuura became chairman of the now-defunct Nuclear Safety Commission, one of the entities remade into the current Nuclear Regulation Authority.

As commission head, Matsuura dealt with Tokyo Electric Power Co.’s cover-up of problems at nuclear power plants and joined work to revise design guidelines to make nuclear plants safer against earthquakes.

Matsuura in April 2011 apologized for the meltdowns at Tepco’s Fukushima No. 1 power plant the month before.

Just charge users twice for decommissioning

Reactor-dismantling cost rule may change

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/02/national/reactor-dismantling-cost-rule-may-change/#.Uao8cthBpg4>

The industry ministry is considering revising an accounting rule to alleviate the financial burden on electricity companies from decommissioning nuclear power plants, sources said Saturday.

The change would allow multiyear instead of single-year booking of losses resulting from dismantling atomic energy reactors, according to the sources.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is looking to allow utilities to **pass on multiyear losses to users through higher electricity rates**, the sources said.

But as **the cost of decommissioning is already factored into electricity rates**, there could be an outcry over slapping customers with the additional financial burden.

Under the current rule, utilities are required to build reserves for decommissioning reactors over their expected lifetimes of 40 years or more. If a plant is scrapped sooner, the operator must cover any shortage of reserves.

In what may turn into an earlier-than-scheduled decommissioning case, the Nuclear Regulation Authority recently acknowledged that reactor 2 at Japan Atomic Power Co.'s Tsuruga plant in Fukui Prefecture sits atop an active fault, which is not permissible under the nuclear regulatory framework.

If the unit is dismantled, Japan Atomic Power is expected to suffer losses in the range of ¥100 billion, a huge financial blow.

METI plans to set up a panel of experts to examine the rule change with the aim of implementing a new regulation by the next-March end of the current fiscal year, the sources said.

According to a METI estimate, the nation's 10 power companies operating nuclear reactors would incur a combined ¥4.4 trillion in single-year losses if all of them were to be decommissioned.

Gov't may be filing lawsuit against TEPCO

Ministry may sue Tepco for ¥16 billion

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/03/national/ministry-may-sue-tepco-for-%C2%A516-billion/#.UauThdhBpg4>

June 2, 2013

Gov't eyes suing TEPCO over unpaid decontamination costs

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130602p2g00m0dm002000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The Environment Ministry is considering filing a lawsuit against Tokyo Electric Power Co., seeking payment of about 16.5 billion yen in decontamination expenses since the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, sources close to the matter said.

The unpaid amount includes expenses for decontamination work by the government near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant undertaken based on a special measures law to deal with radioactive contamination, as well as government subsidies allocated to local governments which conducted decontamination work, the sources said.

Under the law, the government is supposed to cover decontamination expenses first and ask TEPCO to reimburse the sum later. Although there is no deadline for the payment, TEPCO's failure to pay the expenses means that the government continues to use taxpayer money for decontamination projects.

If the court orders TEPCO to pay the decontamination costs, the utility will also have to pay interest. Therefore, the Environment Ministry believes that TEPCO will soon agree to the payment, the sources said, adding that the ministry is now discussing the matter with the Justice Ministry.

The Environment Ministry has asked TEPCO to pay the decontamination costs every three months after finalizing the sum following the completion of decontamination projects.

Of about 21.1 billion yen that the ministry requested the utility pay, TEPCO only agreed to pay 4.4 billion yen.

TEPCO plans to soon pay an additional 250 million yen, but it remains unwilling at present to pay the remaining 16.5 billion yen, saying it takes time to confirm relevant documents.

The government has booked about 1.3 trillion yen in decontamination costs by fiscal 2013. The sum that the Environment Ministry asked TEPCO to pay is only part of the overall decontamination projects conducted in fiscal 2011.

When each local government closes its book for fiscal 2012, the sum will likely top 100 billion yen, the sources said.

TEPCO told Kyodo News that it responds appropriately in accordance with the special measures law on radioactive materials but declined to elaborate on the specific conditions of the payment.

Nukes no longer risky

June 4, 2013

Environmental government white paper removes risks of nuclear power

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201306040085

By TETSU KOBAYASHI/ Staff Writer

In line with the Abe administration's push for the restart of nuclear reactors, the 2013 government white paper on environmental issues has noticeably removed the warning on the risks of nuclear power, which was included in the 2012 report.

In the 2012 white paper, the "Annual Report on the Environment, the Sound Material-Cycle Society, and the Biodiversity in Japan," radioactive contamination is described as the "biggest environmental issue." That report followed the 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

However, such a warning disappeared from the 2013 version, which was approved by the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on June 4.

Before the nuclear accident, the Environment Ministry had regarded nuclear power, which does not emit carbon dioxide, as an important means of reducing global warming. In the 2010 version of the white paper, for example, the ministry said that it would further promote the use of nuclear power.

In the 2012 version, which was compiled after the nuclear disaster, however, the white paper described the risk of the utilization of nuclear power by devoting two pages under the title "Turning Point for the Nuclear Safety Regulation."

The description partly said, "Before the Great East Japan Earthquake, the relationship between environmental concerns and nuclear disasters was rarely discussed as a political matter."

It included, "An issue for nuclear safety measures is how to define potential risks, since nuclear accidents can cause serious environmental contamination."

In the 2013 report, the white paper described the progress of the decontamination of radioactive materials that had spread due to the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. It also described

measures that had been taken to alleviate the public's concerns over the possible adverse health effects from the contamination.

However, it contains no description detailing the risk of the utilization of nuclear power generation.

According to the Environment Ministry, the Nuclear Regulation Authority, which was set up as an affiliate of the ministry, is expected to use safety regulations on nuclear power generation as the main theme of its annual report. Therefore, the ministry “ceded” the cautionary note to the NRA, the ministry said.

Meanwhile, the Abe administration plans to fashion new goals to combat global warming in the autumn. The discussions for that plan will focus on the restart of the nation's idled nuclear reactors, which account for 48 of the 50 reactors.

“We don’t want to give to the discussions a (one-sided) view (that the utilization of nuclear power contains risks). It is very difficult for us to express our views in the current situation,” a high-ranking Environment Ministry official said.



Hollande's visit - cooperation on nukes between both countries

June 6, 2013

France's Hollande on Japan visit to push nuke ties

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130606p2g00m0dm092000c.html>

TOKYO (AP) -- French President Francois Hollande arrives in Japan on Thursday for a visit expected to focus on closer cooperation in nuclear energy technologies and on Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's economic strategies.

Hollande and Abe will hold summit talks that local media say may yield an agreement on cooperating in nuclear fuel cycle technology, next-generation reactors and decommissioning of nuclear power plants.

Japan is struggling with the cleanup from meltdowns at the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant following the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami disasters, and with the suspension of its Monju fast-breeder reactor, which is meant to process spent atomic fuel.

Abe is eager to sell Japan's nuclear technology overseas, despite the suspension of most nuclear power generation following the Fukushima disaster, and is endeavoring to show it can offer the highest safety standards. Its Mitsubishi Heavy Industries has teamed up with France's nuclear services giant Areva in building a nuclear reactor on the Black Sea coast in Turkey.

Earlier this week, Hitachi-GE Nuclear Energy, Ltd. and Areva announced they plan to work together on improving nuclear safety through filtered containment venting systems that can remove radioactive materials from the air.

Areva also has aided the crippled Fukushima plant with water treatment technology, though Tokyo Electric Power Co., its operator, soon switched to using a system designed by Toshiba after deciding the French system was not as effective as expected.

Though France is the only nation with technology for a closed nuclear fuel cycle, which reprocesses and reuses spent nuclear fuel, Hollande has announced plans to scale back its atomic power program, cutting the country's reliance on atomic power, from 75 percent to 50 percent by 2025.

On broader issues, Hollande will get a first-hand look at how Abe is fighting Japan's two-decade-old economic slump through his "Abenomics" policy mix of monetary and fiscal stimulus and reforms. Many commentators have urged European leaders to reconsider fiscal austerity imposed due to the financial crisis, pointing to Japan's emergence from recession late last year and its 3.5 percent annual economic growth rate in the last quarter as evidence that stimulus is crucial for recovery.

France has been seeking to counter its economic woes by growing its business with Asia. Hollande returned just over a month ago from a visit to China, where the two countries clinched deals on the sale of dozens of Airbus aircraft and on building a used nuclear fuel treatment and recycling facility.

It is also hoping to work with Japan on emerging technologies such as nanotechnology, information technology and robotics. The two sides also have pledged to increase student and cultural exchanges.

France's annual exports to Japan total around 7.5 billion euros (\$9.8 billion), while its imports are just over 9 billion euros. Both rank 11th as respective trade partners.

Hollande's is the first state visit to Japan this year and as such he was to be given a formal welcoming ceremony and a banquet hosted by Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko. He and French first lady Valerie Trierweiler are due to leave Japan on Saturday.

Here comes Areva

07.06.2013_No22 / World Nuclear Review

Areva Signs Cooperation Agreements On Fukushima And Rokkasho

<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2013/06/07/areva-signs-cooperation-agreements-on-fukushima-and-rokkasho>

Research & Development

7 Jun (NucNet): French and Japanese companies have signed agreements that will see them cooperating on the rehabilitation of the Fukushima nuclear site and the start of commercial operations at the Rokkasho used fuel reprocessing facility.

A joint statement of cooperation to prepare for commercial start-up of Rokkasho was signed in Tokyo today by Japan Nuclear Fuel Limited (JNFL) president Yoshihiko Kawai and Luc Oursel, the president and chief executive officer of France's Areva group.

Areva and JNFL plan to expand their collaboration at Rokkasho, particularly on complementary safety assessments.

Areva will also contribute its technical expertise to the construction of a Japanese mixed oxide (MOX) fuel fabrication facility, whose technology is based on Areva's Melox facility in France.

Areva also signed a cooperation agreement with nuclear decontamination company Atox for dismantling and cleanup operations. The two companies will work on solutions for the rehabilitation of the Fukushima site and region.

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- Another Postponement For Japan's Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant (News in Brief No.161, 13 September 2010)

Japan and France highly skilled in the area of safety...

June 7, 2013

Abe, Hollande reach deal to push nuclear technology

by Mizuho Aoki

Staff Writer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/07/national/abe-hollande-reach-deal-to-push-nuclear-technology/#.UbHRVthBpg4>

French President Francois Hollande and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe agreed Friday to deepen cooperation on developing and exporting nuclear power plant technologies, and to strengthen security ties.

In a joint statement following their summit in Tokyo, the two leaders agreed to arrange talks between their foreign and defense ministers, commonly known as two-plus-two talks, to discuss joint development of defense equipment as well as exporting such items overseas.

Through such talks, Japan aims to stop France from exporting dual-use items to China that could improve the Chinese military's capabilities.

A French naval contractor sold ship-based helicopter landing systems to China, triggering concern in Japan that it will raise the potency of Chinese surveillance ships deployed around the disputed Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea.

France will be the fourth country for Japan to establish a framework of two-plus-two talks, after the United States, Australia and Russia.

During a joint news conference, Abe stressed that the proposed cooperation in nuclear power plant technologies is to enhance "safety standards" throughout the world, as **Japan and France are highly skilled in this area.**

"In that sense, I'm confident that Japan and France are the world's best partners," Abe said.

The two leaders agreed to cooperate on starting "the safe and stable operation" of the fuel reprocessing plant in the village of Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, which was initially due to be completed in 1997 but has been delayed by technical problems.

They also agreed to **promote joint development of a next-generation nuclear reactor as well as to support private-sector efforts to export nuclear power technologies to emerging countries.**

In early May, a Japanese-French consortium including Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. and France's Areva SA won the exclusive negotiating right for building Turkey's second nuclear plant, and both governments hope to reach similar deals elsewhere.

Cooperation in high-tech fields such as robotics and smart grids were also stipulated in the joint statement.

The European Union has maintained an arms embargo on China introduced in the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown. France argues that the helicopter landing equipment is not subject to the ban.

Asked about exports of dual-use items to China, Holland said, "I want to say that those (export items) are not for a military use," adding that France is abiding by the rules.

The two countries agreed to **promote ongoing negotiations for a Japan-EU free-trade agreement** so that the deal will be reached soon.

Hollande's three-day trip to Japan is the first by a French president in 17 years. The last to visit as a state guest was Jacques Chirac. Hollande is scheduled to leave Tokyo on Saturday.

Abe, Hollande agree on bilateral cooperation

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130607_25.html

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and French President Francois Hollande have agreed that their 2 countries will cooperate in developing defense equipment and exporting nuclear power technologies.

The 2 leaders issued a joint statement at a news conference after their meeting in Tokyo on Friday.

Abe told reporters that he and Hollande confirmed that Japan and France, which share common interests, will strengthen their special partnership.

Hollande said Turkey has decided to buy a nuclear reactor jointly developed by 2 firms from France and Japan. He said France and Japan can cooperate in a range of fields as well as the energy sector.

The joint statement calls for an early foreign and defense ministerial meeting to discuss the joint development of defense equipment and export controls.

It also says the 2 countries will support the overseas sales of the ATMEA One nuclear reactor, which was jointly developed by French nuclear energy firm AREVA and Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries.

Abe and Hollande also confirmed that the 2 countries will closely exchange information about the security situation in the Middle East and Africa.

Terrorists carried out an attack in January on a gas plant in Algeria and Japanese nationals were among the dead.

The statement also says the 2 countries will help accelerate talks between Japan and the European Union on an economic partnership agreement.

Diplomacy and the promotion of nukes

June 8, 2013

EDITORIAL: Abe should stop using diplomacy to promote nuclear power

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201306080030>

France is the world's most nuclear-dependent country.

Under the pretext of international cooperation with this country, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is moving fast in a direction that is exactly opposite to the promise he made during last year's Lower House election campaign to reduce Japan's dependence on nuclear power.

The only conclusion we can draw from its actions is that the Abe administration is solidly committed to promoting nuclear power.

Abe and visiting French President Francois Hollande issued a joint statement stressing the importance of nuclear power generation after their meeting on June 7.

The statement promises support for Japan's efforts to establish a nuclear fuel recycling system, including the restart of the fuel reprocessing plant in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture. The document also calls for bilateral cooperation in the development of fast reactor technology and in exports of nuclear technology to third countries.

Little more than two years have passed since the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, and it is not completely over yet. Nor is the work to decontaminate areas polluted with radiation and to allow evacuees to return home yet finished.

New revelations, including the discovery of an active fault within the grounds of a nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture, have brought to the fore afresh the risk of operating nuclear power plants in this earthquake-prone country.

The advent of the Abe administration has not decreased the desire of many Japanese to see their society wean itself from dependence on the energy released by nuclear fission.

Despite these circumstances, Japan and France jointly declared their intention to attach great importance to nuclear power.

It may make sense for Japan to receive help from France in certain areas where the European powerhouse has accumulated experience and expertise, such as reactor decommissioning and radioactive waste management.

But the other parts of the bilateral nuclear power agreement are all highly questionable.

The biggest source of concern is their deal on cooperation over Japan's stalled program to create a nuclear fuel recycling system.

Last month, Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority imposed a ban on the restart of the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor, which is supposed to play the central role in the program. The nuclear safety watchdog's action came after it was revealed that the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, which operates the experimental reactor, failed to carry out mandatory inspections of nearly 10,000 pieces of equipment at the plant.

Prospects for the commercial use of a fast-breeder reactor are highly doubtful from a technological viewpoint as well. The realistic decision for the Monju program would be to pull the plug on it and decommission the reactor.

The Rokkasho reprocessing plant has also been plagued by a series of troubles. Even if the plant is somehow brought online eventually, its operation will keep churning out plutonium for which there is no clear plan for use.

Japan is the only country which doesn't possess nuclear arms but has a large-scale nuclear fuel reprocessing plant.

Japan would cause immeasurable damage to the international system to prevent nuclear proliferation if it works with France, a nuclear power, in a project that would increase its production of plutonium.

This kind of cooperation between a country armed with nuclear weapons and a country that once suffered nuclear devastation could make many other non-nuclear countries think that they would be better off owning material that can also be used to produce nuclear arms.

Rather than building a nuclear fuel recycling system, Japan and France should work together in efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation.

The Abe administration has been showing increasingly clear signs that it is keen to promote nuclear power generation.

The administration has included the use of atomic energy in its strategy for economic growth. In addition to the Middle East, India and France, East Europe is also on the list of potential areas for the administration's efforts to expand Japan's nuclear cooperation with other countries. Abe is going to announce Japan's nuclear cooperation with East Europe during his visit to Poland in mid-June.

But the Abe administration has failed to offer a detailed explanation about its nuclear power policy. In taking advantage of international cooperation to gradually shift its policy toward promoting nuclear power, it is acting in a way that seriously compromises its political integrity.

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Japan's nuke technology "the world's safest"?????

June 10, 2013

Editorial: Japan security cooperation with France important, but nuclear claims unfounded

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130610p2a00m0na003000c.html>

Following bilateral talks, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and French President Francois Hollande released a joint statement reaffirming cooperation in nuclear power technology and security, as well as a five-year action plan.

In the field of security, the two leaders agreed on the creation of a forum to deliberate export controls of civilian items that have military applications, joint development of defense equipment, and arranging for discussions between defense and foreign ministers, known as two-plus-two talks.

Setting up a forum to discuss export management should be recognized as a forward-looking move.

Since the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, the EU has prohibited the sale of weapons to China. What constitutes weapons, however, has been left up to the discretion of each member country.

Last year, a French defense company sold a state-of-the-art helicopter landing device to China. Japan has voiced fears to the French government that the equipment could be used by Chinese patrol boats near the Senkaku Islands, thereby improving China's performance around the disputed islands.

Hollande has consistently claimed that the sale of the copter device was not for military purposes, and for now, Japan and France have failed to see eye to eye on the issue. However, the safety of the East China and South China seas are an important matter for France, as well as to Japan, as they constitute trade routes to East Asia. Let's hope that further discussions on security, including the two-plus-two talks, can further France's understanding of the security environment, and lead to more stringent controls on exports to China.

During their talks, Abe and Hollande also reached an agreement to strengthen cooperation on nuclear technology exports, the promotion of the nuclear fuel cycle, and reactor decommissioning and decontamination following the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

France and Japan are the world's second and third largest nuclear powers, respectively, after the U.S. The two leaders proudly declared that by bringing their nuclear power businesses together, they could raise the safety standards of nuclear technology worldwide.

We welcome bilateral cooperation on decommissioning reactors and decontamination. But working together to export nuclear reactors and promote the nuclear fuel cycle is another thing. The Fukushima nuclear disaster has yet to be brought under control, and we have not yet come to fully understand what caused it.

It is under such circumstances that Abe has outlined infrastructure export, including nuclear technology, as a pillar of the country's growth strategy. Following his tour of the Middle East in April and May, he is set to visit Eastern Europe in mid-June to market Japanese nuclear technology.

In Saudi Arabia, Abe claimed, "We can provide the world's safest nuclear technology." At a press conference following his meeting with Hollande, he declared, "Japan will meet (global) expectations for its nuclear technology to improve global safety standards. To do that, I am convinced that Japan and France are the world's best partners."

What is the basis for Abe's declaration that Japan's nuclear technology is "the world's safest?" He has failed to provide the Japanese people with a convincing explanation.

Areva, JNFL & ATOX

Areva signs nuclear power deals with Japanese firms

Source : Energy Business Review

<http://nuclear.energy-business-review.com/news/areva-signs-nuclear-power-deals-with-japanese-firms-100613>

EBR Staff Writer **Published 10 June 2013**

French nuclear firm Areva has signed **a series of strategic agreements with two Japanese firms, Japan Nuclear Fuel (JNFL) and ATOX**, for the continuation and development of the Franco-Japanese partnership in civil nuclear power.

The cooperation agreement with JNFL includes the commercial launch of the used fuel recycling plant at Rokkasho-Mura in Japan.

Both companies are also planning to expand their collaboration for the used fuel processing facilities on the Rokkasho-Mura site, especially within the field of complementary safety assessments.

In addition, Areva will provide its technical expertise to the ongoing construction of a Japanese MOX fuel fabrication plant, whose technology is based on the company's MELOX plant in France.

The second cooperation agreement with ATOX includes dismantling and clean-up operations.

As per the deal, both firms will jointly develop new solutions, primarily designed for the rehabilitation of the Fukushima nuclear site and region.

Areva said the agreement will enable both the firms to expand their partnership, which was started more than two years ago.

Areva president and CEO Luc Oursel said, "These agreements strengthen the historic links between AREVA and the Japanese nuclear industry and confirm their recognition of our expertise in the field of nuclear safety."

10 billion yen a year for idle Genkai no.1 and 2 reactors

June 11, 2013

Kyushu Electric spends 10 billion yen a year to maintain idle nuclear reactors

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130611p2a00m0na007000c.html>

Kyushu Electric Power Co. is continuing to spend around 10 billion yen a year to maintain the idle No. 1 and 2 reactors at the Genkai Nuclear Power Plant in Genkai, Saga Prefecture, it has been learned, even as a potential 40-year operation limit for the No. 1 reactor looms.

Multiple company executives said that they are "not thinking at all" of decommissioning the No. 1 reactor, although it will hit the 40-year-limit defined in the revised Nuclear Reactor Regulation Law in October 2015. The Nuclear Regulation Authority can grant exceptional extensions of 20 years, and company executives, who hold a strong view that nuclear power will continue to be a more cost-effective electricity source than thermal power, are hoping to be granted that exception.

According to Kyushu Electric, the price of thermal power is over 11 yen per kilowatt-hour, while the price of nuclear power is around 7.5 yen per kilowatt-hour. Even adding in the costs to meet new nuclear safety standards, the price of nuclear power would only rise about 1 yen per kilowatt-hour, so it would still be cheaper than thermal power.

Kyushu Electric also cites the problem of the cost of decommissioning the reactor. In accordance with the Electricity Business Act, the utility is setting aside funds to decommission the reactor, but at the end of fiscal 2015 it will still be 3.6 billion yen short of the estimated 35.8 billion yen needed to decommission the No. 1 reactor.

"People are telling us to dismantle the reactor, but that would be difficult if we don't receive financial assistance," says Kyushu Electric President Michiaki Uriu.

On the other hand, bringing the old reactor in line with new safety standards would require massive investments which would go to waste if it was decommissioned upon reaching the 40-year limit. Still, it seems that Kyushu Electric officials would prefer to postpone a decision on the reactor's fate for now, even if it means expending maintenance fees, until they know whether they will be able to receive an extension for the reactor and whether it will be profitable after bringing it in line with the new safety standards.

The company's consolidated balance sheet at the end of last fiscal year showed it was 332.47 billion yen in the red, its largest deficit ever. Normally, it would not be able to afford to spend 10 billion yen a year maintaining offline reactors.

"The reason they can spend large amounts of money on an inactive facility is that the current system allows them to collect power bill income to cover expenses (such as reactor maintenance) that are deemed as prime costs," says Ritsumeikan University professor of environmental economics Kenichi Oshima.

Regarding Kyushu Electric's argument for nuclear power's cost-effectiveness, Oshima raised his doubts. "Currently there is no assurance of what degree of safety measures would have to be taken at the No. 1 reactor to earn an extension, so they can't calculate the cost-effectiveness. When you also consider the costs for compensation and disaster response in the case of a nuclear disaster, you cannot call nuclear power more cost-effective than thermal power," he said.

The No. 1 reactor emerged as a problem after it was learned that its pressure vessel was in worse condition than expected. Last year, the Nuclear Regulation Authority's previous incarnation, the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, said the reactor would be operational until 2033. However, the cause of the pressure vessel's deterioration remains unknown, and there is a strong opinion among experts that a non-biased research institute should analyze it. Even Hideo Kishimoto, the mayor of the town of Genkai, which hosts the plant, has expressed concern over the 20-year extension, though he is strongly calling for its reactivation.

Will Mizuno get in trouble?

June 14, 2013

Editorial: Official's tweets damage trust in disaster reconstruction efforts

<http://mainichi.jp/graph/2013/06/14/20130614p2a00m0na009000c/001.html>

A senior Reconstruction Agency official's tweets slandering legislators and a nongovernmental organization (NGO) supporting victims of the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and ensuing nuclear disaster have damaged the public's confidence in the government's reconstruction efforts.

Reconstruction Minister Takumi Nemoto apologized for the incident during a Diet session and removed the official, 45-year-old Yasuhisa Mizuno, from his post in charge of supporting Fukushima disaster victims. The government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe should take prompt action to restore the public's trust in its reconstruction efforts.

Mizuno, a top-level bureaucrat at the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry, was loaned to the Reconstruction Agency in August 2012. He was tasked with working out a basic policy to support the livelihoods of children and other victims of the Fukushima nuclear crisis under legislation enacted about a year ago.

Bureaucrats should be allowed to dispatch messages to the public on their private Twitter accounts, but it goes without saying that they must be responsible for the content of their tweets. Article 99 of the National Public Service Act stipulates that officials of the central government must not damage the trust in their positions or take any action that disgraces the entire bureaucracy.

Nevertheless, it has recently come to light that Mizuno slandered legislators and an NGO supporting reconstruction efforts on his private Twitter account, identifying himself as a national public servant.

After attending a rally organized by a citizens group, he tweeted, "I attended a meeting where I was intensely jeered by left-wing s---s."

Furthermore, he tweeted that an outstanding issue had been "resolved" when officials decided to leave it ambiguous, implying that he hailed procrastination on the issue.

The tweets are clearly condescending and lack a sense of responsibility for implementing measures to support the livelihoods of Fukushima victims.

The Reconstruction Agency, which says it will consider punishing Mizuno, should deal strictly with the matter. It should also examine whether his actions obstructed the performance of the agency's duties.

The government has already come under pressure to respond to revelations that a portion of public funds allocated to local governments affected by the disasters for reconstruction efforts was used outside the disaster areas.

The government tightened regulations on the use of state funds earmarked for disaster recovery following the revelations of misuse. However, it has been unable to check the use of funds provided to local bodies that are not under state control. Although the disaster recovery funding system was created by the previous government led by the Democratic Party of Japan, the Abe administration must monitor how the money is being used. The national government should promptly take concrete measures to address the misuse, such as freezing the allocation of remaining reconstruction funds.

Most government officials assigned to help restore areas affected by the disasters and support victims' livelihoods are working earnestly and enthusiastically. However, the public's trust in their efforts could be lost in an instant as a result of just one senior official's damaging words and deeds and the national government's insensitivity to the use of taxpayers' money.

To restore the public's confidence, the government has no choice but to demonstrate to society that it is steadily and patiently working on tasks to restore disaster-hit areas and support victims' livelihoods.

June 13, 2013

Reconstruction official insults citizens groups, Diet members on Twitter

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201306130069

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A Reconstruction Agency official in charge of supporting those affected by the 2011 nuclear disaster called a citizens group "stupid leftists" and slandered Diet members on his Twitter account.

Yasuhisa Mizuno, 45, a counselor, has admitted in the agency's questioning that he posted the comments. The agency plans to impose disciplinary measures against him shortly.

Mizuno, who is on the fast-track career course of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, was dispatched to the agency on loan in August 2012 after serving as vice mayor of Funabashi in Chiba Prefecture.

As a person in charge of the law to support children and other people affected by the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, he has often made business trips to Fukushima Prefecture.

In his Twitter account, he called himself a "central government employee." After taking part in a gathering held by a citizens group, he tweeted, "I attended a gathering in which I was repeatedly abused by stupid leftists."

Mizuno also criticized lawmakers who did not submit notices for questions they want to ask in the Diet as required.

"Because a party for workers is not submitting its notices, many (government) employees are now working late-night overtime," he tweeted.

Initially, he posted comments under his own name, but after being dispatched to the Reconstruction Agency, he began to post anonymously.

According to the agency, its employees' use of Twitter is not restricted.

Referring to Mizuno's tweets, Reconstruction Minister Takumi Nemoto said in the Lower House special committee on reconstruction on June 13: "If it is true, they are inappropriate remarks for a central government employee to make. If the tweets offended the people concerned, I want to apologize to them openly."

He added: "I am now confirming the facts of the matter. Based on the results, I intend to take appropriate (disciplinary) measures against him."

Reconstruction Agency official's tweets slander NGO, lawmakers supporting Fukushima victims

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130613p2a00m0na008000c.html>

A senior Reconstruction Agency official in charge of supporting Fukushima nuclear disaster victims has slandered lawmakers and an NGO on his private Twitter account in connection with their recovery efforts, prompting the agency to mull punishing him, it has been learned.

Yasuhisa Mizuno, 45, a counselor at the Reconstruction Agency, repeatedly tweeted defamatory comments on parties and issues related to his duties, calling attendants of an NGO-sponsored meeting "left-wing s---s" and hailing the procrastination of a pending issue as a "settlement."

Alerted that his tweets could raise doubts about the government's disaster recovery efforts, the Reconstruction Agency started questioning Mizuno and is mulling punishment against him, saying, "We will make a proper response based on the results confirmed." His anonymous Twitter account, in which he identified himself as a "national public servant," has since been deleted. He had earlier identified his name on the account until October last year and had tweeted at least some 600 times since assuming his current post.

During a session of the House of Representatives special committee on reconstruction from the Great East Japan Earthquake on June 13, Reconstruction Minister Takumi Nemoto bowed in apology over Mizuno's tweets, saying, "If he really made those statements, they were inappropriate as a national public servant."

I'd like to deeply apologize to the concerned parties," adding that the minister will respond to the issue properly based on the results confirmed.

Takayuki Kobayashi, a lower house member of the Liberal Democratic Party, said, "People who lost so many precious things to the quake disaster have been striving to get their lives going, and his tweets are extremely disrespectful of those who have been working so hard to support them. I urge strict responses to be taken."

Mizuno is a career bureaucrat at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, who formerly served as deputy mayor of the Chiba Prefecture city of Funabashi. He has been on loan to the Reconstruction Agency since August last year, where he is in charge of assisting nuclear disaster victims in Fukushima Prefecture. Some 150,000 residents of the prefecture are still living as evacuees after more than two years since the onset of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant crisis.

Mizuno is specifically in charge of putting together a basic policy on concrete support measures based on the Act on the Protection and Support for the Children and other Victims of the TEPCO Disaster, which was enacted in June last year at the initiative of a group of suprapartisan lawmakers.

On March 7, Mizuno attended a meeting organized by a citizens group at the Members' Office Building of the House of Representatives and explained the progress of the basic policy compilation as a responsible official at the Reconstruction Agency. Later that day, he tweeted, "I attended a meeting where I was intensely jeered by left-wing s---s."

On March 8, he tweeted, "One of the pending issues was resolved today. To be precise, the concerned parties agreed to leave the matter ambiguous, without determining black or white" -- with the apparent implication that he hailed the procrastination of the issue.

The compilation of the basic policy has been delayed even though a year has passed since the enactment of the disaster support act, due in part to a delay in determining the standards for radiation doses in areas subject to support measures.

On March 15, Reconstruction Minister Nemoto announced a package of support measures for disaster victims based on the law, apart from the pending basic policy compilation. However, because the content of the package showed a setback from what had initially been anticipated, lawmakers who were involved in the enactment of the law and citizens groups criticized the measures as having been "watered down."

On his Twitter account, Mizuno slandered those lawmakers and a Cabinet minister in a way that readers could almost identify them from the context, calling one Diet member as "looking like Doraemon" and one minister as a "habitual liar."

Mizuno declined to comment on his Twitter account during an interview with the Mainichi Shimbun on the evening of June 11, only stating, "I run the account privately" and "I don't remember." He deleted his account shortly after the interview.

Independent regulators

13.06.2013_No147 / News in Brief

Regulator Says 'Organisational And Human Factors' Contributed To Fukushima
<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2013/06/13/japan-regulator-blames-organisational-and-human-factors-for-fukushima>

Security & Safety

13 Jun (NucNet): Organisational and human factors, including the lack of an independent national nuclear regulator, contributed to the severity of the March 2011 Fukushima-Daiichi accident in Japan, a safety conference heard yesterday.

Kenzo Oshima, commissioner of the Japanese Nuclear Regulatory Authority, told the second European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group (Ensreg) Conference on Nuclear Safety in Europe in Brussels that the lack of independence of the national regulator meant little or no separation between the government and the regulatory body, resulting in a “cozy relationship” between the two. In effect, “the regulator was serving business interests”, he said.

In addition, it was left to operators to exercise their discretion when it came to the implementation of safety measures. The lack of mandatory measures made a weak framework for response to severe accidents. Any concerns voiced by the regulator resulted in the operator failing to exercise its discretion.

Mr Oshima highlighted the lack of a proper safety culture in Japan, which was dominated by a policy-culture of “nuclear infallibility”.

To resolve these issues, the Nuclear Regulation Authority was created in 2012 as an independent and transparent organisation.

Before the NRA was established, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) had both promoted nuclear energy and regulated it through a branch known as the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency. The NRA was instead established under the Ministry of the Environment.

The main challenge for Japan according to Mr Oshima is “to regain public confidence and trust” in nuclear power and safety. Japan has to fundamentally “re-build its safety culture”.

European regulatory authorities agreed that the Fukushima-Daiichi accident has highlighted the need for independent, transparent and accountable national regulators in order to avoid organisational difficulties leading to mishandling of severe accidents.

Philip Lowe, director-general of the Directorate-General for Energy at the European Commission said “we need to maintain and strengthen the independence of national authorities”.

Decontamination - Why bother?

June 16, 2013

Government secretly backtracks on Fukushima decontamination goal

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201306160022>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

With the government facing difficulty in finding disposal sites, municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture are being unofficially notified that the goal for completion of radioactive decontamination work in March 2014 may not be met, sources said.

The government also informed municipalities that it will not allow decontamination work to be redone in areas where radiation levels have not declined even after decontamination efforts have been completed.

Those remarks apparently contradict the government's official stance that it will accelerate decontamination efforts for areas impacted by the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant following the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. Without a clear explanation, the government has begun to backtrack on its policies.

The government aims to lower radiation levels in areas to one millisievert or less a year. It plans to achieve that goal in all of the evacuation zones in 11 municipalities in the prefecture within this fiscal year, which ends in March 2014, by spending a total of 1.5 trillion yen (about \$15 billion) by the end of the year.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe also said in March that the government will accelerate decontamination work and reconstruction activities.

However, the government is facing difficulties in securing sites to store waste contaminated with radioactive materials, due to local opposition. As a result, the government has yet to start decontamination work in five of the 11 municipalities where some or all residents were forced to evacuate due to high radiation levels.

Even in evacuation zones where the decontamination work has already begun, the progress rate of the work for houses was only 1 percent in Iitate village as of March.

In such circumstances, officials of five of the 11 municipalities said that they were told by the Environment Ministry in or after April that it would be difficult to achieve the goal within this fiscal year. Because of that, the town of Tomioka has begun to inform residents that the decontamination work will continue until the next fiscal year.

“The central government should officially admit the delay of the decontamination work and review the (decontamination) plans as early as possible,” said a Tomioka official in charge of the issue.

The ministry has also effectively rejected redoing decontamination efforts in areas where radiation levels have not declined. In a meeting with seven municipalities, held in May 27 to exchange opinions, the ministry told them, “As of now, we are not allowing the redoing of decontamination work.”

The stance is apparently contradictory to the government’s policy that redoing decontamination work could fall under the government’s fiscal measures to cover the costs. The policy was described in a document related to the government’s guidelines on decontamination work.

The contradiction is creating a backlash among municipalities because 25 municipalities have said that radiation levels have yet to decline to one millisievert in some of their areas even after decontamination work was completed.

As for decontamination plans, the Environment Ministry told The Asahi Shimbun that the policy of achieving the goal within this fiscal year is unchanged.

As for a second round of decontamination efforts, the ministry said that, currently, it has yet to target any areas. Therefore, that shows a priority being placed on areas where decontamination efforts have not been conducted at all.

“We cannot make drastic reviews until the July Upper House election,” said a high-ranking official of the ministry.

The decontamination work is apparently facing a slowdown. Though two years and three months have passed since the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, decontamination work has yet to start in many areas.

In addition, additional decontamination work is not being allowed, even if radiation levels do not decline as a result of decontamination efforts. Incidents of slipshod decontamination work have also been revealed. Citizens are also having growing doubts on the cost-benefit performance of the decontamination work.

Opinions of residents are mixed. Residents, especially elderly citizens who want to return to their houses as early as possible, are placing strong hopes on the decontamination work. Meanwhile, according to a survey conducted by the village of Iitate in June 2012, more than 40 percent of the respondents replied that they don't expect to benefit from the decontamination efforts. In a Tomioka town survey, whose

results were released in February this year, 40 percent of the respondents said that they have decided not to return to their houses.

Many of the affected people are also requesting assistance for their current livelihoods rather than decontamination efforts.

Unless the government shows a clear road map for the decontamination work, residents cannot make plans for their future.

Delay of decontamination work became obvious in March when progress rates of those efforts were compiled. However, Environment Minister Nobuteru Ishihara said in the Diet in May, "There are no changes in the government's plans."

On the surface, the government is saying that it will accelerate decontamination efforts. Behind the scenes, however, it is showing an opposite stance. That means that the government is abandoning its responsibilities.

The government needs to show realistic decontamination policies to the public and make efforts to obtain their support for them.

The Fukushima prefectural government has not recorded any cases in which a second round of decontamination work has been allowed.

In the village of Yugawa in the prefecture, decontamination work was completed in fiscal 2012, which ended in March 2013. On June 5, the village asked the ministry for a second round of efforts, fearing that radiation levels could rise again due to melting snow. However, the ministry rejected the request, saying, "In principle, we cannot do them."

"The Environment Ministry's attitude toward us has always been terrible. We are not surprised at such a rejection," said an official of the village.

(This article was compiled from reports from Miki Aoki, Tamiyuki Kihara and Toshio Tada.)

What can be behind rate increases

June 17, 2013

KEPCO rate hikes found to include costs for empty company housing units

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130617p2a00m0na009000c.html>

Customer rate increases demanded by the Osaka-based Kansai Electric Power Co. (KEPCO) beginning in May have included upkeep costs for a total of some 70 empty units within five company housing and dormitory properties, it has been revealed.

During a review previously undertaken in conjunction with the price increases, it had been revealed that fee reduction appraisals were being assessed for maintenance costs associated with housing properties with a large number of unoccupied units. However, the recent discovery made it clear that electricity fees were including the upkeep fees for completely unoccupied buildings, which is certain to draw criticism from customers.

Electricity fees are derived by calculating the necessary fees (initial costs) for providing power, as well as factoring in the ability to derive profits. In applying for a fee hike this year, KEPCO submitted documents to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry calculating the costs for the approximately 250 buildings that were leased from outside companies and utilized for company housing and dormitories (totaling some 5,000 individual units) as part of initial costs. Permission from the ministry was asked for, and granted, to reflect such costs within customer fees.

The inclusion of the fees within the total cost calculations was discovered when the Mainichi obtained copies of these internal documents, and spoke with ministry officials who revealed that the number of occupants within the five buildings in question was zero in fiscal 2012, and that the projected number of occupants within the same buildings for the period up to fiscal 2015 was also zero.

Transparency

June 17, 2013

Familiar faces win ¥1.6 billion in nuclear public relations projects after Fukushima disaster

By SATOSHI OTANI/ Staff Writer

Nearly 70 percent of government spending to regain public trust in nuclear energy has landed at organizations that employ retired bureaucrats or former executives of electric power companies, The Asahi Shimbun has found.

In the two fiscal years after the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the industry ministry awarded 49 contracts and the science ministry provided 18 for various projects worth 2.48 billion yen (\$26.2 million) to publicize and educate the public on nuclear energy.

Ten organizations with either retired bureaucrats or executives of utilities won 33 of those projects worth **1.63 billion yen**, or 66 percent of the total. The remaining projects were contracted out to advertising companies, according to documents.

The funds used in the projects come from taxes that are included in monthly electric bills.

The budget to promote nuclear energy was cut to about half of the level before the Fukushima nuclear disaster amid concerns about additional accidents and criticism against government officials who had touted the safety of nuclear energy.

The ministries' remaining programs were tailored to regain public trust by providing information on nuclear energy policy and promoting an understanding of radiation.

The cozy ties between politicians, bureaucrats, regulators and businesses in the "nuclear village" were also attacked for promoting collusion. One target of criticism was "amakudari," the practice in which retired ministry officials gain employment at companies and organizations that are overseen by those ministries.

Officials from the industry and science ministries said the hiring practices of organizations did not influence the bidding process for the projects.

"The presence of retired bureaucrats is not a standard for deciding on contract winners, and there is nothing arbitrary about the selection process," said an official with the Nuclear Fuel Cycle Industry Division within the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy under the industry ministry.

However, a number of the contracts were won by default--there were no other bidders.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry spent 1.48 billion yen in its public relations program for nuclear energy in fiscal 2011 and 2012. The program is mainly directed at citizens and municipalities hosting nuclear power plants, and much of the expenses were used to arrange lectures by nuclear energy scientists and provide workshops related to radioactive waste.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology used 1 billion yen in its program to support education on nuclear energy over the same period. The projects included the leasing of radiation detection equipment, seminars on radiation targeting teachers, and advertisements in newspapers and on TV.

Documents obtained from the two ministries showed that 34 private-sector companies as well as foundations and other organizations won contracts over those two years.

Six contract winners were employing retired bureaucrats from the two ministries as directors. And three of them--the Japan Science Foundation, the Radioactive Waste Management Funding and Research Center and the Tsukuba Expo '85 Memorial Foundation--had retired bureaucrats on the payroll as full-time executives.

Those three organizations were the only ones that revealed the pay of their executives. Full-time directors had annual salaries of about 16 million yen.

Four other contract-winning organizations had retired or current executives of electric power companies serving as directors or auditors.

Contracts are normally won in an open bidding process. But almost all of the public relations projects were awarded based on the commissioning body's appraisal of the bid proposal and technical skills.

Only one bid was placed for 10 of the 33 contracts won by the 10 organizations. The average winning bid was 96.8 percent of the predetermined maximum amount of the contract.

Before the Fukushima nuclear accident, between 2 billion and 3 billion yen a year was spent on public relations projects for nuclear power.

But after the triple meltdowns at the plant, those projects came under fire for spreading the false "safety myth" about nuclear power generation.

The two ministries scrapped some public relations projects that had been regular fixtures, such as poster contests and advertisements in in-flight and women's magazines.

"After the Fukushima nuclear accident, we conducted projects to meet the needs of the public in learning about radiation," said an official with the Atomic Energy Division of the science ministry. "Bidding is conducted based on established regulations, and we do not give priority to those organizations with retired bureaucrats."

However, one project in Hokkaido had a double involvement with retired officials.

In Horonobe in northern Hokkaido, a facility designed to educate the public about burying radioactive waste within an artificial barrier was built next to a larger center operated by the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA).

Construction on the facility started in fiscal 2008, and 910 million yen had been spent on the project by fiscal 2012.

The facility opened in April 2010 and will be completed this fiscal year.

Experiments at the facility are conducted jointly by the JAEA and the Radioactive Waste Management Funding and Research Center.

The research center has won contracts to build and manage the facility year after year because it has been the sole bidder.

But since there are no center employees at the Horonobe facility, the actual management work has been subcontracted to Tokyo-based Pesco Co.

Three former high-ranking officials of JAEA now work for Pesco, including the company president.

Why MOX so important is - (to Takahama)

June 17, 2013

Kepeco's MOX load to arrive June 27

by Eric Johnston

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/17/national/kepcos-mox-load-to-arrive-june-27/#.Ub8UvdhBpg4>

OSAKA – Two ships carrying uranium-plutonium oxide fuel for the Takahama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture, will arrive on June 27 — the first batch of MOX to be sent to Japan since the Fukushima disaster in March 2011.

The controversial fuel is destined for reactor 3 at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama plant. But with the reactors still idle and stricter safety regulations taking effect next month, it's unclear how long the fuel might sit in storage. The Nuclear Regulation Authority still has to clear the plant before it can be restarted. The U.K.-registered Pacific Heron and Pacific Egret left France in mid-April with 20 MOX fuel assemblies. While Kepco and French nuclear firm Areva SA, which made the fuel, have not released figures, Greenpeace estimates the two ships are carrying about 10 tons of MOX, which is made with weapons-grade plutonium.

Kepco hopes to restart the units 3 and 4 after new regulatory standards take effect next month. The utility has said it won't restart them without approval from Fukui Gov. Issei Nishikawa, although it is not legally necessary.

That is not expected to be a huge political problem. Nishikawa is strongly pro-nuclear, but he has also said his judgment on giving the green light to restart reactor 3 and its new MOX fuel load will be based on the new regulatory standards.

For Takahama, the arrival of the MOX is seen as a critical step to economic recovery. About ¥4 billion, or nearly 55 percent of Takahama's fiscal 2013 budget, comes from nuclear-related subsidies provided by the central government. In past years, over 60 percent of its budget has come from such subsidies.

Over 40 local firms have contracts at the town's four nuclear power plants for a variety of goods and services. During regular inspections, which occur roughly once every 13 months, up to 2,500 of Takahama's 11,000 residents have been hired to help the inspectors, and the secondary economic impact on local stores and hotels, with their guests from Kepco and the central government, is huge.

Takahama estimates keeping just one reactor idle will cause an annual revenue loss of ¥500 million in subsidies and secondary economic benefits.

Nobody died because of Fukushima disaster

June 19, 2013

Meltdowns haven't killed anyone: LDP bigwig

by Reiji Yoshida

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/19/national/meltdowns-havent-killed-anyone-ldp-bigwig/#.UcHFXthBpg4>

Staff Writer

Liberal Democratic Party policy chief Sanae Takaichi has created a stir by saying the 2011 Fukushima meltdowns didn't kill anyone and arguing the government should restart reactors nationwide given Japan's scarce energy resources.

Delivering a speech in Kobe on Monday, Takaichi said the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 plant "has not claimed the lives of any people," and argued the nation should "utilize nuclear power stations after securing the maximum possible safety."

No deaths have been confirmed to be directly related to the massive quantities of radioactive materials spewed from the Fukushima No. 1 plant's wrecked reactors since the March 2011 triple meltdowns.

However, hundreds of elderly people and hospitalized patients around the stricken complex were forced to evacuate because of the disaster, resulting in at least 70 deaths, according to the final report by the investigatory Diet committee on the crisis.

Takaichi's remarks were heavily covered in media reports, forcing Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga to try to defend her Tuesday by claiming certain parts of the speech were taken out of context.

"I saw the context, and I don't think it's a problematic remark," Suga told a news conference Tuesday. "It is true (the three meltdowns) did not kill anybody."

But when asked about the fatalities caused by the evacuation of elderly and hospitalized people, Suga admitted some of them had died and said "we recognize the vast damage."

"It's true some people died at evacuation places," Suga said.

The LDP-led government has pledged to reactivate nuclear plants across the country once their safety is confirmed, based on new regulation standards that are set to take effect in early July.

Nuclear activists have also criticized Prime Minister Shinzo Abe for helping Japanese firms to export nuclear power equipment and technologies at a time when all but two of the nation's reactors are still suspended in view of the Fukushima crisis.

Scientists, including those at the U.N., generally agree they are unlikely to find a significant statistical increase in deaths from cancers in the coming years from the nuclear crisis, given the relatively low radiation exposure of residents near Fukushima No. 1.

People's anger forces LDP policy chief to apologise

June 19, 2013

LDP's Takaichi retracts death toll comment after sparking anger in Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201306190073>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Amid calls for her resignation and growing outrage in Fukushima Prefecture, the ruling party's policy chief on June 19 apologized for saying the Fukushima nuclear disaster has not directly caused any deaths. "It was regrettable if people in Fukushima Prefecture felt bitter and were angry," Sanae Takaichi, chairwoman of the Liberal Democratic Party's Policy Research Council, told reporters at the LDP headquarters in Tokyo. "I will retract everything I said about the energy policy."

Politicians and families of people who died in the evacuation process described Takaichi's June 17 comment as insensitive, baffling and inaccurate.

Although the central government has defended Takaichi, the criticism has been so great that some members of the LDP want to limit her public appearances during the Upper House election in July.

Takaichi made the comment when she was arguing for the need to restart idle nuclear reactors during a meeting of the LDP's Hyogo prefectural chapter in Kobe.

"We are in a situation in which no one has ever been killed by an accident at a nuclear power plant (in Japan), including Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant," she said.

Takaichi later said she wanted to emphasize that no one has died due to radiation exposure from the Fukushima disaster. But opposition party leaders said Takaichi was missing the point.

"Some people died due to stress during their prolonged stays at evacuation centers. It was undoubtedly caused by the nuclear accident," Goshi Hosono, secretary-general of the Democratic Party of Japan, told reporters on June 18. "Anyone who cannot accept the seriousness of such a situation has no right to manage things at the center of the government."

Mizuho Fukushima, leader of the Social Democratic Party, was more blunt.

"The LDP, which has promoted nuclear power, is most responsible for the Fukushima accident," she said. "(Takaichi's remark) was outrageous. She should resign her post as the policy chief."

And Toru Hashimoto, co-leader of the Japan Restoration Party, who himself has come under fire for his remarks about wartime "comfort women," said of Takaichi's comment, "It is wrong to judge the nuclear problem based on whether people died or not."

However, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga on June 18 defended Takaichi's remark, saying, "Seen from the context, I don't think it so problematic."

Not all LDP members agreed.

The LDP's Fukushima prefectural chapter filed a protest to the party headquarters on June 19, demanding Takaichi retract her remark and apologize.

Takao Hiraide, secretary-general of the chapter, said the previous day: "With many prefectural citizens having died during the evacuation, their relatives are heartbroken. Takaichi's remark was truly regrettable."

A Lower House member who belongs to the LDP chapter was furious and bewildered. "With the central government and the LDP saying they would stay close to the pain in the disaster-stricken areas, what she said goes exactly against it."

According to Fukushima Prefecture, 1,415 residents in the prefecture have died during the forced evacuation or after they were relocated since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the nuclear disaster in March 2011.

About 160,000 people in the prefecture still live in evacuation.

Forty patients at Futaba Hospital in Okuma, about 4 kilometers from the crippled plant, had died by the end of March 2011 during the chaos in the evacuation process.

"(Takaichi's) comment tramples on the feelings of people in Fukushima," said a resident whose family member was one of the Futaba patients who died. "I was unhappy about (Prime Minister Shinzo) Abe's plans to restart nuclear reactors, and I cannot stand his subordinate's remark, too."

Relatives of several patients who died in the evacuation sued TEPCO earlier this month, arguing that the deaths were caused by the accident.

In addition, some residents are still suffering from anxiety after being temporarily evacuated to an area with high radiation levels due to the government's failure to release predictions on the spread of radioactive materials immediately after the accident.

Tamotsu Baba, mayor of Namie, which was designated as a no-entry zone after the accident, said Takaichi displayed a lack of sensitivity to the continuing plight of the affected residents.

"It was an outrageous comment, given that town residents are living hard lives and were scattered in the evacuation," he said. "I am afraid that memories of the accident seem to be fading."

The LDP, currently well ahead of other parties in opinion polls, plans to include the resumption of nuclear power operations in its platform for the Upper House election.

Yoshimi Watanabe, who heads Your Party, said Takaichi's comment "showed one aspect of the LDP's intoxication caused by the high support rates."

However, many LDP members have expressed concerns that Takaichi's remark could hurt the party in the election and fuel opposition to its plan to restart nuclear reactors.

"I don't want Takaichi to make a campaign speech," a senior LDP official said.

Abe plans to visit Fukushima Prefecture on June 30 for the third time.

June 20, 2013

LDP policy chief retracts Fukushima comments

by Reiji Yoshida

Staff Writer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/20/national/ldp-policy-chief-retracts-fukushima-comments/#.UcK2RthSb9k>

Facing flak from both the opposition — and her own party — Sanae Takaichi, policy chief for the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, retracted earlier remarks that no one was killed in the 2011 Fukushima meltdowns and that the government should restart reactors nationwide.

Takaichi told reporters Wednesday that she would retract all of the remarks she made Monday during a speech in Kobe, adding that it was up to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to decide her fate.

Abe, who was later briefed on the matter during his diplomatic trip in Europe, said he would keep Takaichi in the position, but warned her against making remarks "that could cause misunderstandings," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said.

Abe and Suga have apparently rushed to stave off any political damage from the controversial remarks ahead of a critical Upper House election next month.

In the wake of Takaichi's comments, Suga contacted her several times to discuss the matter, a government source said.

"It's true (her words) caused misunderstanding," Suga said. "A politician should be careful not to make any remarks that could lead to misunderstandings."

No deaths have been confirmed to be directly related to the massive amount of radioactive materials spewed from the Fukushima No. 1 plant's wrecked reactors since the March 2011 triple meltdowns. However, the hasty evacuation of elderly and hospitalized patients resulted in at least 70 deaths, and many other evacuees from Fukushima Prefecture died at shelters or killed themselves after the meltdowns.

Earlier the same day, the LDP's Fukushima prefectural chapter submitted a letter of protest to party headquarters in Tokyo, saying Takaichi had ignored those victims as well as numerous Fukushima residents still unable to return to their hometowns because of dangerous levels of radiation.

Abe's Cabinet has urged party executives and Cabinet ministers in particular to avoid any gaffes that could hurt their electoral chances since his first Cabinet in 2006 and 2007 suffered political setbacks after a rash of ministerial scandals.

LDP policy chief apologizes for remarks on nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130619p2g00m0dm094000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The policy chief of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Liberal Democratic Party apologized Wednesday over her remarks that drew criticism for making light of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

"I retract (the remarks) and offer my apology," said Sanae Takaichi, who said on Monday that Japan should keep using atomic power while pointing out there was no death directly linked to the crisis.

The remarks sparked criticism from both ruling and opposition camps with the opposition parties urging her to resign as LDP policy chief and a lawmaker.

Takaichi told reporters at the party's headquarters that she has left the decision of whether she should resign as the LDP policy chief to "the hands of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe."

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said at a press conference that Abe wants Takaichi to stay on as policy chief, given that she has already backtracked on her remarks and apologized.

"The prime minister told me over the phone that he wanted Ms. Takaichi to be careful about what she says, and continue to soundly fulfill her role as policy chief. And I told her about that," Suga said.

The row over her remarks, however, could negatively affect Abe's position for restarting nuclear power reactors, most of which remain offline nationwide due to safety concerns.

In a speech in Kobe on Monday in which she called for the resumption of atomic power generation in Japan, Takaichi said, "No one has died" in the crisis following the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in eastern Japan, adding, "So, we have little choice but to utilize (nuclear reactors) while ensuring maximum safety."

After facing fierce criticism, Takaichi tried to clarify her remarks Tuesday, saying, "My way of phrasing things was bad." But On Wednesday, she even faced protest from a Cabinet member.

"I'm very angry," Masako Mori, minister in charge of declining birthrate, told reporters after meeting with Takaichi. Mori, a House of Councillors member, is elected from Fukushima Prefecture.

The LDP chapter in Fukushima submitted a letter of protest to the party's leadership, saying Takaichi "is not fully aware of the current situation in Fukushima and lacks consideration" for people affected by the crisis.

The letter also noted many people remain evacuated due to radiation fears, and that more than 1,400 people have died for reasons related to the disaster, including those who committed suicide due to negative mental health.

Radiation fears forced more than 150,000 people to flee their homes in Fukushima Prefecture as of May, the government said, while seriously damaging farming and fisheries industries in surrounding areas.

LDP politician apologizes for Fukushima remarks

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130619_24.html

A high-ranking member of Japan's ruling party has apologized for remarks she made about victims of the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

In a speech in Kobe on Monday, policy chief of Liberal Democratic Party Sanae Takaichi suggested that no one was killed by the nuclear disaster in Fukushima. She added that Japan should restart its idled nuclear plants while ensuring their safety.

The remarks caused a backlash from within the LDP. The secretary general of the party's Fukushima chapter, Takao Hiraide, visited LDP headquarters in Tokyo on Wednesday.

He said more than 1,400 people in the prefecture have been recognized as having died as a result of the disaster. They include people who died because of the stresses of evacuation and those who killed themselves due to anxiety.

Hiraide said Takaichi's remarks are inappropriate and that they lack consideration for the people of Fukushima. He submitted a letter demanding her to withdraw the remarks and apologize to residents.

Takaichi later told reporters that she retracts the remarks. She added that she regrets if her remarks caused people to suffer or feel anger. She apologized for offending residents and LDP members who are devoting themselves to reconstruction efforts.

Jun. 19, 2013 - Updated 07:11 UTC

LDP policy chief clarifies remarks on nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130619p2g00m0dm047000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Sanae Takaichi, policy chief of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Liberal Democratic Party, on Tuesday tried to clarify her earlier remarks that drew criticism for seeming to make light of the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant in 2011.

In a speech in Kobe on Monday in which she called for the resumption of atomic power generation in Japan, where most reactors remain offline due to safety concerns, Takaichi said, "No one has died (in nuclear power plant accidents) including the Fukushima plants which suffered devastating explosions" after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in eastern Japan.

"So, we have little choice but to utilize (nuclear reactors) while ensuring maximum safety," she added.

Takaichi told reporters Tuesday, "If I have caused misunderstanding, it may be that my way of phrasing things was bad."

"I am aware that there are people who died due to poor health (after the disaster), even if it was not actually caused by radiation exposure, and others who killed themselves after losing their jobs and livelihood," she said.

Takaichi added she is not supporting the restart of nuclear power generation simply because there had been no deaths in the Fukushima plant disaster.

Radiation fears forced some 150,000 people to flee their homes in Fukushima Prefecture as of May, according to the government. The crisis has also seriously damaged farming and fisheries businesses in surrounding areas.

Takaichi's remarks sparked criticism from opposition parties, as well as from some lawmakers within the LDP and government.

"I believe politicians must be very careful with their own words so to avoid causing misunderstandings," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters.

But the top government spokesman also defended Takaichi, saying that some media reports had played up her remarks without taking the context into account.

June 19, 2013(Mainichi Japan)

Meanwhile "the agonies of Fukushima continue"

June 19, 2013

VOX POPULI: Shameful selective memory regarding nuclear power issue

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/vox/AJ201306190034>

A farmer who grew organic vegetables in Sukagawa, Fukushima Prefecture, hanged himself just 13 days after the onset of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The man left behind more than 7,500 heads of cabbage that he painstakingly grew. The nuclear disaster occurred just as the cabbages were ready for harvest.

The farmer's bereaved family demanded compensation from the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., through the nuclear damage claim dispute resolution center set up by the government. The two sides are expected to reach a settlement soon. I found the following words from the farmer's 37-year-old son, Kazuya Tarukawa, striking: "We filed a claim not because we wanted money, but because we wanted to stop (TEPCO and the government) from saying the nuclear accident caused no deaths."

I think Tarukawa spoke his true feelings.

I don't know whether she knew of the plight of the cabbage farmer or not, but on June 17, Sanae Takaichi, who chairs the Liberal Democratic Party Policy Research Council, said, "This is not a situation in which the accident caused deaths." She made the remark in connection with plans to restart nuclear power plants that have been idle since the disaster. I wonder which of the remarks can win public understanding.

The problem is not Takaichi's alone. **The Abe administration's inclination to go back to nuclear power generation is made up of the three arrows of "taking advantage of confusion," "leaving questions unanswered" and "chipping away at barriers."** With those in the business world acting as cheerleaders, the administration is moving little by little toward its goal of restarting idled nuclear reactors while hiding and giving a glimpse of its true intent. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Shinzo **Abe is traveling overseas as the top salesman of Japanese nuclear technology.**

A newly approved white paper on energy makes no reference to the proposal made by the Democratic Party of Japan-led government last year to phase out nuclear power generation.

The white paper reflects a drastic "changing of the times." Many people will be surprised to hear that the government has not taken down its banner of "moving away from dependence on nuclear power."

Before we knew it, the focus of politics shifted to the economy, overshadowing the nuclear power issue. **But the agonies of Fukushima continue. Despite this fact, politicians are starting to speak about the continuing aftereffects of the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake in the past tense.** The Upper House election is quickly approaching. Let us carefully examine what is going on in this current political climate.

--The Asahi Shimbun, June 19

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Vox Populi, Vox Dei is a popular daily column that takes up a wide range of topics, including culture, arts and social trends and developments. Written by veteran Asahi Shimbun writers, the column provides useful perspectives on and insights into contemporary Japan and its culture.

Vox Populi, Vox Dei is a daily column that runs on Page 1 of the vernacular Asahi Shimbun.

"The problem is that (scandals) crop up one after another"

June 20, 2013

TEPCO withheld data on contaminated well water for weeks

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201306200076>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

After finding tritium levels higher than the safety standard in well water at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, Tokyo Electric Power Co. withheld the information from the public for nearly three weeks.

The company on June 19 disclosed that 500,000 becquerels of tritium per liter of water, eight times the legal limit, were detected. It also said that 1,000 becquerels of strontium, 30 times the legal limit, were detected.

TEPCO began taking water samples from the well on the sea side of the turbine buildings for the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors on May 24.

Analysis results about tritium were conveyed to plant officials on May 31 and shared within the company on June 14.

A TEPCO official said the announcement was not made until June 19 because additional analyses were carried out as there had been problems in past measurements.

The official also said the company waited until June 18 to see analysis results about strontium, which were due that day.

But on June 14 the utility already began considering measures to prevent water from flowing into the sea under the ground.

The well, 27 meters from the sea, is close to a water intake system of the No. 2 reactor, an area from which highly radioactive water leaked into the sea in April 2011.

TEPCO suspects that the contaminated water spread underground at the time and later flowed into the well, one of the three it dug in November and December.

The company plans to dig four wells nearby to investigate the situation and also inject an agent into the ground along the coast to prevent contaminated water leaking into the sea.

The discovery of high levels of strontium and tritium is expected to delay TEPCO's plan to pump groundwater at the plant and release it into the sea to slow an increase in radioactive water.

Kazunori Endo, of the Soma-Futaba fisheries cooperative in Fukushima Prefecture, said he was exasperated with the series of problems of contaminated water at the plant.

Members of his cooperative are opposed to the plan to dump groundwater into the sea, although TEPCO said the water contains lower levels of radioactivity than nearby rivers.

The opposition grew after June 3 when TEPCO said that radioactivity levels in the water were higher than initially reported due to a mistake in measurements.

"The problem is that (scandals) crop up one after another," Endo said. He added that TEPCO must solve the latest problem before trying to release groundwater into the sea.

Members of his cooperative have been preparing to resume full-scale operations along the prefectural coast following the March 2011 nuclear disaster.

Akio Komori, a TEPCO managing executive officer, visited the Fukushima prefectural government office on June 19 to apologize for the high levels of strontium and tritium.

Tetsuya Hasegawa, head of the living environment department, asked Komori to identify the cause of high radioactivity levels, investigate the environmental impact and prevent the spread of contaminated water.

“It was regrettable that (radioactive water was found) at a time when we are calling for all possible measures,” he said.

Fukushima Governor Yuhei Sato told senior prefectural officials on June 19 to enhance monitoring of any effects of radioactivity in the ocean.

“We have repeatedly told TEPCO to take thorough precautions against contaminated water,” Sato said. “(The latest discovery) was regrettable.”

Insincere and too smug

June 42, 2013

EDITORIAL: Kansai Electric should lose its smug attitude

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201306240044>

The only nuclear reactors currently operating in Japan are at Kansai Electric Power Co.’s Oi plant in Fukui Prefecture. The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) has decided to allow their continued provisional operations until September, when they are shut down for regular inspections.

The government decided on June 19 that the new safety standards for nuclear power plants will be enforced on July 8. Essentially, the operations of the two reactors at the Oi plant should be suspended before the new standards take effect. However, the NRA will likely judge that the two reactors largely meet the new safety standards.

The NRA apparently will take a realistic approach based on an examination of “whether the two reactors have problems that are big enough to suspend operations” before peak electricity consumption in summer. The nuclear watchdog seems to have made efforts to see whether the two reactors are meeting the new safety standards.

However, we disagree with the NRA’s expected approval of the continued operations because it has not reached a conclusion on experts’ indication that an active fault lies directly below an important facility of the Oi plant.

If the NRA concludes there is an active fault or faces some other serious problems, it should immediately suspend the reactor operations even before the regular inspections start.

NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka has clearly said as much. As a matter of course, postponed decisions on serious issues cannot be tolerated in any official examination for the Oi and other nuclear plants concerning the new safety standards.

What is more problematic than the NRA is Kansai Electric’s insincere attitude.

The NRA's evaluation report criticized Kansai Electric, saying, "(The utility) looked as if it were trying to find the lowest possible bar to clear the new safety standards by proposing safeguard measures by piecemeal."

Kansai Electric's geological surveys made little progress. As a result, no data were available to see whether the fault running below the key facility is active.

To evaluate the quake-resistance capabilities of the Oi plant, the NRA asked Kansai Electric to consider a case in which three active faults running near the plant's site move together. However, the utility resisted the request for more than one month.

Kansai Electric appeared firmly convinced from the first that it would be impossible for the NRA to halt operations of the two reactors at the Oi plant. The company does not seem to be putting a top priority on safety. **If the utility continues to take such an attitude, it is not qualified to operate nuclear power plants.**

Electric power companies have used their detailed technological knowledge to conveniently manipulate regulation authorities in certain aspects related to the safety of nuclear power generation. Kiyoshi Kurokawa, chairman of the Diet's Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission, said regulation authorities have become "captives" of electric power companies. He pointed out that supervisory functions over nuclear power plants have collapsed in Japan.

The NRA is at least trying to reflect on such a system. Electric power companies must abandon their old ways of thinking, fully cooperate with the NRA and change their attitudes to ones that secure the highest level of safety.

The public is still taking a strict view of electric power companies. Those companies should understand the realities surrounding them and reflect seriously on their attitudes.

TEPCO's staffing concerns

June 19, 2013

Tepco minutes reveal staff exodus concerns

Top executives fretted over future as pay cuts caused workers to bolt

by Tsuyoshi Inajima and Yuji Okada
Bloomberg

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/19/business/tepco-minutes-reveal-staff-exodus-concerns/#.UcCN3NhBpg4>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. executives spent dozens of meetings fretting about the utility's future as hundreds of younger employees quit over salary cuts after the Fukushima No. 1 reactor meltdowns, according to minutes obtained by Bloomberg News.

“The company could quickly deteriorate” as workers leave at “a rapidly accelerating rate,” an unidentified executive said at an Oct. 4 meeting last year of the government-backed fund designed to bail out Tepco, which faces an estimated ¥11 trillion in cleanup costs from the nuclear crisis.

The comments are in redacted proceedings of 23 meetings of the fund’s steering committee from Oct. 3, 2011, to this April 8, obtained through a freedom of information request.

Almost 1,200 employees voluntarily resigned in the two years that ended in March, Tepco Managing Executive Officer Mamoru Muramatsu said in an April 8 meeting, according to the minutes. Turnover among employees under 30 accounted for about half of all voluntary departures, Tepco President Naomi Hirose said at a Nov. 12 meeting.

“The biggest reason is money,” Hirose said, according to the minutes. “It’s difficult for us to stop them when they say they have loans and have to take care of kids and so on.”

The notes offer the first full view of the committee’s operations and talks among senior officials involved in the utility’s revival following the March 2011 meltdowns at its Fukushima No. 1 plant. The workings of the committee are contained in 227 pages, parts of which mask most attendants’ names and agenda items deemed too sensitive to be made public, according to a letter provided by the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund to Bloomberg as part of the request.

The utility cut annual salaries by 25 percent for managers and 20 percent for workers under its turnaround plan released in May last year. The average annual salary of Tepco employees over the three years ending in March 2015 will be reduced to ¥5.9 million, the utility said in a July 25 statement.

Motivation among remaining Tepco employees may flag because of uncertainty about how much of the Fukushima cleanup costs the company will be required to shoulder, three unidentified attendants of the Oct. 4 meeting said, according to the minutes.

Tepco, which has accumulated ¥2.7 trillion in combined losses for the past three fiscal years, had a workforce of 48,757 on a consolidated basis as of March 31, down about 5,300 from the beginning of fiscal 2011, it said in a May 9 statement.

Kansai Electric Power Co. and Chubu Electric Power Co., Japan’s second- and third-biggest utilities by generating capacity, added workers in the two fiscal years to March 31, 2012, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. Kepeco’s workforce expanded 2.7 percent to 32,961, while Chubu Electric’s rose 2.3 percent to 29,774.

Tepco had around 3,000 workers at its Fukushima No. 1 plant and 1,300 at its No. 2 plant as of early June, spokeswoman Kaoru Suzuki said, adding that staffing fluctuates depending on operations.

Peak staffing after the disaster started totaled 4,000 at the Fukushima No. 1 complex and 2,250 at the No. 2 power station. Tepco has secured enough workers to continue operations at the two plants for the time being, she said.

Bullet point summaries covering the major topics discussed by the steering committee have been released previously, but not the full minutes.

Members of the state-backed damage liability fund's steering committee include Central Japan Railway Co. Chairman Yoshiyuki Kasai, former Dowa Holdings Co. Chairman Hirokazu Yoshikawa and Tadashi Maeda, a senior official at the Japan Bank for International Cooperation.

In addition to staffing concerns, discussions related to the size of the Tepco's cleanup bill for the Fukushima meltdowns arise frequently in the minutes.

Final costs associated with Fukushima are unknown because decontamination projects are at an early stage, meaning the time isn't right to request additional aid from the government, an unidentified source said during meeting last Nov. 12 of the steering committee, after the utility sought state support.

"The biggest concern is that the company will collapse if we wait until the cost is fixed," Takashi Shimada, a former senior official at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry who is now an executive officer at Tepco, said in response, according to the minutes.

The government should review the structure under which Tepco must pay all decontamination costs, Shimada said at the time.

Tepco had paid ¥2.21 trillion in compensation by late April, it said in an April 30 statement. The utility asked the government's bailout fund to increase compensation aid by ¥666 billion to ¥3.79 trillion on May 31 after revising for a fourth time its estimate on compensation payments to those affected by the disaster.

The March 11, 2011, quake and tsunami shattered the Fukushima No. 1 plant, causing three of its reactors to suffer core meltdowns, forcing around 160,000 people to evacuate the ensuing radioactive fallout and leaving some areas uninhabitable for decades. The catastrophe also led to the eventual halt of all the

nation's nuclear reactors, only two of which have been restarted, effectively shutting down a critical energy source that once supplied more than a quarter of Japan's electricity.

More than ¥10 trillion will be needed to pay compensation to those affected by the nuclear crisis and to clean up areas contaminated by radioactive substances from the Fukushima No. 1 plant, Tepco estimated Nov. 7 in a two-year business plan. Decommissioning the smashed reactors of the Fukushima No. 1 facility may "far exceed" the ¥1 trillion allocated by Tepco, it said at the time.

The government should "promptly consider establishing a new support framework to handle the huge amount of financial risk that exceeds the limit under the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund Law and the cost of decommissioning of the reactors," Tepco said at the time.

Asimo kin to probe plant

Kyodo

Tokyo Electric Power Co. said Monday it will conduct a probe at its crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant with a remote-controlled robot that uses technology originally developed for Honda Motor Co.'s Asimo humanoid robot.

The new robot, jointly developed by Honda and the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology, will be sent into the reactor 2 building Tuesday to check the radiation level and condition of high areas on the first floor.

The robot has an arm with 11 joints and it can examine areas as high as 7 meters even in a narrow space using a zoom camera, laser range finder and dosimeter at the tip of the arm.

In developing the robot, Honda said it has applied technologies used for the Asimom, including a system that enables simultaneous control of multiple joints.

The outcome of the probe is expected to be used for the planning of cleaning the radiation-contaminated building. Tepco is also considering using the robot to check the inside of other damaged buildings.

The utility plans to decommission reactors 1 to 4 when the process can be safely accomplished. The work is expected to take decades.

TEPCO tries do dismiss US sailors lawsuit

June 23, 2013

Tepco seeks dismissal of damages suit filed in U.S.

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/23/national/tepco-seeks-dismissal-of-damages-suit-filed-in-u-s/#.UcYRUdhSb9k>

LOS ANGELES – Kyodo

Tokyo Electric Power Co. has filed to dismiss a lawsuit in which around 50 plaintiffs are seeking damages from the utility in connection with the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The plaintiffs, including U.S. sailors dispatched to northeastern Japan for the relief operation following the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami, are seeking damages without fixing the price.

They are also demanding that Tepco set up a fund worth at least \$1 billion for medical checks and treatment, arguing they faced risks of cancer and radiation exposure.

In a statement submitted Friday to the U.S. federal court in San Diego, the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 power plant argued **the plaintiffs have not clarified what actually caused damage to their health and the suit should be filed in Japan**, site of the nuclear crisis.

The original group of plaintiffs sought \$110 million in damages when they filed the lawsuit Dec. 21. They changed their demands later, while the number of plaintiffs has since grown to include other U.S. military personnel and families.

The U.S. armed forces conducted the relief operation known as Operation Tomodachi in hard-hit coastal areas in coordination with the Self-Defense Forces.

See also :

TEPCO seeks dismissal of damages suit filed in U.S.

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130623p2g00m0dm007000c.html>

Secret promises to US

June 25, 2013

Japan made secret promise with U.S. to restart pluthermal nuclear program

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130625p2a00m0na006000c.html>

A Japanese prime ministerial envoy secretly promised to the United States that Japan would resume its controversial "pluthermal" program, using light-water reactors to burn plutonium, according to documents obtained by the Mainichi.

The secret promise was made by Hiroshi Ogushi, then parliamentary secretary of the Cabinet Office, to Daniel Poneman, deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Energy, during Ogushi's visit to the United States on behalf of then Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda in September last year.

The revelation comes as Japan's pluthermal project remains suspended in the wake of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster due to safety concerns. The fact that a Japanese official promised to the U.S. to implement such a controversial project without a prior explanation to the Japanese public is expected to stir up controversy.

According to the official documents obtained by the Mainichi, upon being pressed to reduce the amount of plutonium in Japan that could be diverted to military use, Ogushi told Poneman that Japan would burn plutonium in plutonium-thermal (pluthermal) reactors. The then ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) was in the final stages of formulating its nuclear energy policy at the time.

Under the pluthermal plan, spent nuclear fuel generated in light-water reactors is reprocessed to extract plutonium, which is then mixed with uranium to create mixed-oxide (MOX) fuel for use in power generation. However, many experts have raised questions about the program, citing its high costs and the risks posed by the fuel's comparatively low melting point and the decreased effectiveness of control rods. The plan to burn plutonium in conventional reactors was introduced in 2009 because there were no prospects for putting the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor into practical use.

The documents that the Mainichi obtained are a compilation of cables recording the Ogushi-Poneman talks in the U.S. on Sept. 12 last year. During the meeting, Ogushi explained that Japan would inject all available policy resources to break away from nuclear power generation in the 2030s, that it would steadfastly promote the nuclear fuel cycle program in the medium and long term, and that Japan would end research on the Monju reactor after confirming its achievements. The explanation was in accordance

with the government's Innovative Strategy for Energy and the Environment, which was finalized on Sept. 14.

The promotion of a nuclear fuel cycle implies extraction of plutonium from spent nuclear fuel at the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant in Aomori Prefecture. But Japan's "zero nuclear power" policy and the suspension of the Monju reactor could leave the nation without a facility to burn plutonium. Poneman expressed concern that this would create a situation in which plutonium could be diverted to military use. In response, Ogushi promised the continuation of the pluthermal program to burn plutonium in light-water reactors.

During an interview with the Mainichi, Ogushi declined to reveal the details of the meeting, saying, "I can't disclose whom I met from a diplomatic standpoint." He added that he didn't remember the pluthermal issue.

The Innovative Strategy for Energy and the Environment states that "nuclear reactors whose safety has been confirmed will be utilized," but contains no reference to pluthermal plans.

Yukio Edano, a House of Representatives legislator who was serving as economy, trade and industry minister at the time, defended Ogushi, saying Japan had made no distinction between pluthermal and conventional reactors that were to be operated. There were no such micro-level talks in the Energy and Environment Council. I would have given the same answer (if I had visited the U.S.)."

The current administration led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe also upholds a policy to resume the pluthermal program, according to documents obtained by the Mainichi that were produced by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry on March 1 and submitted to minister Toshimitsu Motegi. The documents clearly state that the government will "promote the use of MOX fuel in light-water reactors (pluthermal) after reprocessing (nuclear fuel) at the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant." Based on the content of the documents, Motegi stated at a lower house Committee on Economy, Trade and industry session on March 22, "We will steadily promote the pluthermal plans."

Despite the country not knowing which nuclear reactors will be authorized to resume operations following the July implementation of the new regulatory standards, the government has been pushing ahead with its plans to restart the controversial pluthermal program.

"It is abnormal for sure," said one official with the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy. "But it can't be helped if the Rokkasho plant is to be put into operation."

Kansai Electric chastened?

June 24, 2013

Kansai Electric responds to NRA's decision

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130624_24.html

A senior official at the operator of the Ohi plant said he felt humbled by the Nuclear Regulation Authority's decision to allow the 2 reactors to stay online.

Shigeki Otsuka from the Kansai Electric Power Company said the company would not merely meet the demands of the authority, but would go further by aiming for a world-class level of safety.

The authority had earlier criticized the utility for proposing safety measures in a piecemeal fashion, as if trying to find the minimum line to be cleared to meet new safety standards that take effect in July.

Otsuka says his company had no such intention. But he added that it would take the criticism seriously in an effort to do even better.

But TEPCO is not convinced...

June 26, 2013

Utilities unreceptive to shareholders' proposals to phase out nuclear power

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130626p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Proposals to phase out nuclear power were rejected at general shareholders' meetings held at nine of the country's 10 utilities on June 26.

With Japan's new nuclear standards set to take effect July 8, and the government's enthusiasm for resuming operations of idled nuclear reactors around the country, Hokkaido Electric Power Co., Kansai Electric Power Co., Shikoku Electric Power Co. and Kyushu Electric Power Co. have also voiced a willingness to restart their reactors at an early date.

As Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) shareholders arrived at a gymnasium in Tokyo's Shibuya Ward where the shareholders' meeting for the operator of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant was to take place, they were welcomed by anti-nuclear activists holding placards.

"Abandonment of nuclear power is the will of the people. Since there have been changes in the (board) membership, I have some hope," said 60-year-old Yui Kimura, who heads the civic group Nuclear Phase-Out TEPCO Shareholder's Movement.

Individual stockholder Kenji Furuhashi, 34, said he took the day off of work to participate in the meeting. "I want to feel the passion of people who are against nuclear power, and listen to the voices of people from the disaster areas," he said. "I want the company to move in the direction of eliminating nuclear power."

Inside, TEPCO President Naomi Hirose opened the meeting at 10 a.m. by reiterating his intention to devote energy to bringing the disaster under control and rebuilding Fukushima Prefecture.

"We will continue to deal responsibly in compensating victims of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant accident and the long-term decommissioning process of the reactors," he said.

Meanwhile, outside the site of Kansai Electric's shareholders' meeting, anti-nuclear civic groups held banners calling for "non-nuclear management," and passed out flyers to shareholders walking in demanding that Oi Nuclear Power Plant be stopped and that operations at Takahama Nuclear Power Plant remain halted.

Inside, Kansai Electric President Makoto Yagi reemphasized his plan to move toward reactivation of idle reactors, saying, "We're in a serious crunch in terms of power supply and revenue, seeing as we don't know when reactors, with the exception of Oi Nuclear Power Plant's No. 3 and No. 4, can be reactivated."

There were a record 15 proposals from shareholders at the TEPCO meeting, including proposals to abandon the Fukushima No. 2 and Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plants. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government, a major TEPCO shareholder, proposed improving management transparency through measures such as the release of balance statements for each power plant.

With the exception of Hokuriku Electric Power Co.'s shareholders' meeting, some shareholders submitted proposals for the utilities to pull out of nuclear power and abandon reactivation. The Osaka Municipal Government, a shareholder at Kansai Electric, proposed a "swift abolition of nuclear plants." It is highly likely such proposals will be rejected, however, as utilities have already expressed objections.

Thermal power generation to compensate for the long-term halt of the country's nuclear reactors has raised fuel costs, resulting in consolidated losses for eight utilities -- the exception being Hokuriku Electric -- for the financial year ending in March 2013. The utilities, save for TEPCO and Hokkaido Electric, proposed dipping into cash reserves set aside for harsh financial situations, and of these, Tohoku Electric Power Co., Shikoku Electric, and Kyushu Electric proposed using their entire reserves.

The utilities all apologized to their shareholders for their declining performance, and sought their understanding for rising power bills and management's improvement efforts.

Protesters gathered at other meeting sites as well, including at Tohoku Electric and Hokkaido Electric, where anti-nuclear shareholders called on fellow shareholders to push for nuclear abandonment.

Shareholders also argued about the Hamaoka nuclear plant at the Chubu Electric Power Co. shareholders' meeting in Nagoya's Higashi Ward.

"If the national government were willing to offer assistance for the public to become energy self-sufficient, we could go without nuclear power," a 62-year-old woman from Nagakute, Aichi Prefecture, said.

A 76-year-old man from Nishio, Aichi Prefecture, meanwhile said, "The Hamaoka nuclear plant is still serviceable for years. It would be a waste not to use it."

Antinuke shareholders voted down

June 27, 2013

Utility shareholders reject all anti-nuke proposals

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201306270053>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Shareholders of eight regional utilities voted down all anti-nuclear proposals on June 26, including those calling for the suspension or decommissioning of reactors or withdrawal from the fuel recycling program.

Nine regional utilities that operate nuclear plants held shareholders' meetings on June 26.

The 72 proposals, submitted by anti-nuclear shareholders, won support from a number of prefectural and municipal governments that own shares in the electric power companies.

But they were rejected by other shareholders, such as banks and businesses dealing with the utilities. The companies' managements were opposed to the proposals.

Support from at least two-thirds of shareholders is required for a proposal to be adopted.

At the shareholders' meeting of Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the Fukushima prefectural government for the first time supported a proposal calling for the decommissioning of the nearby Fukushima No. 2 plant.

Tohoku Electric Power Co. operates the Higashidori nuclear plant in Aomori Prefecture and the Onagawa nuclear plant in Miyagi Prefecture.

At the company's meeting of shareholders, the Aomori city government and the Misato town government in Miyagi Prefecture backed a proposal calling for the decommissioning of these plants.

The Osaka city government, the top shareholder of Kansai Electric Power Co., demanded that the company abolish nuclear reactors as soon as possible.

The Tokyo metropolitan government, which owns shares in TEPCO, called for enhanced transparency in management.

No anti-nuclear proposal was submitted at Hokuriku Electric Power Co.'s shareholders' meeting.

Executives of the nine utilities told shareholders they plan to restart idle reactors as soon as possible.

Kansai Electric, Hokkaido Electric Power Co., Shikoku Electric Power Co. and Kyushu Electric Power Co. plan to apply to the Nuclear Regulation Authority for restarting 12 reactors soon after new safety standards take effect on July 8.

The nation's 50 nuclear reactors were taken offline after the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011. Only two of them have been brought back online.

June 26, 2013

Ryuichi Kino on TEPCO (concealing information)

June 26, 2013

Fight to get Tepco, state to come clean lives on

Late lawyer-journalist's right-to-know push continues

by Keiji Hirano
Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/26/national/fight-to-get-tepco-state-to-come-clean-lives-on/#.UcqNhthSb9k>

Freelance journalist Ryuichi Kino started attending press briefings at Tokyo Electric Power Co. shortly after the nuclear crisis erupted at its Fukushima No. 1 complex in March 2011, knowing that it was an event of world significance.

"I knew I would regret it if I missed covering an incident like this making world history," he said.

It was not long, though, before he began to suspect the utility was not coming clean, a view shared by an old friend he bumped into at the briefings, Kazuo Hizumi, who operated an online news site while working as a lawyer.

Kino, 47, recalls Hizumi telling him, "We need to do something."

"I myself took offense at that time at Tepco's reluctance to properly disclose necessary information," Kino said.

Prompted by urgent concerns that people would remain uninformed amid the massive disaster, the two worked together on a book — "News Conference on the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster: What Did Tepco and the Government Conceal?" Released in January 2012, the book detailed the exchanges at press briefings in an effort to show that both the utility and the government fell short of disclosing information in the public's interest.

Five months later, on June 12, Hizumi succumbed to cancer at the age of 49.

More than a year after his death, those close to Hizumi are continuing his struggle to press for the public's right to know.

Kino, who has continued to attend Tepco news conferences, recently published a sequel to the duo's first trove.

"I know what Mr. Hizumi wanted to achieve, although he was compelled to leave unfinished business," he said.

"He must have thought he himself should continue attending the briefings to seek more detailed information. . . . I think he pushed me to write the second book," he added.

Both books were published by Iwanami Shoten Publishers in Tokyo.

In the latest book, Kino again stresses the need for adequate disclosure of information, arguing, among other things, that people need to know detailed information about workers at the crippled Fukushima plant, including what kind of work they are involved in and what levels of radiation they have been exposed to.

"It would be impossible for us, without proper information, to examine whether Tepco has followed the right path" in dealing with the crisis, he said. "And I believe each individual must be able to determine his or her fate in the face of an unexpected event by obtaining and analyzing proper information."

Kino became acquainted with Hizumi in the early 1990s when both worked for a free paper for Japanese living in Sydney, where Hizumi had moved after leaving his job as a reporter for a major daily in Japan.

After returning home, Hizumi became a certified lawyer while also serving as chief editor of the News for the People in Japan (NPJ), launched in 2008 by lawyers and freelance journalists to report issues that the mainstream media rarely covers.

As a lawyer, Hizumi was involved in lawsuits relating to information disclosure and journalistic issues.

Tokyo-based lawyer Kazuyuki Azusawa also worked with Hizumi on various occasions.

The two managed the NPJ site together, while representing around 25 plaintiffs with other lawyers in a lawsuit seeking disclosure of diplomatic documents on the 1972 reversion of Okinawa to Japan from U.S. control.

One of the plaintiffs was a former reporter at a major daily newspaper who was arrested in the 1970s for his reporting of a secret bilateral pact on the cost burden of the reversion. The reporter was ultimately convicted, raising concerns that press freedoms and the people's right to know were being infringed upon.

"Mr. Hizumi greatly contributed to building the framework of the information disclosure lawsuit," Azusawa, 60, said.

Recalling Hizumi's information disclosure push, Azusawa said: "He worked for delivering proper information to those affected by the Fukushima nuclear crisis, in the expectation that it would contribute to alleviating their sufferings — even if just a little bit — although he himself faced the burden of disease.

"He believed people could be their own rulers by having information," Azusawa added.

Hoping to promote the ideals Hizumi believed in, Azusawa and like-minded lawyers and journalists have established the Hizumi Fund for Promotion of Information Distribution by collecting public donations. "We hope we can encourage those who are campaigning for expanding information disclosure," Azusawa said.

With its first move, the fund gave a ¥300,000 award to the Access-Info Clearinghouse Japan on June 12 — the one-year anniversary of Hizumi's death.

The clearinghouse, a Tokyo-based nonprofit organization, has worked since 1980 to improve the disclosure of information and has supported those who have fought for the public's right to know.

"We are trying to secure information that can be a common basis for public debate," said Yukiko Miki, chairwoman of the NPO. "Mr. Hizumi, for his part, played an active role in promoting information disclosure for information-sharing among the public. In that sense, Mr. Hizumi and our organization are related to each other."

The NPO is now focusing on obtaining nuclear disaster-related information from the government, including health surveys of residents near the stricken plant and decontamination work.

The NPJ news site, meanwhile, has continued its own reporting on various subjects, including the debates over plans to revise the Constitution and the nation's energy policy.

Azusawa himself continues to interview key figures. "We cannot stop what Mr. Hizumi began and left behind at the risk of his life."

Chubu Electric receives part of recovery fund

June 28, 2013

Government diverts quake recovery funds to help utility with idle reactors

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Part of the national budget for recovery efforts from the Great East Japan Earthquake has been diverted to help a utility company burdened with extra power generation costs after being told to keep its nuclear reactors offline, The Asahi Shimbun has learned.

A fund administered by the Environmental Partnership Council paid 1.9 billion yen (\$19.2 million) in fiscal years 2011 and 2012 to Chubu Electric Power Co., which shut down all reactors at its Hamaoka nuclear plant in Shizuoka Prefecture in May 2011 at the request of the central government.

The third supplementary budget for fiscal 2011 set aside 9 billion yen as a "subsidy to facilitate thermal power generation" and 1 billion yen as a "subsidy to improve a facility using thermal effluent."

The 10 billion yen was mainly financed by post-quake recovery surtaxes, which are added on top of income taxes and other tax sources.

The thermal power generation subsidy is intended to cover the interest payments on new loans that utilities take out when they activate a thermal power plant as a replacement for idle nuclear reactors.

Although all power utilities in Japan are eligible for receiving subsidies from the fund, Chubu Electric has so far been the sole recipient.

Only two of Japan's 50 nuclear reactors have been reactivated since the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake after they were taken offline for regular inspections and other reasons.

The thermal effluent subsidy enables the central government to bear the burden for the Shizuoka prefectural thermal effluent utilization research center, a fish breeding facility that stopped receiving hot water from the adjacent Hamaoka nuclear plant when the latter was taken offline. The subsidy is provided via a fund administered by the prefectural government.

Chubu Electric had signed an agreement to provide hot effluent from the Hamaoka nuclear plant free of charge as part of a package of promotional measures for local communities. The prefectural fund has paid 400 million yen to cover the costs to install a new boiler for producing hot water without relying on the nuclear plant and to pay the electricity bills for generating the heat.

An industry ministry official told The Asahi Shimbun that part of the post-quake recovery budget was used in the latest cases because the Hamaoka nuclear plant was shut down at the request of the central government. The official added that the government will stop covering the interest payments for Chubu Electric beyond July, and will call for a return of the 6 billion to 7 billion yen remaining in the thermal power generation facilitation fund.

Regarding what to do with the thermal effluent fund, however, the official only said discussions were under way with relevant organizations.

The central government has yet to release information about the budget diversion. Only about 100 billion yen of the amount is expected to be returned to state coffers.

The Asahi Shimbun reported in May that more than 1 trillion yen in national post-quake recovery budget had been distributed to 20 or so funds that could be used outside the disaster zones. The revelation prompted the central government to begin reviewing those funds.

(This article was written by Eiji Zakoda and Hirotaka Kojo.)

"Sickening" collusion between utilities and some local governments

June 29, 2013

EDITORIAL: Local communities should have more say in nuclear safety planning

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201306290057>

A serious accident at a nuclear power plant inevitably causes damage to a very wide range of areas.

Even this most fundamental of lessons of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster has yet to be absorbed effectively into the process of developing nuclear power policy in this nation.

Following the devastating accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the government widened special priority zones to a 30-kilometer radius around a nuclear power plant from 8 to 10 km. Communities within these zones must make special preparations for nuclear accidents.

The expansion increased the number of local governments within the special priority areas from 45 municipalities to 135.

If an idled nuclear reactor is restarted, it is vital to obtain the consent of all the municipal governments within the zone.

In fact, such local governments have been seeking agreements with regional electric power companies to require utilities to receive the consent of the municipalities if they want to bring a nuclear reactor back online. Similar agreements exist between utilities and the governments of cities and towns where nuclear plants are located.

But there has been little progress in the talks for such deals. Kansai Electric Power Co., which wants to restart its Takahama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture as soon as possible, has been in talks with municipal governments in Kyoto and Shiga prefectures that are located within 30 km of the plant. But the utility has so far refused to grant their requests.

Some local governments that host nuclear power plants are opposed to the central government's policy of expanding areas subject to its special damage mitigation measures.

Fukui Prefecture has 14 nuclear reactors, more than any other prefecture in Japan. There are concerns that a major natural disaster could trigger accidents at many of these reactors.

But the prefectural government has postponed talks with local governments in neighboring prefectures over cooperation in responding to nuclear accidents under the pretext that the central government's evacuation criteria are vague. Fukui has developed its own response plan that limits evacuation sites to places within the prefecture.

As a result, during an evacuation drill conducted in June on the supposition of a severe accident at the Mihama nuclear power plant, residents in the town of Mihama followed the prefecture's evacuation plan. They took refuge in the town of Oi within the prefecture, home to the Oi nuclear plant, instead of a location in neighboring Shiga Prefecture, which is farther away from the nuclear plants.

Does this qualify as an evacuation plan that puts the highest priority on the safety of local residents?

Behind the Fukui prefectural government's attitude is cozy relations between the operators of nuclear power plants and the local governments concerned. These companies provide contributions to the local governments and create jobs in their communities. In return, the local governments accept dangerous nuclear facilities.

If more communities become part of the special priority zones, it will become harder for utilities to restart their idled reactors, while the local governments may find the benefits they receive by accepting nuclear plants reduced.

Such concerns appear to be affecting the actions of the nuclear plant operators and the local governments concerned. This behavior is sickening considering the nation has witnessed the harrowing consequences

of a serious nuclear accident. The collusive ties between the utilities and the local governments are unacceptable.

Nuclear plant operators should work out agreements with all local governments within a 30-km radius of their plants to establish a multilayered monitoring system. Local governments around nuclear plants should cooperate on a region-wide level to enhance their influence on issues concerning nuclear safety. They should also develop effective evacuation plans for emergencies.

Instead of mutual back scratching, both sides need to build healthy but tense relations based on the principle that the safety of residents should come first.

In addition, some reactors will not be restarted because they fail to meet the new safety standards.

Local governments that have been supporting the central government's policy of promoting nuclear power generation are in a tough situation. It is by no means easy for these governments to change their policies and start reducing their dependence on the nuclear power business.

Even Fukui Prefecture has set a goal of diversifying its energy sources. It has started to make efforts to carve out a future less dependent on nuclear energy, such as seeking a terminal for liquefied natural gas located within the prefecture.

Instead of focusing its policy efforts on winning support for restarting reactors, the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe should **pour more energy into helping local communities around nuclear power plants map out a new, economically independent future for themselves.**

--The Asahi Shimbun, June 29

Don't forget the locals

July 4, 2013

TEPCO asked to seek local approval

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130704_43.html

The governor of Niigata, which hosts Japan's largest nuclear plant, has demanded the operator seek the prefecture's approval as it prepares to restart the facility.

Hirohiko Izumida made the request Thursday to Tokyo Electric Power Company. The utility operates the Kashiwazaki Kariwa nuclear plant, with 7 reactors, on the Sea of Japan coast.

TEPCO officials decided Tuesday to ask Japan's nuclear regulator to conduct safety checks of the reactors. The checks are needed to gain approval for restarting them.

TEPCO officials plan to make their request on or after Monday, when the regulator puts new safety standards into effect. The standards are aimed at ensuring that nuclear plants can withstand severe accidents like the one in Fukushima.

Niigata's governor told TEPCO officials on Thursday that before they apply to the regulator, they should get his approval for a new safety device called a "filter vent."

The device is designed to release pressure in the containment vessel of a reactor while limiting emissions of radioactive substances.

A safety agreement between TEPCO and municipalities stipulates that the utility must gain local authorities' consent before setting up any new facilities at a nuclear plant.

The governor of Niigata has expressed concern about the filter vent. He said the device reduces emissions, but still allows radioactive substances to escape.

The governor will meet with TEPCO President Naomi Hirose on Friday to convey his request.

TEPCO officials say they will take the request into consideration.

Safety?

July 5, 2013

Japan utility hires nuclear safety advocate



Lady Barbara Judge smiles during an interview with The Associated Press in Tokyo on July 5, 2013. (AP Photo/Itsuo Inouye)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130705p2g00m0dm070000c.html>

TOKYO (AP) -- The Japanese utility still battling leaks of radiated water and rat-caused power outages at a nuclear plant, sent into multiple meltdowns, thinks it has found the perfect person to oversee its safety campaign -- a foreign woman.

Lady Barbara Judge -- a British-American, who has worked as a lawyer, banker and U.S. Securities and Exchange Commissioner -- says that Tokyo Electric Power Co., the utility behind the 2011 Fukushima nuclear catastrophe, has changed enough, under a new president, to begin restarting its reactors.

Still, she did not mince words about the past practices of the utility linked to the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl.

"There was a culture of efficiency, not a culture of safety," Judge told The Associated Press on Friday, during a trip to Tokyo for meetings at TEPCO. "There was no safety culture. There was an assumption of safety."

Judge, honorary chairman at the U.K. Atomic Energy Authority, says she is exactly the kind of person Japan's insular and male-dominated atomic industry needs to keep it in rein.

She also says nuclear power remains the best option for a resource-poor nation like Japan and vows that under her guidance the utility will adhere to world-class safety standards.

TEPCO, which hired her for its nuclear reform committee in September, is eager to restart its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, northeast of Tokyo.

New government safety rules are set to kick in next week, signaling a possible go-ahead for some of the 50 idled reactors to get back online.

Having undergone a public bailout, TEPCO is bleeding money, facing compensation demands from the thousands of people evacuated from around the plant, as well as importing costly oil, coal and gas to keep power going

All its reactors are either defunct, including the four being decommissioned at Fukushima Dai-ichi, or shut down for safety tests after the disaster. And nuclear plants that can't restart are a liability, looking terrible on a company's books.

But Japanese protesters oppose restarting the plants, and public opinion surveys show a majority want an end to atomic power. The ruling party is pro-nuclear, but every other political party is demanding a phase-out.

Chikako Fujii, an aromatherapist who has taken to the streets opposing nuclear power, said she had believed in the superiority of Japanese technology -- until Fukushima.

"This nation is definitely moving ahead to have nuclear plants back up again. But I am really against that," she said.

Decades are likely needed to decommission Fukushima Dai-ichi. A dead rat recently caused a massive blackout, temporarily shutting down the system to keep reactor-cores cool.

Tons of contaminated water continue to leak. Experienced workers are growing harder to find as they reach radiation-exposure limits.

Judge's answer to such skeptics: TEPCO should do more outreach to answer people's questions and show how nuclear is the superior choice.

She has advised TEPCO to "apologize profusely" for the accident and asserts that under her initiative, TEPCO is bringing together the toughest standards and safest practices in the world.

Judge served as chairman of the U.K. Atomic Energy Authority from 2004 to 2010.

She insists that the safety-oversight section she is bringing together at TEPCO, instead of being ignored as they were in the past, will be respected, a place for "the best and the brightest."

She said the standards her team is putting together would be ready "within months."

After all, the Fukushima accident was set off because backup generators were in the basement when the tsunami struck in March 2011, not a failure of fancy science, she noted.

She pointed to Germany as seeing costly energy imports, worsening carbon emissions and higher electricity prices, while it's buying nuclear power from France, after opting for a nuclear phase-out.

"It's a mess," said Judge. "Life without nuclear is the Emperor's new clothes, as far as I'm concerned."

See also :

Japan utility hires nuclear safety advocate

July 05, 2013

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201307050080>

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Japanese utility still battling leaks of radiated water at the nuclear plant sent into meltdown by the 2011 tsunami thinks it has found the perfect person to oversee its safety campaign--a foreign woman. [...]

Some people are happy with nukes

Mountain regions pull for linear collider project

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130708p2a00m0na009000c.html>

Two mountainous regions, one in northeast Japan and one in the southwest, are now competing to host the construction of a major supercollider -- even as the national government shows little interest in the project.

The initiative, known as the International Linear Collider (ILC) project, involves a giant particle accelerator that would be used to help uncover the mysteries surrounding the birth of the universe.

The two competing areas -- the Kitakami mountain region lying within Iwate and Miyagi Prefectures, and the Sefuri mountain region straddling Saga and Fukuoka prefectures -- are both hoping to entice the facility to their respective locations.

The collider is set to become the successor to the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN)'s Large Hadron Collider (LHC), which was used to discover a new particle believed to be the Higgs boson. The machine will accelerate electrons and positrons (positive electrons) to nearly the speed of light, colliding them in a straight accelerator around 30 kilometers long, and then analyzing the various particles created in the collision.

While the LHC can only make a Higgs Boson once every trillion collisions, the ILC will be able to produce them once every hundred collisions. This has created hopes regarding the potential discovery of new particles that make up dark matter, as well as results that may be utilized toward cancer treatment and semiconductor processing.

A thick book of schematics for the project was completed in June, totaling 1,240 pages. Building the collider will come with a heavy price tag of at least 830 billion yen, with the host country expected to pay half the total. Around 10,000 residents including researchers and their families are expected to live around the collider facility, which is likely to employ a few thousand people every year.

Saga and Fukuoka prefectures are working with local business groups to advertise themselves as potential sites. The governors of both prefectures visited Europe in May, touting their areas as featuring excellent transportation services and other city functions. Both regions have also hung banners at train stations and convenience stores in an effort to drum up local support.

Iwate Prefecture is positioning the project as one that will bring economic health back to the tsunami-stricken area, and has set up a committee to promote the project. An official says, "We are close to related research facilities in Ibaraki Prefecture, and with our bullet train line and expressways, our transport infrastructure is not inferior (to the Sefuri mountain region)." The promotion committee has also invited Professor Takehiko Saito of Germany's Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz to talk to elementary and junior high students in the area about topics including the makeup of the universe, and research on elementary particles.

Not all opinions are in favor of the project, however, with no country having officially come forward as a host candidate so far due to its heavy cost. The Japanese government has similarly shown little interest, giving the project the lowest possible priority rating during its large project reviews in 2010 and 2012. An evaluation committee with the Science Council of Japan that opened in June was also unenthusiastic. "The project would cost a lot of tax money, so if the reasons for building it are not further explained, the people won't go along with it," one member commented.

A radiation leak incident at a particle accelerator in Tokai, Ibaraki Prefecture that occurred in May has also lowered opinions regarding the project. Still, however, the two local sites remain locked in a PR tug-of-war, driven by an estimate released by the Japan Productivity Center that the linear collider would create an international research city and bring 45 trillion yen in profit to domestic industries over a 30-year period.

An evaluation committee is expected to recommend a single candidate location to the national government in August.

July 08, 2013(Mainichi Japan)

NRA must learn to listen/talk to people

July 8, 2013

New challenge for Japan's nuclear regulators

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130708_15.html

Japan's nuclear regulators are facing a tough challenge as new safety regulations take effect on Monday.

The new rules make plant operators legally responsible for the first time for taking steps to prevent severe accidents.

The expertise of 80 people charged with examining power companies' applications to restart reactors is on the line.

Most of the examiners were employed by the now-defunct Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency. The

former regulator was criticized for its lack of expertise in nuclear plant operations.

Some people even called it "a slave" of the power companies it was meant to supervise. The current Nuclear Regulation Authority must assess the safety of each reactor under the new regulations. This includes measures taken by operators to prevent severe accidents.

The NRA is also required to explain to the public the review process and its outcomes in plain language that people can understand.

The NRA in May confirmed the existence of an active fault under the No. 2 reactor at the Tsuruga nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture. The authority concluded the reactor is vulnerable to an earthquake and cannot be allowed to operate.

But local communities complained about a **lack of transparency** in the way the authority handled the matter.

Experts say the NRA needs to establish a mechanism for hearing public opinion about the review process and responding to questions.

The problem of fuel costs

July 7, 2013

Power companies suffer from higher fuel costs

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130708_04.html

Japanese power utilities are losing money by having to pay more for the fuel used in operating their thermal power plants.

All of Japan's nuclear power plants-- except one plant on the Japan Sea coast-- are off-line following the accident in Fukushima in 2011.

Nine Japanese power companies posted combined fuel cost of 7 trillion yen, or about 70 billion dollars, in the business year that ended in March. This is about double what they paid 2 years ago.

Due to the increased fuel cost, 4 companies, including Kansai Electric and Kyushu Electric, posted their largest-ever losses in the business year ended in March.

Hokuriku Electric was the only utility that did not post losses.

Some utilities have decided to raise electric bills to cover their losses.

Experts say a restart of operations at one nuclear plant would slash fuel costs by as much as 60 to 100 million dollars per month.

Power company officials say they want to resume operations as soon as possible to improve their finances and to ensure stable power supplies.

The influence of Twitter

July 9, 2013

Retweeting of nuclear power-related posts help boost their online presence

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130709p2a00m0na006000c.html>

The forwarding and quoting of tweets about "nuclear power" by specific Twitter users are playing a major part in boosting the number of such tweets among policy-related words over the Twittersphere, analysis by the Mainichi Shimbun and a Ritsumeikan University associate professor has shown.

The analysis, which was jointly conducted by the Mainichi and Ritsumeikan's Ryosuke Nishida as part of collaborative research into online campaigning for the July 21 House of Councillors election, sought the reasons behind the high number of tweets about the nuclear power issue, using the analysis software "BuzzFinder" developed by NTTCom Online Marketing Solutions Corp.

When tweets posted on July 4, the day the upper house election was officially announced, were collected and analyzed, it was found that the diffusion of tweets about nuclear power were expanded by specific Twitter users who were intensively retweeting them.

There were 55,100 tweets that included the term "nuclear power" on July 4, of which 18,600 were original tweets posted by 9,100 users. Those tweets were retweeted 36,500 times by 16,500 users. Many of the original tweets are believed to represent writers' own opinions, with an average of two tweets posted per person that day. Nearly twice the number of those who posted original tweets retweeted at least two tweets each on average. Because the same person may have posted original tweets and also retweeted others' tweets, it can be said that specific individuals and groups concerned with the nuclear power issue repeatedly retweeted relevant posts, tripling the number of tweets from that of those original tweets.

According to a nationwide telephone survey by the Mainichi Shimbun covering some 30,000 voters on July 4 and 5 over which points of contention they weigh the most in their voting decisions for the upper house election, 28 percent cited "pension, health care, nursing care and child-rearing" and another 28 percent cited "economic measures." Only 8 percent cited "nuclear power and energy policy." As for those in their 20s to 30s -- many of whom are believed to be Internet-users --- the trends were almost the same, with those who cited "nuclear power and energy policy" accounting for just 5 percent.

There were 19,800 tweets about "pension and child-rearing" on July 4, of which 10,000 were original tweets posted by 7,400 people and the remaining 9,800 were retweets by 6,400 people. Compared to tweets about nuclear power, original tweets about "pension and child-rearing" were fewer in number and were not retweeted as frequently. As such, the gap between the total number of tweets is greater than the gap between the number of original tweets on the respective topics.

Celebrities and others who have over 100,000 followers each have actively tweeted their views on the pros and cons of nuclear power, contributing to the diffusion of such tweets. The protests against reactor

restarts in front of the Prime Minister's Office also expanded via Twitter. Ties nurtured among those specific users are believed to have made it easier to diffuse such tweets via retweeting.

"Topics on Twitter tend to be focused on policy issues that encompass diverse points of contention and are hard to resolve unambiguously, such as the nuclear power issue," Nishida said.

"It should be said that communications among specific Internet users have been made visible (on Twitter), and that the number of tweets itself does not reflect public opinion.

"The number of those who posted their original tweets wasn't so many, considering the total number of Twitter users. The idea of exploring public opinion on the Internet by analyzing topics frequently discussed on Twitter may be inappropriate in itself," he added.

Strict, swift and...convincing

July 8, 2013

Governors seek strict nuclear plant screening

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130708_42.html

Prefectural Governors in Japan have requested strict screening procedures before restarting nuclear power plants under the new safety guidelines.

The heads of 47 prefectures began two days of meetings on Monday in Matsuyama City, western Japan. They discussed the new safety guidelines that were officially decided by the Nuclear Regulation Authority.

The guidelines require nuclear plant operators to take concrete steps when handling serious accidents. They took effect on the same day.

Ehime Prefecture Governor Tokihiro Nakamura called for setting up a system where the central government assumes final responsibility for allowing nuclear plants to restart.

Nakamura made the request in reference to the Ikata nuclear plant operator's application to restart its number 3 reactor under the new guidelines.

Tottori Prefecture Governor Shinji Hirai said the central government has to decide whether to restart nuclear plants based on the opinions of local governments.

The prefectural leaders agreed on proposals that call on the nuclear authority to implement strict and swift screenings under the new guidelines.

They also proposed that when deciding to restart a nuclear plant, the central government must hold public hearings to gain the understanding of locals living nearby.

A very pro-nuclear government and administration

July 9, 2013

Utilities seeking restarts have support of pro-nuclear government

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201307090073>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

With a pro-nuclear administration chomping at the bit, Japan is expected to bring at least one nuclear reactor back online as early as winter, after the two already running are shut down in autumn.

Four electric power companies on July 8 applied to the Nuclear Regulation Authority for restarting 10 reactors at five plants based on the new safety standards incorporating lessons from the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The No. 3 reactor at Shikoku Electric Power Co.'s Ikata plant in Ehime Prefecture is expected to be the first to get restarted. Key equipment items have been constructed, and there is a low risk of the plant being swamped by a massive tsunami.

The No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai plant in Kagoshima Prefecture also face few hurdles.

The NRA will confirm whether reactors satisfy the new standards through a safety screening, whose conclusion is expected in six months or so.

Electric power companies also need to obtain consent from local governments that host nuclear plants and approval from the central government before restarting reactors. However, approval from local governments for restarting these 10 reactors is believed to be relatively easy for the four utilities to gain.

The pro-nuclear Abe administration plans to bring idle reactors back online as soon as NRA safety screenings are over.

"We are responsible for supplying energy at low cost and in a stable manner," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on a TV program on July 5. "We want to restart those reactors the NRA judged as safe."

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party stands equally committed.

"If we are to be responsible for Japan's economy, we have no other choice but to restart reactors whose safety has been confirmed," Secretary-General Shigeru Ishiba told reporters on July 8. "We will never avoid that responsibility."

Japan's 50 reactors, except for two, have all remained offline after the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant was crippled by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi plant in Fukui Prefecture were reactivated last June based on provisional procedures. They are among the 10 reactors because they will be shut down in September for regular inspections.

The four utilities—Kansai, Shikoku, Kyushu and Hokkaido Electric Power Co.—are desperate to restart reactors to turn around their operations because they depended on nuclear energy for more than 40 percent of their electricity supply.

In the fiscal year ended in March, eight regional utilities, including these four, incurred a combined loss of 1.6 trillion yen (\$15.80 billion) due mainly to fuel costs for thermal power generation that made up for lost capacity at nuclear plants.

Kansai Electric and Kyushu Electric raised household electricity rates in May, and Shikoku Electric and Hokkaido Electric have applied for increases.

"The reactivation of reactors is necessary not to inconvenience our customers with higher electricity rates," said Toru Yoshizako, executive vice president of Kyushu Electric.

Opposition parties have criticized the Abe administration for rushing headlong to restart idle reactors.

"The LDP is trying to promote nuclear energy without any debate," said Goshi Hosono, secretary-general of the Democratic Party of Japan.

Hosono was trying to set the DPJ apart from the LDP ahead of the crucial July 21 Upper House election.

The government plans to postpone discussions on a percentage of electricity supplied by nuclear power for 10 years, without specifying a figure in a basic energy plan to be compiled at the end of the year.

The DPJ, which was in power when the accident started at the Fukushima No. 1 plant, also supports restarting reactors whose safety has been confirmed by the NRA. The DPJ government approved the reactivation of the Oi reactors last year.

But the party has continued to call for halting operations of nuclear plants by the 2030s, a goal set before it was ousted from power by the LDP in a Lower House election in December.

The Japan Restoration Party, whose campaign promise is phasing out nuclear energy by the 2030s, said it is premature to restart reactors now.

"We must tide ourselves over with other energy sources until the safety standards are met," Ichiro Matsui, the party secretary-general, said.

The Japanese Communist Party is dead set against restarting reactors.

A telephone survey conducted by The Asahi Shimbun on July 6-7 found that 48 percent of respondents opposed the LDP's stance backing the reopening of nuclear plants, compared with 34 percent who support the party's stance.

Seventy percent of respondents said they will consider the issue of nuclear plants either "greatly" or "to some extent" when they vote in the Upper House poll.

The LDP has refrained from turning nuclear policy into a key campaign issue for the election. A senior party official in charge of policy issues said nuclear policy cannot be translated into votes.

As the four utilities turn to local governments for approval for restarting the reactors at the five plants, they face mixed reactions from residents.

One of the plants is Kansai Electric's Takahama plant in Takahama, Fukui Prefecture.

"Young people in this district are engaged in work related to the nuclear plant. I want to see the plant restarted soon," said a 66-year-old Takahama resident.

"There will not be a limit if we think about what would happen beyond expectations," he said of safety measures. "The plant was safe until now. They can consider (safety measures) after the plant is restarted."

The operator of a grocery store 2 kilometers from Kyushu Electric's Sendai plant said the area would have been virtually deserted without the nuclear plant.

His store derived half of its sales from vegetables and fish sold to hotels and inns. But orders halved after regular inspections for the nuclear plant were suspended following the Fukushima accident.

Local governments are trying to attract solar and wind power generation companies to help take the place of nuclear power.

But the grocery operator, 52, said, "With wind or solar power, people will not come. Roughly 2,000 workers come for a regular inspection of the nuclear plant."

A 35-year-old homemaker in Satsuma-Sendai, where the Sendai plant is located, said she did not pay any special attention to the nuclear plant but the Fukushima nuclear disaster changed her way of thinking. "I will be concerned as long as the plant is in operation even if it passes a safety screening," she said. "I hope Japan will become a society that can meet electricity requirements without nuclear plants, with people saving energy."

Has M. Yoshida left a record of the disaster?

July 10, 2013

Mixed reviews over deceased ex-Fukushima plant chief's handling of nuclear crisis

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130710p2a00m0na012000c.html>

Masao Yoshida, who had spearheaded the daunting on-site task of handling the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, died of esophageal cancer at the age of 58 on July 9.

While receiving high marks for such actions as continuing to inject seawater into one of the troubled reactors at his own discretion in defiance of instructions from his bosses at the headquarters of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), Yoshida is also known to have failed to implement measures against tsunami ahead of the March 2011 disaster. His 58 years of life reflect the light and dark sides of Japan with heavy dependence on nuclear power.

Yoshida told his friend, a medical doctor, last year, "I am thinking of writing a record of the accident, but I can't make much progress in my writing." He was considering publishing a memoir and contributing the royalties to disaster victims. But his health condition failed to stabilize because of treatment for esophagus cancer, and therefore he apparently tended to stop writing.

Yoshida emerged from Tokyo Institute of Technology's graduate school in 1979. He joined TEPCO after turning down a job offer from the then Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), which is currently the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI). He had consistently served in technology-related positions in the company. He won the confidence of workers at the nuclear station for being a "big-brother type" and "service-minded." Apparently he was also respected by workers from other companies who had little connection to TEPCO headquarters. He became the head of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in June 2010, his fourth assignment to the nuclear station.

According to the government's accident analysis (interim) report released in December 2011, when Yoshida was the head of TEPCO's nuclear facility department in 2008, he compiled results of his own preliminary calculation which said tsunami of up to 15.7 meters -- far greater than what had previously been assumed -- could hit the nuclear plant. But it has emerged that he actually postponed the implementation of anti-tsunami measures such as the construction of levees, saying, "It is nothing but a preliminary calculation based on the severest hypothesis."

In November 2011, eight months after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis, Yoshida apologized for the accident and told the media at the nuclear power station, "Some of the assumptions were too optimistic. It is necessary for other nuclear power plants to make improvements in light of that."

Yoshida also said, "The hydrogen explosion at the No. 3 reactor (on March 14, 2011) had the biggest impact. We were in a situation where we wouldn't have been surprised if we died. I thought about 10 people could have died." Yoshida had seldom talked about the accident in public. But in August 2012, he sent a message to a public symposium in which he looked back on the disaster.

"It is our most important duty to stabilize the nuclear reactors. I want to do my best to help workers at the site when I get my strength back," he said in the video message. While showing fatigue from his battle against cancer, he expressed his willingness to make a comeback to the task of bringing the crippled nuclear power station under control.

However, in late July 2012 after recording his video message, he suffered bleeding to the brain. A source close to the government's accident investigation panel described Yoshida as "the person who knows the most about the process of the accident." But Yoshida's life ended without fully revealing the truth behind the nuclear disaster. An official of TEPCO's public relations department said, "We have not confirmed whether he left a note or he wrote private papers on the accident."

Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) lawmaker Naoto Kan, who was the prime minister when the crisis broke out, said on June 9, "We are largely indebted to Mr. Yoshida for preventing the accident from further expanding. I was thinking of talking to him when he recovered. I really regret that I couldn't do that."

DPJ Secretary General Goshi Hosono, who had served as the state minister in charge of the nuclear accident, posted a video message on Facebook, saying, "Without Mr. Yoshida's leadership and fighting spirit, we would not have been able to overcome that situation."

Interview with Kyoto governor

Kyoto gov. says gov't should clarify its responsibility for nuclear power policy

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130711p2a00m0na013000c.html>

KYOTO -- Kyoto Gov. Keiji Yamada pointed out that **there are problems that need to be addressed before the national government approves the restart of idled nuclear reactors, such as safety measures for residents of areas hosting nuclear plants in case of an accident.**

In an exclusive interview with the Mainichi Shimbun, the 59-year-old governor also **urged the central government to clarify its responsibility for Japan's nuclear power policy.**

Excerpts of the interview follow:

Question: Kyoto Prefecture neighbors the Fukui Prefecture city of Oi that hosts Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi Nuclear Power Plant. As heads of local governments neighboring nuclear plants, you and the governor of Shiga Prefecture jointly recommended that the national government ensure transparency of its nuclear power policy. Do you think your recommendation has been sufficiently reflected in the new safety regulations enforced recently by the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA)?

Answer: Members of the general public are worried that the central government has failed to sufficiently clarify the cause of the crisis at the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant run by Tokyo Electric Power Co. And it remains to be seen how far the new safety regulations will dispel the public's concern. It's hard to understand why electric power companies have been given a grace period to implement safety measures under the new regulations. Moreover, the regulations don't provide for sufficient measures to respond to an accident, such as how to ensure the safety of residents around nuclear plants. There remain tasks that must be addressed before restarting idled nuclear reactors.

Q: There are calls within industries urging that the government approve reactivation of nuclear power stations to ensure stable supply of less expensive electric power. How would you react to such calls?

A: As a member of the Union of Kansai Governments, Kyoto Prefecture left a final decision on whether to reactivate the Oi power station to the national government because we feared that a power shortage in summer could pose a threat to the lives and safety of prefectural residents. However, the Kyoto Prefectural Government's basic position is to create a society that needs to rely on as little nuclear power as possible. If the national government intends to promote the restart of nuclear plants, it should show responsible measures to decommission aging reactors and deal with spent nuclear fuel.

Q: Power suppliers warn that they wouldn't be able to balance their budgets and would be forced to raise their electricity charges unless they were allowed to restart their nuclear plants. What do you think about such a view?

A: An energy strategy is the core of basic national policy along with diplomacy and security. I doubt that it should be dealt with as a matter of one company's profitability or utility charges. The lesson of the Fukushima nuclear crisis is that nuclear plants (which could cause serious damage in case of an accident) can't be considered simply from the viewpoint of private companies' management. The government should further clarify its own responsibility for Japan's nuclear power policy.

Q: The national government is looking for a site for a final disposal facility for spent nuclear fuel, isn't it?

A: The central government has asked the National Governors' Association to hold talks about the issue. Because nuclear plants had been in operation for many years, spent nuclear fuel had continued to accumulate. The government can't work out an energy strategy without addressing the issue. Moreover, there will be no solution to the problem if local bodies continue to say, 'We need energy but don't want a disposal facility.' The issue of building a final disposal facility is what the whole nation should decide. I wonder what conditions the national government will offer to ask a local community to host a final disposal facility and how to win understanding of local residents. I think the national government's ability to deal with the matter is being tested.

Why such a rush?

July 10, 2013

Rushing to restart reactors

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/07/10/editorials/rushing-to-restart-reactors/#.Ud6jD6xSb9k>

Four power companies on Monday asked the Nuclear Regulation Authority to assess the safety of 10 reactors at five nuclear power plants under the NRA's new safety regulations, which went into force the same day.

The Abe administration and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party have presented no clear long-term policy related to nuclear power. They should be criticized for trying to bring nuclear power plants back online by *fait accomplis* even before the causes of the Fukushima nuclear disaster are established. In addition, the

regulations include a five-year grace period for an important safety measure, so once again the nuclear industry would be gambling that a disaster won't strike in the interim.

While the Democratic Party of Japan was in power, it carried out deliberative polls across the country to find out people's views on nuclear power. In that process, a majority of people called for eventually ending Japan's reliance on nuclear power.

According to a Kyodo News poll whose results were made public on May 19, 54.3 percent of those polled opposed the restart of reactors even if they passed the NRA's safety assessment while 37.2 percent supported it. The Abe administration and the LDP should make a sincere effort to listen to people's opinions by organizing public discussions in a transparent manner.

The government, political parties and people should not be swayed by short-term economic factors such as rises in electricity charges in the absence of nuclear power. In addition to safety concerns over their operation, which grow riskier as they age, spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste will continue to accumulate but there is no established technology for safely storing it.

One wonders whether the Abe administration and the LDP are aware of these factors. They have yet to present clear-cut programs to deal with a large-scale nuclear disaster or to dispose of accumulating spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste.

The government should present a clearly defined plan to eventually end Japan's reliance on nuclear power, to encourage the development of renewable energy sources and to end the major power companies' regional monopolies.

The NRA's new regulations require power companies to take measures to cope with severe accidents, including construction of sea walls to protect individual nuclear power plants from the largest possible tsunami and the installation of filters to prevent radioactive substances from escaping into the atmosphere in the event of an emergency. The NRA's new regulations are an improvement, however they are far from perfect. A grace period of five years is allowed for the installation of filters in the 10 reactors that the four power companies want assessed, because they are pressurized light-water reactors, in which hydrogen explosions are said to be unlikely. For example, the new safety measures do not require construction of a hard structure to protect a reactor core against a terrorist attack involving missiles, bombs or 9/11-style aircraft strikes. They also do not mandate the installation of emergency cooling-water storage facilities inside reactor containment structures to help prevent core meltdowns.

The NRA should carry out its reactor assessments in a thorough and transparent manner, and resist any pressure from vested "nuclear village" interests, so that the public can readily understand and trust its conclusions.

Don't mention it

Pro-nuke LDP's candidate quiet on Ehime reactor restart bid

by Eric Johnston
Staff Writer

IKATA, EHIME PREF. – On the far western edge of Shikoku, Ehime’s Sada Misaki Peninsula juts out into the Seto Inland Sea. It’s a long sliver of land home to several species of hawk and several varieties of the prefecture’s famous “mikan” oranges.

It’s also **home to the Ikata nuclear plant**, whose reactor 3 might be the first to be turned back on under new regulations that came into effect Monday. That’s a decision, local opponents say, that has more to do with municipal, and national, Liberal Democratic Party politics than with any need for the power the plant would provide.

“Much of the electricity Ikata generates can be sold to Kansai Electric Power Co., money that Shikoku Electric Power Co. needs. Unlike the Kansai region, **large commercial enterprises in Shikoku often have their own generators and are, in fact, selling their excess power to Shikoku Electric,**” said Junko Saima, an Ikata resident who has opposed the plant for decades.

Noboru Hiroo, a Shikoku Electric official, said the utility expects peak summertime electricity demand to reach 5.62 million kw. While most of the supply will come from fossil fuel plants, some will be bought from those generating their own electricity.

“We have contracts with eight companies and expect them to provide 140,000 kw,” he said.

As the July 21 Upper House election looms, utilities nationwide are rushing to apply for restarting their nuclear power stations, which have been shut down since the March 11, 2011, earthquake, tsunami and Fukushima meltdowns. With the ruling LDP expected to win big, at least a dozen reactors, including Ikata’s reactor 3, could be rebooted by next year if they clear the safety assessment by the Nuclear Regulation Authority.

Less than 2½ years since those tragic events, the heavily pro-nuclear LDP and its allies in the utilities, local governments and business community are striking back, as concerns about electricity shortages and rising electric bills clash with safety fears.

Of the 10 major political parties, only the LDP rejects the idea of eliminating atomic energy entirely. Its platform calls for gaining the trust of local residents to reactivate reactors.

“We will not restart reactors that do not meet NRA standards. At the same time, we have a responsibility to provide safe electricity,” Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told reporters at the Japan National Press Club earlier this month

New Komeito, the LDP's ruling bloc junior partner, is campaigning on a goal to make Japan nuclear-power-free "as soon as possible." Despite strong support from pro-nuclear utility worker unions, the Democratic Party of Japan, the main opposition force and the ruling party when the Fukushima meltdowns occurred, says it wants all atomic plants offline by the 2030s.

Among other opposition groups, Your Party promises to have no nuclear power plants operating by the end of the 2020s, while Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party) promises to phase out all nuclear energy by the 2030s. The Japanese Communist Party has pledged to keep idle all reactors shut down at present. Only two reactors are currently operational nationwide, at Kepco's Oi plant in Fukui Prefecture.

While the restart of reactor 3 at the three-reactor Ikata plant is making local headlines, bread-and-butter issues like economic revitalization, employment and care for children and the elderly are just, if not more, prominent.

In Ehime, LDP Upper House candidate Takumi Ihara, who in media polls is leading the race, makes no mention on his website of restarting the Ikata reactor. While JCP hopeful Masakatsu Ueki calls for decommissioning the plant, Your Party candidate Kayoko Fujioka says little about it, choosing instead to emphasize child care issues.

For the town of Ikata and Shikoku Electric, the restart of reactor 3 is of paramount importance. The town of over 10,000 inhabitants relies on both nuclear power-related subsidies, including government and private subsidies, while local service industries count on plant-related business, especially during inspection periods, to keep them going.

But the idling of the Ikata plant has also finally given local politicians a chance to speak about a nuclear-free future.

"I feel strongly the need to revise our economic revitalization policy, which relies on the presence of nuclear power," Ikata Mayor Kazuhiko Yamashita said in mid-June, although he added he was not seeking a permanent shutdown of the Ikata plant.

For Shikoku Electric, keeping the facility offline has forced the utility to import more fuel for its thermal plants, prompting it to hike electricity rates.

"With the reactors at Ikata shut down, there's no change in the tough situation we face with regard to electricity supply," Shikoku Electric President Akira Chiba said at a shareholders' meeting in June.

The House of Councilors election is about short-term politics, and whether Japan's remaining reactors will be fired up within months or years. But regardless of the result, politicians of all stripes will be forced to tackle fundamental long-term problems regarding atomic energy, especially what to do with aging reactors and the shortage of storage space for spent nuclear fuel.

Of the nation's 50 commercial reactors, three are more than 40 years old. By 2020, another 11 will have hit the 40-year limit, including all of those operated by Kansai Electric, while reactors 5 and 6 at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s wrecked Fukushima No. 1 plant are unlikely to be restarted due to political opposition.

Reactors are supposed to be decommissioned after 40 years of service, and utilities can apply to extend their operations for up to two decades. But while not legally obliged to do so, the units are unlikely to continue operating beyond 40 years without local consent.

Towns and villages hosting atomic plants are sure to raise safety concerns. This means the central government and the utilities will likely find themselves bargaining with local officials over how much taxpayer money and private donations should be pumped in initially to secure local permission to keep the nuclear plants online.

That's just the first problem.

Assuming reactors are restarted and run at pre-3/11 levels, media reports estimate that 33 of the 50 reactors will see their on-site spent-fuel pools max out their capacity within six years. They include all seven Tepco reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata Prefecture and some of Kepco's Takahama and Oi reactors in Fukui. The pools of another 14 reactors would likely be filled to the brim within a dozen years.

Only three reactors, including Ikata's unit 3, have enough space left to continue storing spent fuel after 12 years.

About 14,200 tons of spent nuclear fuel was sitting in pools next to Japan's reactors as of September 2011 — around 70 percent of the total capacity.

The government says the three options for dealing with this stockpile, and future spent fuel, are to ship it to Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, for reprocessing, build medium-term storage facilities or send it overseas for direct reprocessing.

The problem with Rokkasho is that its planned reprocessing facility is decades behind schedule and will not open anytime soon. Rokkasho's storage pools for spent fuel sent by utilities around the nation over the years are about 98 percent full.

The problem with new medium-term storage facilities is that, despite central government and utility cash incentives, few local governments have expressed any interest in building such facilities in their backyard. Even if a few were approved somewhere soon, they aren't likely to be built before spent-fuel pools at some reactors are full.

That leaves overseas reprocessing, an effort that, critics say, hides the true cost of nuclear power and creates a host of international safety and proliferation concerns.

Although restarting the plants, and the future of atomic power, is an important campaign issue, **the headline-grabbing antinuclear protests seen a year ago were absent as the campaign kicked off.**

A recent rally in Matsuyama, Ehime Prefecture, for Greens Japan candidate Uiko Hasegawa drew only a couple dozen people. Conceding the level of public demonstrations has faded since last July, Hasegawa nevertheless said events since the March 11, 2011, disasters have created a new reality.

"Think about the situation before then, when Japanese society almost considered you a criminal if you opposed nuclear power. Today, everybody is talking about whether it's necessary. There's a much better awareness of the problems," she said.

In Ikata, meanwhile, Saimu, whose husband led lawsuits nearly four decades ago to stop the plant from being built, continues to oppose the restart of Ikata's reactor 3. But she admits it's a tough job.

"It takes pretty much all of our effort just to oppose the Ikata plant. **The Fukushima meltdowns shattered the nuclear power safety myth. But now we have to translate that into political action,** and that can be quite hard," she said.

What to think of M. Yoshida?

June 11, 2013

Did late No. 1 plant head avert or facilitate nuclear crisis?

by Reiji Yoshida

Staff Writer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/07/11/national/did-late-no-1-plant-head-avert-or-facilitate-nuclear-plan-crisis/#.Ud-oNqxSb9k>

When Masao Yoshida met reporters from major media outlets for the first time on Dec. 12, 2011, the then-chief manager of the Fukushima No. 1 plant left a strange impression on those present.

Yoshida remained calm and quiet throughout the joint interview, although he was known for exerting impassioned leadership that barely spared the nuclear plant from suffering the same explosive fate as Chernobyl, and thus mitigated the level of radioactive fallout in the Tohoku region.

“I apologize from the bottom of my heart. That’s the first thing I will say,” Yoshida told the reporters, saying the triple meltdowns had caused great trouble to everyone in Japan but especially those in Fukushima Prefecture.

Three days later, he left the plant and Tokyo Electric Power Co. later announced he had esophagus cancer. When Yoshida, 58, died of the cancer Tuesday after a long fight, the news made big headlines across the country.

A Tepco spokesman said the utility is not sure if he was aware of the disease at the time of his only news conference.

Many Japanese have praised his bravery in continuing to battle the crisis as well as the bureaucratic tendencies of Tepco’s top management.

Yet while not much spotlighted, Yoshida may have been partly responsible for ignoring the dangers of potentially giant tsunami and for not taking enough measures to bolster the plant against major damage, even though expert advisers in 2008 had warned Tepco about the threat.

Yoshida was known for a strong leadership style that kept united plant workers fighting the meltdown crisis that broke out in March 2011, triggered by the quake-tsunami disasters.

He became a national hero for containing the crisis. He even defied unreasonable instructions from senior management at Tepco's head office in managing the disaster, which only added to his reputation as a decisive leader who cared about his employees.

During a March 12, 2011, teleconference, Tepco executive Ichiro Takekuro ordered Yoshida to stop the critical injection of seawater into the wrecked reactor 1 despite the acute need for more coolant to prevent a catastrophic explosion.

Yoshida loudly told his staff to stop the injection, as ordered by Takekuro, but at the same time whispered to them that they should never actually do so. Experts later said Yoshida's judgment was spot on.

"The possibility was high that without him, the (Fukushima) crisis would have escalated further," former Prime Minister Naoto Kan wrote on his blog Wednesday, after learning of Yoshida's death.

"Whatever I asked, staff who came to the prime minister's office from Tepco's head office didn't give any organized answers. Yoshida clearly explained the situation. . . . I strongly felt you can trust this guy," Kan wrote.

But Yoshida was also a Tepco executive and may have been partly to blame for not preventing the disaster in the first place, as indicated in a 2011 interim report by an expert investigatory panel set up by the government.

According to the report, a panel of experts had pointed out to Tepco in February 2008 that the plant was vulnerable to a possible mega-quake and monster tsunami. Yoshida was then the head of Tepco's nuclear equipment management department.

Based on this warning, Tepco conducted a simulation and concluded that tsunami in excess of 10 meters could hit the Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

Yoshida and Sakae Muto, a fellow Tepco executive, were briefed about the simulation but they didn't take any effective measures, believing the projection was based only on a worst-case scenario and was thus unrealistic, the report showed.

Investigation into discharge of radioactive water in river used for irrigation

July 12, 2013

Probe launched after contractor JDC dumped radioactive water into river for irrigation in Fukushima

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/07/12/national/probe-launched-after-contractor-jdc-dumped-radioactive-water-into-river-for-irrigation-in-fukushima/#.Ud75HqxSb9k>

JDC Corp., a midsize general contractor, **discharged 340 tons of radioactive water into the Iizaki River, which is tapped for irrigation in Minamisoma**, Fukushima Prefecture, during government-sponsored decontamination work it was involved in, company sources said Thursday.

Local government officials claimed they were never informed of the action. But JDC sources said the dumping occurred after it received assurances from the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, which contracted it to carry out the decontamination work, that the state body had informed the local governments about the discharge in advance and no problem was anticipated.

The company had not been aware that water from the river would be used for agricultural purposes, the sources added.

A Minamisoma official said the city never received any explanation about the dumping, nor had Fukushima Prefecture, according to a prefectural official.

The Japan Atomic Energy Agency claimed it had verbally notified the city and prefecture, but had not established an agreement in writing.

The Environment Ministry is investigating, suspecting information was not properly conveyed in accordance with law.

The radioactive water was accumulated during agency-sponsored decontamination projects JDC was involved in between December 2011 and February 2012.

JDC engaged in radiation decontamination work in and around Kanabusa elementary school in Minamisoma and accumulated 609 tons of tainted water, according to JDC data made available to Kyodo News.

Of that amount, 269 tons was treated by specialists and the remaining 340 tons was discharged into the Iizaki River, which is used to irrigate rice paddies.

The discharged water included 60 tons with radiation levels at 100 to 121 becquerels per liter, exceeding the agency's maximum allowable standard of 90 becquerels, the company data indicate. Radioactive substances in the discharged water totaled 16 million becquerels.

The agency approved a JDC plan to transport radiation-contaminated water to a certain collection center in December 2011 and submitted the plan to the Minamisoma Municipal Government.

The city said that at the time, it had expected the tainted water to be taken away.

Gov't money allotted to decontamination work not used

June 12, 2013

State withholds more than 60% of Fukushima cleanup budget

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201307120080>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The central government held back more than 60 percent of the 255 billion yen (\$2.57 billion) recovery budget earmarked in fiscal 2012 for radioactive cleanup efforts overseen by municipal governments in Fukushima Prefecture.

The central government is directly overseeing cleanup efforts in the vicinity of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The central government has also set aside separate amounts to cover the expenses of decontamination work overseen by 36 municipal governments in Fukushima Prefecture. The cash has been deposited in a fund administered by the prefectural government.

It pays for the work initially, but later sends corresponding bills to Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant operator.

The thriftiness is apparently partly due to consideration for TEPCO, which eventually has to cover the expenses of the cleanup. Rigorous restrictions apply.

The finding by The Asahi Shimbun raises questions over the consistency of the practice, given the Abe administration's official pledge to speed up the decontamination work.

It emerges that 158 billion yen in leftovers from the budget earmarked for the decontamination of radioactive fallout triggered by reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima plant following the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster was carried forward into the current fiscal year, which started in April.

Documents disclosed by the prefectural government showed that only 97 billion yen, or less than 40 percent of the allocated budget, was used in fiscal 2012. Thirty-two municipal governments carried over residual amounts into the current fiscal year, with 17 of them not even spending half of their allocations.

Nevertheless, the central government has set aside an additional 204.7 billion yen in the fiscal 2013 budget for cleanup work, including new cash injections into the prefectural fund.

Officials in municipal governments have pointed out that cleanup methods proposed by their governments are often rejected by the Environment Ministry, which strictly adheres to its rigorous decontamination guidelines. That comes on top of delays in securing land plots for hosting temporary waste storage depots and a shortage of cleanup workers.

The Environment Ministry holds meetings with municipal governments to decide on the applicability of decontamination methods in the absence of clear-cut standards. The ministry has so far refused to approve the replacement of drain spouts and the use of other costly cleanup methods.

An official with the ministry's Fukushima Office for Environmental Restoration told The Asahi Shimbun that **decisions are being made with TEPCO's opinions factored in.**

"We cannot approve methods that TEPCO does not approve," the official said.

A senior official with a different central government body expressed sympathy with the Environment Ministry's stance.

"It's only natural to negotiate matters so that TEPCO would not refuse payments," the senior official said.

So far, TEPCO has refused to pay 15.9 billion yen of the 21.2 billion yen in central government bills, citing ambiguities in the decontamination standards. **The central government is likely to end up paying the bills that TEPCO has refused to pay.**

Talks were held on 284 cleanup issues in fiscal 2012. **It can take up to six months before a conclusion is reached.**

"The cleanup processes will speed up only if the municipal governments are given the authority to make decisions," said an official with the Fukushima city government.

Ironically, the budget for decontamination processes, which the central government has pledged to promote on its own responsibility, has remained noticeably underused at a time when the national budget earmarked for other post-quake recovery efforts are found to have been diverted to apparently irrelevant purposes.

There is a strong sense of distrust among officials in municipal governments, who believe the central government is citing meticulous rules as a pretext to curb the use of the cleanup budget.

"We are discussing the cleanup processes with the Environment Ministry but we cannot disclose the details," a TEPCO representative said.

(This article was written by Shinichi Sekine and Eiji Zakoda.)

Japan Atomic Power Co challenges Tsuruga ban

July 16,2013-

**Utility seeks to overturn reactor ban
NRA judgment of active fault at Tsuruga plant challenged**
Kyodo, JJI

- <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/07/16/national/utility-seeks-to-overturn-reactor-ban/#.UeZUfW1U2vM>

Japan Atomic Power Co. filed a petition Tuesday seeking to revoke the Nuclear Regulation Authority's instruction issued in May to assess how spent-fuel assemblies would be affected by movement in a fault that runs under one of its reactors at the Tsuruga nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture.

The move by Japan Atomic Power, which is angling to restart the Tsuruga reactors, is aimed at countering NRA's conclusion that the fault is active.

This is the first protest filed by a power firm based on the administrative appeal law against the NRA since the regulatory body debuted last September.

A team of experts under the NRA compiled a report in May concluding that a crush zone under reactor 2 at the Tsuruga plant is an active fault requiring attention under seismic-resistant design guidelines for nuclear plants.

The NRA authorized the report and instructed the power company to submit an assessment by the end of July of how spent-fuel assemblies stored in a pool in the building housing reactor 2 could be affected by a quake.

In its objection, Japan Atomic Power requested the cancellation of the instruction, arguing that providing such an assessment would be tantamount to concluding the fault is active, which the firm denies.

The company argues that the NRA's conclusion about the fault is mistaken and therefore the instruction based on it is illegal.

At the same time, the company said it will submit an evaluation report later this month as instructed because it can't risk being penalized for not complying.

Last Thursday, Japan Atomic Power submitted a report to the NRA insisting that the fault shows no trace of movement during the past 120,000 to 130,000 years and therefore does not meet the definition of an active fault.

The NRA is now looking into that report.

Under the seismic-resistant design guidelines, no important structure in a nuclear facility can be built above an active fault.

Separately Tuesday, the NRA held its first meetings with power utilities to check whether their reactors satisfy the new safety requirements introduced following the 2011 Fukushima reactor meltdowns.

Four utilities have so far applied for the NRA's safety assessments on a total of 12 reactors for which restarts are being sought.

The new requirements, introduced July 8, oblige utilities to put in place for the first time specific countermeasures against possible severe calamities, like reactor core meltdowns, as well as against huge tsunami — the direct cause of the catastrophe at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 complex.

Naoto Kan sues Abe for libel

July 17, 2013

Ex-prime minister sues Abe for libel over Fukushima comments

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201307170007

REUTERS

Japan's prime minister at the time of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster said on July 16 he has sued the current premier, Shinzo Abe, for defamation over an article criticizing the emergency operation he supervised during the crisis.

Naoto Kan, a lawmaker for the opposition Democratic Party of Japan, took the highly unusual step only a few days before an Upper House election on July 21, in which nuclear power is one of the most hotly debated issues.

Kan has become a vocal opponent of nuclear power in the wake of the disaster, while Abe's ruling Liberal Democratic Party wants atomic energy to help pull the economy out of stagnation.

About two-thirds of the public opposes nuclear power.

Kan headed the government when an earthquake and tsunami killed nearly 20,000 people and set off the world's worst nuclear crisis in 25 years when the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant was destroyed, leaking radiation into the sea and air.

In an article from May 20, 2011, still visible on Abe's website, Abe criticized Kan for taking credit for the decision to cool the melting nuclear reactors with seawater. He said Kan had not been aware of the operation at first, then stopped it only to finally restart it after consulting experts.

“The content is based on totally false information. The article has severely damaged my honor,” Kan told a news conference at parliament, adding that he had asked Abe to remove the article several times.

Kan demanded that Abe immediately delete the story, apologize and pay 11 million yen (\$110,100) in compensation.

Kan has been credited with playing an important role in stopping the crisis from getting worse by preventing the operator of the crippled plant, Tokyo Electric Power Co., from abandoning the plant and pulling out its workers.

Cooling the nuclear reactors with seawater was seen as key to preventing the situation at the crippled plant from getting completely out of control.

All of Japan’s 50 nuclear reactors were shut down after the disaster.

A decision by the previous government to restart two of them last year was met with the biggest protests in decades and contributed to the government’s defeat in a December Lower House election.

Still, opinion polls show strong support for the LDP, buoyed by hopes that Abe’s hyper-easy monetary policy, public spending and structural reform will bolster growth and jolt Japan out of years of stagnation.

TEPCO trying to stop brain drain

July 20, 2013

TEPCO makes lump-sum bonus payment to managers to stop brain-drain

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201307200041>

By MARI FUJISAKI/ Staff Writer

Managers at Tokyo Electric Power Co. will receive a one-time payment of 100,000 yen (\$997) each, in a bid to boost morale and keep them from abandoning the embattled utility and operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Naomi Hirose, the corporate president, formally announced the plan during a news conference July 19, where he tried to allay possible complaints about the payment amid the protracted efforts to keep the situation at the crippled nuclear plant under control.

"The cleanup work, the decommissioning processes for the nuclear reactors, the making of damage payments, these all take workers and personnel to accomplish," Hirose said. "We have decided on the payment, despite its extremely unusual nature, to boost spirits and motivate the managers to do their jobs."

The lump-sum payment is scheduled to be made July 22. Only section chiefs and managers higher up are eligible for the payments because quite a number of them are currently being compensated less than the rank-and-file.

That's because the annual wages received by managers have fallen by as much as 30 percent since the onset of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011. Non-managerial employees have had their salaries cut by 20 percent. However, they are entitled to overtime pay, TEPCO officials said.

About 5,000 individuals are eligible for the one-time payments, which will cost TEPCO 500 million yen (\$4.9 million). **The payment has been made possible due to the 500 billion yen in cost cuts achieved in fiscal 2012**, which was 150 billion yen more than TEPCO had initially envisioned, officials added.

Customers are also bearing part of the burden due to electricity rate hikes by TEPCO.

From the onset of the nuclear crisis and until the end of June 2013, a total of 1,286 employees left TEPCO of their own volition. Fifty-one of those were section chiefs or higher, with many playing central roles in the Corporate Planning Department, which is responsible for mapping out the utility's post-crisis business recovery efforts, and the departments in charge of damage payments.

Blocking the brain-drain of core personnel has emerged as a major management challenge for TEPCO.

How reliable are WHO's data?

July 20, 2013

Question about the credibility of WHO data

Posted by **Mochizuki** on July 20th, 2013 ·

<http://fukushima-diary.com/2013/07/column-question-about-the-credibility-of-who-data/>

Last week, Tepco revised their own medical report.

The report is about the exposure dose of Fukushima workers. It was already submitted to WHO one year ago.

In the revised report, Tepco states about 2000 workers had significant thyroid exposure. It's 11 times much number as originally reported to WHO.

Why did they report 1/11 times smaller number in the beginning ?

As the reason, Tepco comments they were on the assumption that "some" workers took radioactive Iodine-131 in the middle of their working term in Fukushima nuclear plant instead of from the beginning of their working term.

"Some" workers mean FEMALE workers and supporting workers from other plants.

Half of Iodine-131 decays in 8 days. By assuming those workers didn't take it from the beginning, they can downplay the effect.

Women are more sensitive for radiation exposure. If Tepco admits they were significantly exposed, Tepco has to pay their medical care. Tepco has a lot of benefits from underestimating the actual exposure.

So far, Tepco hasn't announced they re-submitted the correct report to WHO.

If they don't, WHO would take another underestimated data of a nuclear accident.

There is a possibility that WHO collects data like this from around the world.

The fake science based on the countless lies is given the brand of "WHO".

We need to investigate the data collecting process of WHO.

Why so late?

July 22, 2013

TEPCO admits radioactive water leaked to sea

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201307220093>

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tokyo Electric Power Co. has said its crippled Fukushima nuclear plant is likely to have leaked contaminated water into sea, acknowledging for the first time a problem long suspected by experts.

Experts have suspected a continuous leak since the Fukushima No. 1 plant was ravaged by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

TEPCO had previously denied contaminated water reached the sea, despite spikes in radiation levels in underground and sea water samples taken at the plant.

Japan's nuclear watchdog said two weeks ago a leak was highly suspected, ordering the utility to examine the problem.

The company said July 22 that the leak has stayed near the plant inside the bay.

TEPCO is struggling to manage leaks of water used to cool the wrecked reactors, a risk hampering the plant's decommissioning efforts.

Tepco now admits radioactive water entering the sea at Fukushima No. 1

Fisheries exec shocked by utility's flip-flop on groundwater's flow

AFP-JJI

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/07/22/national/tepcu-now-admits-radioactive-water-entering-the-sea-at-fukushima-no-1/#.Ue1bV6xSb9k>

Fukushima nuclear plant operator Tepco on Monday **admitted for the first time** that radioactive groundwater is flowing into the sea, fueling fears that marine life is being poisoned.

The admission came a day after voters handed the largely pro-nuclear Liberal Democratic Party of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe — and ally New Komeito — a handsome majority in the Upper House.

Earlier this month, Tokyo Electric Power Co. said groundwater samples taken at the battered plant showed that levels of cesium-134 had shot up more than 110 times in a few days.

Although unable to explain the increased readings, Tepco had nevertheless maintained the toxic groundwater was likely being contained, largely by concrete foundations and steel sheets.

"But now we believe that contaminated water has flowed out to the sea," a Tepco spokesman said Monday.

However, the spokesman insisted the impact of the radioactive water on the ocean would be limited. "Seawater data have shown no abnormal rise in the levels of radioactivity."

Tetsu Nozaki, chairman of Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Associations, voiced deep concern.

"It was quite shocking," he told NHK. "(Tepco's) explanation is totally different from the one in the past." Fishing around the Fukushima plant was halted shortly after the crisis, and production of beef, milk, mushrooms and vegetables was banned in surrounding areas, crippling the prefecture's thriving fishing and agriculture industries.

Tepco, which is surviving thanks to a massive infusion of public funds, said it would step up efforts to reduce underground water by consolidating soil near its harbor.

Radioactive substances released by the reactor core meltdowns at the aging plant following the huge quake and tsunami of March 2011 have been leaking from damaged buildings and mingling with the ground water, which usually flows out to sea.

Environmental experts warn that the festering radioactive sore could contaminate the food chain by tainting marine life and ultimately, the humans who eat it.

Tepco said earlier this year that a fish found with radiation more than 2,500 times the legal limit had been caught in a port on Fukushima No. 1's premises. It also said last week that around 2,000 people who worked at the plant now face a heightened risk of thyroid cancer.

This is 10 times more than Tepco's previous estimate for potential thyroid cancer victims and came after the beleaguered utility was told its figures were too conservative.

Gov't : TEPCO always "one step behind the problems"

Jul. 23, 2013

Suga: TEPCO must stop leak quickly

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130723_27.html

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga says the government will instruct the operator of Fukushima Daiichi to do a quick and secure job in preventing further leaks of radiation-tainted groundwater into the sea.

Tokyo Electric Power Company admitted for the first time on Monday that tainted water is seeping into the sea from the plant site, based on its analysis of water levels underground and in the adjacent sea.

High levels of groundwater contamination have been identified since May at the plant's monitoring wells.

Suga told reporters after the Cabinet meeting on Tuesday that the government views this as a grave matter.

He said the government will urge TEPCO to take necessary measures immediately and appropriately.

Suga said TEPCO had submitted some data to the Nuclear Regulation Authority last Thursday, but they were still not sufficient proof of leakage at that point.

He said the government believes that data should be made open to the public immediately, and that it will have the economy and industry ministry instruct the utility on transparency.

Economy and industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi criticized TEPCO, saying its release of data was too slow.

Jul. 23, 2013 - Updated 05:16 UTC

Industry ministry official slams TEPCO

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130723_05.html

A senior Japanese government official has criticized the operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant for failing to stop radioactive water leaking into the ocean.

Tokyo Electric Power Company officials announced on Monday that new findings suggest tainted water has been leaking into the ocean since April.

Officials from the Industry Ministry inspected the plant later on Monday. Senior vice minister Kazuyoshi Akaba says the situation is deplorable.

He says **TEPCO always seems to be one step behind the problems.**

TEPCO says the contamination has not spread beyond an area near the plant.

Workers are using chemicals to solidify the ground around the wells and the coastal area to stop further leakage.

BUt hasTEPCO any trust to damage?

July 23, 2013

TEPCO loses trust over leak of radioactive water into sea

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130723p2a00m0na011000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) finally admitted on July 22 that radiation-tainted water has been seeping from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant into the sea.

Highly contaminated water was first found in an existing observation well at the nuclear plant on June 3. On numerous occasions since then, an increase in radiation levels had been measured in the sea and high concentrations of radioactive materials were detected in a new observation well, raising suspicions of leaks. But in an opinion on the cause of the increased levels, TEPCO had previously explained, "When contaminated water leaked from the vicinity of an intake of the No. 2 reactor in April 2011, right after the outbreak of the nuclear accident, some of it remained in the ground. We haven't seen any significant impact on the environment."

Contaminated water has continued to accumulate at a rate of 400 metric tons per day as a result of groundwater entering damaged reactor buildings at the Fukushima plant. As of July 16, roughly 75,000 tons of water had accumulated in the No. 1-4 reactor buildings. To reduce the amount of water building up, TEPCO initially planned to release groundwater that had not yet been contaminated into the sea, thereby limiting the amount of groundwater entering the reactor buildings.

However, small amounts of radioactive materials were detected in the groundwater, and local fisheries cooperatives objected to the plan due to fears it would spark harmful rumors about local marine resources. In the end the plan was derailed. Now, having admitted to a leak of contaminated water, the fishing industry's trust in TEPCO could diminish further.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) pointed out this month that there were strong suspicions contaminated water had seeped into the sea. NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka stated, "Contamination of the sea, to a greater or lesser extent, is continuing," suggesting it was possible that contaminated water that had leaked from reactor buildings had mixed with groundwater and was flowing toward the sea.

On July 22, TEPCO finally released its analysis of data on the sea level and the water level in a buried observation well near the sea. This overturned previous views on the situation. The company had reported the data to the NRA on July 18.

Seiji Abe, a Kansai University professor familiar with public utilities, criticized TEPCO's handling of the situation.

"Its response damaged trust that urgently needed to be restored, and its actions were extremely problematic," he said. "The company still probably hasn't come to the realization that the monopoly it has had has created a wide gap between its reasoning and the public's demands."

The government has been involved in creating a roadmap to decommission the damaged reactors at the Fukushima plant. However, it has not had a direct hand in any onsite work.

"TEPCO is the one that's working on the scene," an official from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry commented.

On the evening of July 22, Takeshi Takahashi, chief of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant stabilization center, visited officials at the Fukushima Prefectural Government headquarters including Tetsuya Hasegawa, head of the living environment department, and explained the leaks.

"We apologize for causing concern. We'll take measures to prevent further leaks into the sea," Takahashi said.

Hasegawa responded with a demand that TEPCO take proper measures to stop radioactive materials leaking into the sea and identify the cause of the leak.

July 23, 2013(Mainichi Japan)

Fishermen in Fukushima angry at TEPCO over leak

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130723_42.html

Fishermen in Fukushima have expressed anger at Tokyo Electric Power Company's acknowledgement on Monday that contaminated underground water is seeping into the ocean.

About 100 fishermen attended a private briefing session on Tuesday by the operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Officials from the utility reportedly said the contaminated water hasn't spread much. They also explained their plan to build walls along the coast to prevent tainted water from leaking into the ocean.

Some fishermen reportedly said Tokyo Electric Power Company officials may have deliberately concealed the information. Others said they cannot trust the firm.

Fishermen are also worried about the impact of the announcement on their plan to resume fishing on a trial basis in September.

The head of a local fisheries cooperative said they will not be able to reassure consumers by drawing a line in the sea to separate safe and contaminated areas.

He said TEPCO's announcement has dealt a serious blow to their plan to resume fishing.

Jul. 23, 2013 - Updated 10:36 UTC

TEPCO criticized for belated admission of radioactive leaks into the sea

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201307230066>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUKUSHIMA--Fukushima prefectural officials blasted Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s belated admission that radioactive water was leaking into the ocean from the damaged Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, even though the utility knew in January that water from a contaminated well had a direct channel to the sea.

TEPCO publicly admitted July 22 for the first time since suspicions emerged in June that radioactive substances from the reactors had likely leaked into the ocean.

The admission came after the utility announced June 19 that it had detected increased levels of radioactive substances in monitoring wells on the ocean side of the hobbled plant--a discovery it had sat on since May 31. It also knew months earlier before the confirmation that the wells where the radioactivity was detected were fluctuating in sync with tide levels.

TEPCO's Fukushima Revitalization Headquarters blamed the delay on announcing its findings on insufficient in-house communication.

"Our civil engineering department had confirmed water level variations in monitoring wells as early as in January," an official of the Revitalization Headquarters told the news conference on July 22, referring to the fact that such variations indicated that groundwater was likely mixing with seawater. That means contaminated groundwater had access to the sea. "But that information was not shared by our department responsible for monitoring radioactive levels."

The Fukushima prefectural government July 22 summoned TEPCO representatives to its offices to lodge a protest.

"It is truly regrettable that the insufficient sharing of in-house information resulted in a delay in safety measures being taken," the director-general of the prefectural government's Living and Environment Department, Tetsuya Hasegawa, told Takeshi Takahashi, head of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant stabilization center, and other TEPCO representatives.

Hasegawa also called on TEPCO to take measures to prevent further leaks and to strengthen its monitoring operations.

"The people of Fukushima become more anxious every time they hear of more safety failures," he told the TEPCO representatives. "Please put that thought at the very center of your mind as you try to fix this situation."

Tetsu Nozaki, who heads the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations, also voiced a renewed sense of distrust in the power company.

"Never have I felt so shocked since we first learned during the early phases of the nuclear disaster that radioactive water was leaking into the ocean," he said.

Nozaki said the fishermen's union had held discussions with TEPCO on measures to stop radioactive water from contaminating the ocean before the most recent admission.

"That premise is gone, and we now face a totally different situation," he said. "Before anything else, I want them to make every effort to stop the leaks as soon as possible."

Will the "pain" of pursuing nuke policy be more tolerable?

July 23, 2013

LDP executive: Abandoning nuclear energy would cause 'intolerable pain'

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201307230037>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Terminating nuclear energy now because of the Fukushima nuclear disaster would inflict unbearable suffering on future generations in Japan, an executive of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party said.

"The world trend is to advance nuclear power generation," Hiroyuki Hosoda, the LDP's executive acting secretary-general, said on a TV program on July 22. "The argument that we should abandon everything because of the misfortune--the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co.--will cause future Japanese nationals intolerable pain."

Hosoda was elected from Shimane Prefecture, which is home to a nuclear power plant.

Although he was apparently trying to express the feelings of residents in Shimane Prefecture, his remark may spark criticism that he is being insensitive to the disaster victims in Fukushima Prefecture.

The LDP's policy chief, Sanae Takaichi, came under heavy fire last month for saying the Fukushima nuclear accident has not directly caused any deaths in her arguments for restarting nuclear reactors.

More than two years since the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami struck northeastern Japan and led to meltdowns at the Fukushima plant, about 150,000 residents of the prefecture are still living as evacuees.

Fishermen very angry with TEPCO

July 24, 2013

Fishermen slam tardy admission of radioactive flow into sea, of well levels in sync with tides

Tepco held back groundwater news

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/07/24/national/tepcO-held-back-groundwater-news/#.UfAFUaxSb9k>

Kyodo

Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s admission Monday that radioactive groundwater from under the disaster-struck Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant has reached the Pacific Ocean came about a month after the problem was confirmed.

Tepco had been taking groundwater samples from wells near the shore at the crippled plant to test for radioactive substances. It claims it only recently realized the water levels in the wells rose when the ocean tides did.

Tepco's slow action and tardy revelation, coupled with an apparent lack of coordination within the utility in sharing crucial data about the case, is making local fishermen increasingly distrustful of the utility.

At a Tuesday briefing for fishermen in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, the day after the groundwater leak was admitted, participants expressed anger at the utility, with one calling for someone to take responsibility.

Following the March 2011 nuclear meltdowns triggered by the massive quake and tsunami, fishermen in the prefecture voluntarily suspended operations.

Finally in June last year, they began trial fishing in a limited area in the north targeting selected types of fish.

Fisheries officials were also considering launching limited operations in waters off Iwaki in the south from September. Then came Tepco's admission.

"This will pose a significant hurdle to the trial operation. Even if we can catch fish, will we be able to tell consumers with confidence that they can eat them?" said Masakazu Yabuki, 76, head of the Iwaki fisheries cooperative.

The utility announced in mid-June that high concentrations of radioactive materials were detected in groundwater observation wells located by the sea. It kept downplaying its possible impact on the sea, saying it did not detect any changes in concentration levels in nearby seawater.

The utility's cautious attitude about announcing the radioactive groundwater flow seems to stem from its urgent need to take measures against the ever-increasing amount of nuclear contaminated water.

At the Fukushima No. 1 plant, a huge amount of water has been pumped into the three reactors that suffered meltdowns. The water was tainted with radioactive materials and recycled for cooling the reactors after removing radioactive cesium and salt content.

Also, about 400 tons of groundwater flows into its reactor building basements daily and gets mixed with the water used to cool the reactors, creating a new contamination problem.

As of July 2, about 400,000 tons of contaminated water was stored in tanks.

The utility had planned to pump out the groundwater and release it into the sea before it enters the ground under the buildings. But it has yet to carry out the plan because of opposition from local fishermen.

The fishermen's distrust grew further after a series of problems surfaced, including an error in the way Tepco checked the radiation levels of the groundwater it seeks to release into the sea.

Tetsu Nozaki, 58, chairman of the fisheries co-op association of the prefecture, said, "It has become emotionally difficult to accept (Tepco's groundwater release plan) due to the leakage of contaminated water (into the sea)."

The utility acknowledged the contaminated groundwater was reaching the sea after realizing that the water levels in the wells rose when the tides came up.

The data had been collected since January by Tepco's civil engineering department working to design a sunken wall to prevent the spread of radioactive materials in the local harbor but had not been shared within the company.

The department overseeing contaminated water became aware of the existence of the data around July 17, sources said.

Tepco informed the Nuclear Regulation Authority of the data the following day, but did not make a public disclosure until the following week, considering the impact it would have on the upcoming briefing, they said.

Fishermen exasperated

July 26, 2013

Fishermen lambaste TEPCO over radioactive water leaks

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201307260041>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Representatives of Japan's national fishermen's federation visited Tokyo Electric Power Co. headquarters on July 25 to hand in a letter of protest over the recent leakage of radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant into the sea.

"We are exasperated at the development, which is an act of treason to all fishing industry workers and to all members of the public in Japan," read part of the letter addressed to Naomi Hirose, the corporate president.

Hiroshi Kishi, head of the National Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations, and his fellow representatives also called on TEPCO to take every precaution to stop the leaks and monitor seaborne contamination more closely.

Tetsu Nozaki, head of the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations, also attended the meeting.

Nozaki told reporters the latest development was the biggest scandal since the onset of the nuclear disaster, which was triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

"We will take prompt measures to stop the leaks into the ocean," Hirose told reporters after the meeting.

He also defended TEPCO's belated admission that radioactive water was leaking into the sea.

"We were cautious and collected more data, because the announcement was expected to have significant ramifications," Hirose explained.

TEPCO announced on June 19 that it had detected increased levels of radioactive substances in a monitoring well on the ocean side of the hobbled plant. TEPCO workers had obtained the analysis results on May 31.

It took TEPCO another month before it officially admitted on July 22 that the radioactive water was also likely leaking into the ocean.

July 25, 2013

Fishermen file protest against TEPCO over leaks

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130725_22.html

The head of a national federation of fisheries cooperatives has lodged a protest against the operator of the crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant after revelations that contaminated groundwater has leaked into the sea.

Federation chief Hiroshi Kishi visited the headquarters of Tokyo Electric Power Company on Thursday.

Kishi handed a letter of protest to TEPCO president Naomi Hirose. He said the federation has repeatedly asked the utility to ensure that no radioactive water reaches the sea. He accused TEPCO of betraying fishermen's trust.

Kishi demanded that TEPCO outlines how it will contain tainted water accumulating in the complex. He said TEPCO must take immediate measures to stop the water leaking into the sea.

He also urged the power company to increase its monitoring for radioactive substances in waters near the plant.

Hirose said he would work to comply with the requests.

A representative of a fisheries cooperative in Fukushima accompanied Kishi. He said he wants TEPCO to know that the leaks of radioactive water are the worst mistake since the nuclear accident.

High concentrations of radioactive substances have been detected in monitoring wells near the shore at the plant as well as in adjacent waters. TEPCO admitted the leaks on Monday.

see also :

July 24, 2013

Fishermen slam tardy admission of radioactive flow into sea, of well levels in sync with tides

Tepco held back groundwater news

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/07/24/national/tepcO-held-back-groundwater-news/#.UfAFUaxSb9k>

Kyodo

Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s admission Monday that radioactive groundwater from under the disaster-struck Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant has reached the Pacific Ocean came about a month after the problem was confirmed.

Tepco had been taking groundwater samples from wells near the shore at the crippled plant to test for radioactive substances. It claims it only recently realized the water levels in the wells rose when the ocean tides did.

Tepco's slow action and tardy revelation, coupled with an apparent lack of coordination within the utility in sharing crucial data about the case, is making local fishermen increasingly distrustful of the utility.

At a Tuesday briefing for fishermen in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, the day after the groundwater leak was admitted, participants expressed anger at the utility, with one calling for someone to take responsibility.

Following the March 2011 nuclear meltdowns triggered by the massive quake and tsunami, fishermen in the prefecture voluntarily suspended operations.

Finally in June last year, they began trial fishing in a limited area in the north targeting selected types of fish.

Fisheries officials were also considering launching limited operations in waters off Iwaki in the south from September. Then came Tepco's admission.

"This will pose a significant hurdle to the trial operation. Even if we can catch fish, will we be able to tell consumers with confidence that they can eat them?" said Masakazu Yabuki, 76, head of the Iwaki fisheries cooperative.

The utility announced in mid-June that high concentrations of radioactive materials were detected in groundwater observation wells located by the sea. It kept downplaying its possible impact on the sea, saying it did not detect any changes in concentration levels in nearby seawater.

The utility's cautious attitude about announcing the radioactive groundwater flow seems to stem from its urgent need to take measures against the ever-increasing amount of nuclear contaminated water.

At the Fukushima No. 1 plant, a huge amount of water has been pumped into the three reactors that suffered meltdowns. The water was tainted with radioactive materials and recycled for cooling the reactors after removing radioactive cesium and salt content.

Also, about 400 tons of groundwater flows into its reactor building basements daily and gets mixed with the water used to cool the reactors, creating a new contamination problem.

As of July 2, about 400,000 tons of contaminated water was stored in tanks.

The utility had planned to pump out the groundwater and release it into the sea before it enters the ground under the buildings. But it has yet to carry out the plan because of opposition from local fishermen.

The fishermen's distrust grew further after a series of problems surfaced, including an error in the way Tepco checked the radiation levels of the groundwater it seeks to release into the sea.

Tetsu Nozaki, 58, chairman of the fisheries co-op association of the prefecture, said, "It has become emotionally difficult to accept (Tepco's groundwater release plan) due to the leakage of contaminated water (into the sea)."

The utility acknowledged the contaminated groundwater was reaching the sea after realizing that the water levels in the wells rose when the tides came up.

The data had been collected since January by Tepco's civil engineering department working to design a sunken wall to prevent the spread of radioactive materials in the local harbor but had not been shared within the company.

The department overseeing contaminated water became aware of the existence of the data around July 17, sources said.

Tepco informed the Nuclear Regulation Authority of the data the following day, but did not make a public disclosure until the following week, considering the impact it would have on the upcoming briefing, they said.

More violations of labour laws

July 27, 2013

68% of firms handling decontamination in Fukushima violated labor laws

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130726p2a00m0na008000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Sixty-eight percent of firms engaged in decontamination work in Fukushima Prefecture in the wake of the prefecture's nuclear disaster were found to have violated labor-related laws during a recent survey, the Fukushima Labor Bureau said.

The bureau announced July 24 that it has already instructed those companies to rectify their conduct. The bureau investigated 388 Fukushima workplaces between January and June this year, mainly through snap inspections, and confirmed a total of 684 violations at 264 offices, officials said.

Seventy percent of the misconduct involved violations of the Labor Standards Act, including 108 cases of unpaid overtime, 90 cases of undocumented payrolls and 82 cases of failure to present working conditions.

The remaining 30 percent involved violations of the Industrial Safety and Health Act. Failure to conduct research on radiation dosages prior to decontamination work was reported in 20 cases, followed by 16 cases of failure to provide workers with proper education on radiation and 14 cases of failure to monitor radioactive contamination levels after decontamination work had finished.

In addition, the bureau discovered 12 cases in which the special daily allowance for decontamination work (around 10,000 yen) had not been paid, and reported these cases to the Ministry of the Environment.

The bureau conducted a similar investigation between April and December last year, targeting 242 firms, and discovered that 45 percent were violating the laws. Officials attributed the large increase this time to the fact that more items had been added to the inspection list.

July 25, 2013

Rampant violations of labor-related laws in decontamination work

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201307250073>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUKUSHIMA--Nearly 70 percent of companies engaged in decontamination work in Fukushima Prefecture were found to be in violation of job-related laws, according to the Fukushima Labor Bureau. Of 388 companies, 264 firms, or 68 percent, had breached the Labor Standards Law or the Industrial Safety and Health Law in a total of 684 cases, the bureau said July 24.

The firms have been instructed to clean up their act, it added.

In on-the-spot inspections from January to June, the bureau uncovered 473 cases that violated the Labor Standards Law and 211 cases that breached the Industrial Safety and Health Law.

The Labor Standards Law violations included not clearly explaining the labor conditions, such as wages including the hazard allowance, and not paying wages.

The Industrial Safety and Health Law violations included not spending the required time for special safety education.

In March it was revealed by The Asahi Shimbun that some companies were not paying hazard allowances to decontamination workers and were instructing them not to talk about the non-payment to government inspectors.

When the labor standards inspection offices mount on-the-spot inspections, they have to implement them without giving advance notification to companies.

However, the Tomioka Labor Standards Inspection Office notified a company in advance. As a result, workers were instructed to lie to inspectors by saying they were receiving hazard allowance.

"In cases in which companies have to prepare related documents for our inspections, we notify companies of our inspections in advance," said Yasufumi Kikuchi, director of the bureau's labor standards department, on July 24.

"Because of that, the Tomioka case does not correspond to leakage of inspection-related information by staff of the inspection office," he said. "But the advance notification led to an undesirable practice (of instructing workers to lie to inspectors). So we have to review the advance notification system."

TEPCO "dodging responsibility"

Editorial: Time for TEPCO to stop dodging responsibility for radioactive water leak

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130724p2a00m0na001000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), operator of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, has admitted there is ground water contaminated with highly radioactive substances from the plant leaking into the Pacific Ocean. TEPCO officials said the leak "will have no effect on the coast," but it may very well cause yet greater economic damage to northeastern Japan by feeding public worries about local products.

The central and local governments plus TEPCO must step up off-shore radiation monitoring and make the results public. TEPCO must also move fast to stop the contaminated water from reaching the sea by installing barriers and improving the nuclear plant buildings' foundations.

TEPCO noticed the ground water problem after the water level in an observation well on the No. 1 plant grounds was seen rising and falling with the tides, leading utility officials to conclude that ground and sea water were mixing below the plant. As tritium makes up much of the leaking radioactive substances, TEPCO believes that polluted water in a service tunnel built on the seaward side of the plant is the source of the contamination.

The power company revealed all this on July 22. Severe contamination of the observation well, however, was confirmed all the way back on June 3. In the following days, TEPCO also confirmed that the concentration of radioactive substances in the local seawater was rising, and measured the concentrations

in the well water. During this time, the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) also stated that it "strongly suspected" radioactive material was seeping into the ocean. Even so, TEPCO continued to insist that the elevated radiation levels were caused by "water that leaked near the No. 2 reactor intake port on April 2, 2011, some of which remained in the ground."

TEPCO was also late reporting a radioactive water leak from an underground storage tank in April this year -- yet another in a string of incidents that show the utility is treating fluctuations in radiation data too lightly, and is responding to these incidents too late as a result. TEPCO's predisposition to try and cover up problems has not changed at all, and we might go so far as to say the company lacks even the ability to take responsibility for the entire situation.

A portion of the data TEPCO finally revealed on July 22 was submitted to the NRA on July 18, and we have to wonder if the utility deliberately delayed releasing the full story so that it wouldn't impact the outcome of the July 21 House of Councillors election. TEPCO denies any such intention, but we remain doubtful.

Japan came in for harsh international criticism some two years ago -- soon after the March 2011 meltdowns -- for dumping contaminated water into the ocean. This time around, the NRA has said it plans to quickly establish a working group to investigate the seeping ground water. There are still many unknowns in the case, including how much contaminated water has made it to the ocean and exactly how it got there. We hope and expect that authorities will get a good grasp of the entire situation, evaluate the risks and take appropriate countermeasures.

However, even if the seepage is stopped, this case shows that the current plan to deal with radioactive water is on the brink of failure.

Even now, the flow of ground water beneath the No. 1 plant is increasing the volume of contaminated water at the rate of 400 metric tons per day. Meanwhile, a plan to redirect groundwater into the ocean before its contaminated has failed to gain the support of local fishing cooperatives. Another plan to freeze soil into a subterranean dam to keep ground water away from the plant isn't expected to be completed until fiscal 2015.

Dealing with the ground water problem is not part of the government's schedule for dismantling the shattered No. 1 plant reactors, and work on-site has yet to address the seepage directly. Contaminated ground water measures are, however, an essential part of any plan to decommission the reactors. We call on the government to do its utmost to address this problem, including explaining the reality of the situation to local residents and drawing up a budget estimate to deal with the issue.

Just didn't want to worry the public

July 27, 2013

TEPCO says was reluctant to worry public over leak

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201307270024>

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The operator of Japan's crippled nuclear plant said July 26 that it delayed acknowledging that the plant was leaking contaminated water into the sea because it did not want to worry the public until it was certain there was a problem.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. acknowledged for the first time this week that its Fukushima No. 1 plant was leaking contaminated underground water into the ocean, a problem many experts had suspected since shortly after the crisis unfolded more than two years ago.

The plant suffered multiple meltdowns after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami destroyed its power and cooling systems.

After a major leak of contaminated water in April of that year, TEPCO said it had contained the problem, and denied there were any further underground leaks into the ocean until July 22.

TEPCO has repeatedly been criticized for delayed disclosures of problems and mishaps at the plant, which still runs on makeshift equipment and has been plagued with problems, including recent blackouts and minor water leaks from storage tanks.

TEPCO President Naomi Hirose said July 26 that the company delayed acknowledging contaminated water was leaking into the sea even though obvious signs of leaks were detected in May because officials were waiting until they were certain there was a problem before making such a "major announcement."

Hirose apologized for the delay and said that he and TEPCO executive vice president Zengo Aizawa would take a 10 percent salary cut for one month over the matter.

"Rather than proactively inform the public of potential risks, we retreated to negative thinking and tried to gather more data to ensure there was a problem because it was going to be a major announcement," Hirose said. "We've been trying to reform, but we repeated the same mistake. Obviously, our effort is not enough. We are really sorry."

TEPCO's quarterly meeting of its reform monitoring committee, which comprises four outside experts, was dominated by discussion of the water leaks on July 26.

The head of the reform committee, Dale Klein, said he was disappointed and frustrated by TEPCO's handling of the disclosure of the leaks.

"These actions indicate that you do not know what you're doing, and that you do not have a plan, and you're not doing all you can to protect the environment and people," Klein, former chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, said at the meeting.

On July 25, the chief of Japan's national federation of fisheries, Hiroshi Kishi, said TEPCO had betrayed the public by denying the leaks for more than two years and demanded the company take steps to stop the leaks immediately and step up monitoring of radioactivity in seawater near the plant.

TEPCO last detected spikes in radiation levels in underground and seawater samples taken at the plant in May. The company says the contamination is limited to just near the plant, but the extent of the contamination is unknown.

Most fish and seafood from along the Fukushima coast are barred from domestic markets and exports.

So what's new?

July 26, 2013

TEPCO provides conflicting accounts on toxic water leak

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130726p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) was aware of a leak of contaminated water from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant prior to its official announcement of the leak on July 22, the head of TEPCO's reconstruction headquarters in Fukushima Prefecture has suggested.

Headquarters chief Yoshiyuki Ishizaki said at a news conference on July 25 that he received an email from the utility's headquarters in Tokyo saying that TEPCO had no choice but to announce that radiation-tainted water from its crippled nuclear power plant had leaked into the Pacific Ocean.

While TEPCO had submitted data on the leak to the secretariat of the Nuclear Regulation Authority on July 18, the utility had thus far insisted that it couldn't explain the data until July 22.

After Ishizaki's news conference on July 25, TEPCO's public relations office said that it had no means to answer which email Ishizaki referred to. It said the office had heard TEPCO finished collecting data on July 21.

Ishizaki said he couldn't remember who sent him the email. He said the Tokyo headquarters' nuclear power division and the Fukushima No. 1 power station team determined that contaminated water was spilling out into the sea. The Fukushima reconstruction head office was not involved in determining the situation, he added.

When asked by reporters if TEPCO had delayed the announcement due to a possible impact on the House of Councillors election on July 21, the public relations office denied it.

Is it "just" fear?

July 28, 2013

Fukushima: evolving fear into fact

by David Roberts and Ted Lazo

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/07/28/commentary/fukushima-evolving-fear-into-fact-2/#.UfZk_KxSb9k

BANGKOK – Masao Yoshida had been the chief manager of Japan’s Fukushima Daiichi (No. 1) nuclear power plant for just nine months when, on March 11, 2011, a massive earthquake and tsunami triggered a triple nuclear reactor meltdown. The plant spewed radioactive material into the air and water, terrifying the Japanese public and much of the world.

Yoshida’s death last week from cancer under the pall of that nuclear disaster brings to mind how vulnerable facts can be to distortion.

In the accident’s wake, a lack of trustworthy information — and an abundance of misinformation — fueled fear among the public, both in Japan and abroad. As we learned from the Three Mile Island (United States) and Chernobyl (Ukraine) accidents, stress can be at least as harmful as the radiation exposure itself. Thus, a veracity rating in the same spirit as The Washington Post’s Fact Checker, which rates the reliability of politicians’ statements in “Pinocchio” units, may help to save lives in future public health crises.

A fearful public quickly lost confidence in official communications channels after repeated failures. People looked instead to the news media for information, but the media could not be relied on fully, either, with even the most respected outlets unnecessarily feeding public anxiety.

Accurate information was understandably difficult to obtain in the weeks immediately following the accident, but misinformation persisted even when scientific data on radiation levels and reactor stability had become more readily available. Even The New York Times, which provided some truly excellent on-the-ground reporting, contributed at times to public alarm during the recovery, owing to misleading — and sometimes incorrect — statements. Three examples of reporting that was clearly flawed at the time, not just in hindsight, demonstrate the point:

(1) In October 2011, the *Times* compared radiation levels in “hot spots” in Tokyo to “some contaminated areas around Chernobyl.” The information was technically accurate, but the menacing impression of pockets of radioactive apocalypse was not.

The article uses the reference point of “37,000 becquerels per square meter, the level at which zones were considered contaminated at Chernobyl,” but fails to mention that this boundary is for the most peripheral of the Chernobyl-contaminated zones and is considered habitable.

The associated potential “dosage of more than one millisievert per year” could more comprehensibly (and much less frighteningly) be likened to the approximate difference in additional annual radiation exposure that the average U.S. resident experiences compared to the average Japanese due to natural background

radiation. Even this non-Chernobyl comparison overstates the real dose, as it is analogous to a large contamination zone rather than a localized “hot spot.”

(2) Likewise, the following January, the Times reported that Japan’s government would soon impose stricter food-safety radiation regulations, “bringing Japan in line with most developed countries.” This statement, made in passing, wrongly implied that Japan’s regulations at the time were notably lax, heightening the paranoia about what were already some of the world’s most strictly radionuclide-regulated food supplies (even before restrictions were further tightened).

(3) Two months later, in an ominously titled article, “Japan Nuclear Plant May Be Worse Off Than Thought,” the Times called into question the stability of one of the reactors. After citing test results showing that water levels in fuel-containment vessels were lower than expected, the article described worst-case scenarios, such as overheating and leakage of contaminated water into the ground or ocean. But the Times neglected to mention that tests of the water’s temperature conducted simultaneously actually suggested that the situation was stabilizing.

Fearful communities are deeply affected by this type of reporting. While enormous amounts of time and resources have been dedicated to learning the technical lessons of the Fukushima accident (and rightly so), not enough have been spent on trying to understand and address the damage to public health caused by misinformation.

Ideally, trusted experts would regularly be on hand to inform a more scientifically literate public and press.

What could be done now to improve post-crisis reporting would be to introduce a sort of scientific ombudsman — someone with strong credentials, access to the world’s leading experts, and a talent for communicating technical concepts to the general public effectively.

International news sources could employ such a person expressly to assess statements issued by governments, journalists, and commentators on large-scale public health crises such as nuclear accidents, epidemics, and oil spills.

In the wake of the Fukushima meltdown, a **trusted expert** [?] handing out veracity scores, or “Pinocchios,” in a respected newspaper would have given the public a greater sense of certainty in an atmosphere of fear and mistrust. That would certainly have been extremely popular among a public desperate for reliable information.

One hopes that, during the next major public health crisis, when people are foundering in a sea of unverified, often-alarming information, such a system will be in place to help keep everyone afloat.

David Roberts is former science adviser to the U.S. ambassador to Japan. Ted Lazo is deputy division head for radiation protection at the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency. © 2013 Project Syndicate (www.project-syndicate.org)

Fukushima: An emergency to be treated as such

July 31, 2013

EDITORIAL: Incompetent TEPCO should never be allowed to handle nuclear energy

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201307310031>

Has Tokyo Electric Power Co. learned nothing over the past two years and four months since the nuclear disaster started at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant?

We cannot help but ask this question in light of the utility's appallingly shoddy handling of radioactive water that is leaking from the crippled plant into the sea. We must also note that the Nuclear Regulation Authority and the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which are responsible for overseeing TEPCO's operations, can hardly be said to be living up to their responsibilities.

Water is still being pumped into the plant's crippled reactors to cool them. Some of the water that became polluted upon contact with radioactive materials has seeped into the ground and leaked into the sea. At the No. 3 reactor, highly radioactive "mystery steam" has been spotted.

The fact that radioactive substances are still being released into the ground, the sea and the air is irrefutable proof that the nuclear disaster of March 2011 is not over. The responsible parties must take this situation gravely and treat it no differently from **an emergency**.

When dealing with an accident or a disaster, the most important thing is to assess the situation accurately and disclose the findings as soon as possible. If the overall picture remains elusive, educated guesses must be made to anticipate the outcome and minimize potential damage.

How has TEPCO acted? After radioactive substances were detected in late May in well water on the coastal side of the reactor buildings, it took the company quite some time to finally admit the possibility that contaminated water was leaking into the sea. And although there was information that the level of the well water was linked to the ocean tide, this vital information was not shared among TEPCO staff.

TEPCO confirmed on July 18 that the leak into the sea had occurred, and President Naomi Hirose on July 19 ordered that directives be issued to the local fisheries community and others. Yet, no official announcement of the leak was made until a regular news conference on the evening of July 22.

The utility's glaring ineptitude with crisis management was noted right from the start of the Fukushima disaster. How and why could TEPCO have kept repeating the same blunders over and over? Did the utility even bother to examine its missteps? Or did it simply fail to learn from them?

The news conference in question took place **the day after the July 21 Upper House election. TEPCO insists this was mere coincidence, but it is only natural to suspect that the announcement was perhaps delayed intentionally to avoid influencing the voters.**

TEPCO intends to restart the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture, but we have zero faith in the utility's reliability as an operator of any nuclear power plant. In fact, allowing the company to handle nuclear energy is simply out of the question.

The entire company now needs to be focused on preventing radioactive substances from escaping into the environment.

Questions are also being raised about the competence of the nation's nuclear watchdogs in handling nuclear mishaps.

The NRA, for instance, should now be directing every aspect of the Fukushima disaster cleanup work, even if it means putting on hold the screening of applications from other utilities to restart their nuclear power plants.

Are the new safety regulations adequate enough to prevent radioactive water from flowing into the sea in the event of a major nuclear accident? We call on the NRA take a good, hard look at this matter upon thorough examination of the Fukushima leakage case.

--The Asahi Shimbun, July 29

TEPCO controls all information

July 31, 2013

Yet more Tepco incompetence

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/07/31/editorials/yet-more-tepco-incompetence/#.UfoWMqxSb9k>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. on July 22 finally admitted that radioactive water is leaking from its stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant into the Pacific Ocean. The admission came more than 50 days after the company detected a high concentration of tritium on May 31 in a ground water sample taken 25 meters from the sea. Tepco had long refused to admit such a leak although experts stressed the possibility.

Tepco's belated admission shows that it lacks the ability to prevent the leakage of radioactive substances into the environment and does not have a proper sense of its responsibility to protect the environment from radioactive contamination.

On June 19 a high concentration of radioactive strontium was detected again in the same groundwater. Although Tepco made its findings public, it said it did not think that the contaminated groundwater was flowing into the sea. On June 24, Tepco said a high concentration of tritium was found in seawater near the plant. On June 29, a high concentration of radioactive substances was detected in a well about four meters from the sea.

On July 10, the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) officially announced that radioactively contaminated water was seeping into the ground and flowing into the sea. But Tepco said that it "could not make a definitive answer" because it lacked relevant data.

It wasn't until July 17/18 that Tepco said that it discovered that data did exist in the company that showed a correlation between the groundwater level and the sea tide level. Tepco then finally admitted that the radioactive groundwater was leaking into the sea. It is deplorable that various Tepco departments failed to share critical data with one another.

Tepco has been postponing taking drastic measures to prevent the leakage of radioactive groundwater into the sea, and because **it controls all information**, it is very difficult for outside groups to know what is going on and to ensure the crisis is being managed correctly. Tepco's monopoly of data and its unilateral decisions on what to do with it must come to an end.

Every day about 400 tons of groundwater flowing into the plant buildings becomes radioactive as it mixes with water that has been used to cool the reactor cores. But Tepco has not worked out a way to prevent this. On July 27, Tepco announced that it had detected 2.35 billion becquerels of radioactive cesium and 750 million becquerels of other, unnamed radioactive substances per liter in water from a cable trench as close as 50 meters to the sea.

If **outside experts** had been able to examine Tepco's data and worked with the company to prevent the leakage of contaminated groundwater, the current situation could have been avoided. **A system for the NRA and other experts, both Japanese and foreign, as well as the government to not only oversee Tepco's handling of the nuclear crisis but actively participate in the process, must be established.** The latest development underlines the need to thoroughly discuss whether Tepco has the ability to properly operate nuclear power plants.

TEPCO's 2-year inaction - Sealing work too difficult

August 1, 2013

TEPCO did nothing about radioactive water leak for 2 years

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201308010053>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant sat on its hands for more than two years despite having pledged to seal a leaking hole in a turbine building, The Asahi Shimbun has learned.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. said in April 2011, just one month after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the Fukushima nuclear disaster, that it would block the connection between a turbine building and an underground pit to prevent radioactive water from leaking into the sea. However, the utility only began preparing for shielding tests this summer, after contaminated water was found to be leaking into the sea.

TEPCO's inaction is likely responsible for the spread of radiation.

During the early phases of the nuclear meltdowns, water, used to cool the overheating reactors, filled the reactor and turbine buildings as well as adjacent underground pits.

On March 27, 2011, TEPCO workers found that radioactive water, measuring more than 1,000 millisieverts per hour, lay in an underground pit adjacent to the turbine building for No. 2 reactor. The following day, at a news conference to announce the findings, TEPCO officials explained that the tsunami had likely broken open a barrier between the underground pit and the basement level of the turbine building, thereby creating a water channel.

One TEPCO official, answering a question from an Asahi Shimbun reporter on that occasion, acknowledged the possibility that radioactive water could seep from pit joints out into the ground and eventually reach the sea.

Radioactive water was found leaking into the sea near a water intake for the No. 2 reactor on April 2, 2011. The leak was plugged four days later.

On April 17, 2011, TEPCO released a road map toward bringing the nuclear crisis under control. To illustrate the measures it had "considered" or "taken" to prevent a recurrence of the leak from the No. 2 reactor, the utility released a public announcement that explicitly mentioned "shielding the connection between the pit and the turbine building," alongside two other measures it had already taken.

TEPCO, in fact, had yet to seal that connection, and left it unattended afterward. Officials of the utility apparently believed that stopgap measures, which consisted of using concrete and crushed stone to seal the seaward end of the pit, were sufficient.

TEPCO said in June this year it had detected high levels of radioactive substances in groundwater sampled from a well on the ocean side of the turbine buildings. The utility, which acknowledged July 22 that radioactive water was leaking into the sea, came under fire when it was uncovered that its officials had reached that conclusion on July 19.

Experts believe some of the radioactive water lying in pits likely seeped out into the ground and eventually reached the ocean.

TEPCO officials have said the turbine building remains connected with the pit, which means highly radioactive water may still be leaking.

In response to questions from The Asahi Shimbun, TEPCO officials insisted that the act of sealing the seaward end of the pit constituted "shielding the connection between the pit and the turbine building" as stated in the announcement material.

The utility did consider plugging up the leak hole in the turbine building after it put together a set of "reliability enhancement measures" in May 2012 at the behest of the government, but **the sealing work "has not been done to this day because of the (technical) difficulties involved,"** the officials added.

(This article was written by Senior Staff Writer Toshihiro Okuyama and Toshio Tada.)

Nuclear victims cost too much

August 1, 2013

Gov't agencies secretly agreed to put off nuke disaster victim relief until after election

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130801p2a00m0na011000c.html>

The Reconstruction Agency secretly agreed with other government agencies to postpone assistance to nuclear disaster victims until after the July 21 House of Councillors election, sources close to the government have revealed.

According to the sources, the Reconstruction Agency and other relevant ministries and agencies agreed in March to put off until after the upper house poll a decision over which organ would lead consideration into radiation dose standards, a crucial step for formulating concrete support measures for nuclear disaster victims under the Act on the Protection and Support for the Children and other Victims of TEPCO Disaster. The law, which is designed to assist residents in areas whose radiation doses surpass certain criteria, is overseen by the Reconstruction Agency.

Such a behind-the-curtain move comes in disregard of nuclear victims' repeated calls for swiftly drawing up support measures, in the face of the prolonged indecision over the radiation dose criteria since the law's enactment on June 21 last year.

The secret agreement had apparently been mentioned in a controversial Twitter comment by a former senior Reconstruction Agency official, who tweeted on March 8, "One of the pending issues was resolved today. To be precise, the concerned parties agreed to leave the matter ambiguous, without determining black or white." The former official, who was in charge of the law for supporting Fukushima victims, was later punished for repeatedly slandering lawmakers and an NGO on his private Twitter account in connection with their recovery efforts.

Because any decision on the dose criteria, based on which the government's medical and life support for children and other residents was to be determined, could draw criticism, the government agencies apparently weighed the possible effects that the decision could have on the upper house race. Almost five months after the secret agreement, examination of the dose criteria has yet to begin.

According to the government sources, the Reconstruction Agency in February sounded out the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) on its intention to draw up dose criteria for the disaster support law, but the

NRA lashed back, saying, "It's not an issue to be decided from a scientific perspective." The NRA oversees the Radiation Council, which is tasked with deliberating radiation exposure standards.

Despite nearly a month of discussions by the Reconstruction Agency, the NRA and the Cabinet Office's Support Team for Residents Affected by Nuclear Incidents, no conclusion was made over which organization would take on the formulation of the dose criteria. The Cabinet Office's support team is in charge of residents' return to areas affected by the nuclear disaster.

Since February, the meetings of section chiefs and counselors of those government bodies were held at the initiative of the Reconstruction Agency, where a decision to postpone consideration on the dose criteria until after the upper house election was eventually made.

Among the attendants of the meetings was a Reconstruction Agency counselor belonging to its "Fukushima team" -- to which the former counselor who was reprimanded for his defamatory tweets also belonged. The meeting was indeed held on March 8, the day the punished counselor tweeted that "One of the pending issues was resolved today." The meeting has since been held about twice a month, joined also by the Ministry of the Environment, which is in charge of decontaminating radioactive materials emanating from the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

While the national standard dictates that the limit of annual accumulated radiation exposure doses for general members of the public be up to 1 millisievert, the government raised the criteria to 20 millisieverts in demarcating evacuation areas for Fukushima disaster victims. Meanwhile, the abovementioned disaster relief law stipulates that residents who voluntarily evacuated from areas not designated as evacuation zones are also covered by support measures if the radiation doses in those areas exceed certain criteria. While citizens groups supporting nuclear disaster victims claim that the dose criteria should be set at 1 millisievert per year, **the government maintains reservations about the decision because extending the areas covered by government support could inflict heavy financial burden on the government.** Consideration of the dose criteria also involves a political decision, while disaster victims are expected to react with a backlash depending on the results of the move.

On March 7, Reconstruction Minister Takumi Nemoto stopped short of specifying the deadline for determining the dose criteria at the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters, saying, "It is necessary to obtain public understanding based on objective evidence." Nemoto added that the headquarters was to present a view by the end of the year on measures to reduce radiation exposure in preparation for residents returning to their hometown.

In response to an inquiry by the Mainichi, the Reconstruction Agency's public relations section stated, "We'd like to withhold from comments on the content of measures (mentioned in the March 8 tweet). Since March 7, officials including section chiefs and counselors of concerned ministries and agencies have held meetings on an irregular basis, but the former counselor (who was punished for his Twitter slanders) did not take part in those meetings."

Slow restart bothers some

August 2, 2013

Slow reactor restart process rattles energy markets as uranium piles up

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/02/business/slow-reactor-restart-process-rattles-energy-markets-as-uranium-piles-up/#.UfvaX6xSab0>

Bloomberg

MELBOURNE – Uranium prices are showing little sign of recovery after sinking to their lowest levels in more than seven years amid a glut of the radioactive metal and speculation Japan will delay restarting its reactors.

Prices may average \$42.82 a pound (.45 kg) this year, according to Morgan Stanley, while Bank of America Corp. is predicting \$43.80.

BMO Capital Markets, which cut its price estimate by 10 percent in July, forecasts \$43 a pound. Uranium has averaged \$40.94 so far in 2013 after sliding to \$34.50 in July, the lowest price since November 2005.

While Japanese power producers including Tokyo Electric Power Co. are seeking to restart reactors as soon as possible as the cost of other fuels escalates, operations may not resume until next year, according to Deutsche Bank AG.

That's threatening to delay a rebound in demand for uranium, hurting miners such as Australia's Paladin Energy Ltd. as supplies outstrip demand. **There is about 60 million pounds of surplus uranium around the world**, according to Cantor Fitzgerald LP.

"The process for restarts is clearly going to take some time," said Jonathan Hinze, a senior vice president at Ux, which provides research on the nuclear industry. "Japanese utilities are unlikely to require any new fuel until 2014 at the earliest. There is a realization that the uranium demand from Japan is unlikely to dramatically change anytime soon, especially this year."

Uranium for immediate delivery has dropped as much as 21 percent this year, extending a 17 percent decline in 2012, according to data from Ux. Prices slumped 12 percent in July, the biggest monthly loss since March 2011. They climbed as high as \$152 in June 2007.

"The weakness in uranium prices is partially attributable to uncertainty surrounding the timetable for reactor restarts in Japan," John Borshoff, the chief executive officer of Australia-based Paladin Energy, said in the company's quarterly production report July 16.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority, which assesses the safety of reactors, began receiving applications for restarts on July 8. Tepco will seek permission to resume operations at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa atomic plant in Niigata Prefecture as soon as possible, it said July 2.

Five reactors may be restarted this year, according to the median estimate of 13 analysts and producers compiled by Bloomberg in June. As many as 10 restarts were predicted in the survey.

"Restarts in Japan and any indication serving to confirm that most of the country's reactors will again be operating should provide comfort to the market that the country's record-high uranium inventories will not be dumped," said David Sadowski, an analyst at Raymond James Ltd. who predicts prices may increase to more than \$50 a pound in 2014. "This should spur other buyers, many of whom have been sitting on the sidelines."

All but two of Japan's 50 reactors remain idle due to the Fukushima disaster and must meet stricter safety standards set by the NRA before they can be restarted. Four utilities have applied to restart 12 idled reactors. That will probably happen early next year, Bank of America said in a July 16 report.

"The timing of restarts appears slower than our estimates," Peta Arnott, a research analyst at Bank of America in Sydney, said in the report, predicting six reactors will resume operations in the second half of this year. This may be a "negative near-term drag on uranium spot pricing," Arnott said.

The reactor review process is likely to take six months for each one, Deutsche Bank said in a July 15 note, citing NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka. An evaluation of all of Japan's reactors may take more than three years and the first units may be restarted in February, Deutsche said.

Conspicuous indeed

August 1, 2013

35% of reconstruction budget unused as decontamination and other key projects stalled

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130801p2a00m0na009000c.html>

About 35.2 percent of the 9.74 trillion yen fiscal 2012 budget for reconstruction of areas hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake has gone unused, as key projects such as decontamination of soil in Fukushima Prefecture were not carried out as smoothly as originally planned.

Of the total money unused, 2.2 trillion yen was reallocated for reconstruction work to be done in fiscal 2013, while the remaining 1.2 trillion yen was transferred to the Special Account for Reconstruction from the Great East Japan Earthquake as disused funds. Because the special account for reconstruction is largely based on special tax increases for reconstruction and other revenues, it should be used effectively and efficiently. Although Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government vowed to "speed up reconstruction," it seems to be easier said than done.

About 64.8 percent of the reconstruction budget for fiscal 2012 was used, slightly higher than 60.6 percent in fiscal 2011. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said at a news conference on July 31, "We have been taking all necessary measures" to use reconstruction budgets. But he also said, "It is difficult to do so, as there are projects for which agreements with local residents are prioritized."

In addition to the need to secure agreements with local residents, Reconstruction Minister Takumi Nemoto said, "Problems such as shortages of staff and materials emerge at the time of implementation (of projects)." The Reconstruction Agency says the budget was not fully used partly because it had secured extra funds for the reconstruction budget in order to prevent necessary projects from being left out due to a lack of funding.

The agency says it has already decided how to use the reallocated funds in fiscal 2013 and thereafter. Therefore, it says, "The ratio of budget execution becomes higher if it is calculated based on contracts." Unused funds can be reallocated only twice.

The disused funds that emerged after projects were cancelled were transferred back to the special account for reconstruction before possibly being used again for reconstruction projects by fiscal 2014. The unnecessary funds include: 221.5 billion yen for reconstruction of facilities for the agriculture, forestry and fisheries industries; 185.8 billion yen for reconstruction of public works facilities; 140.1 billion yen to help disaster-stricken people rebuild their livelihoods; 101.1 billion yen for decontamination of soil and the like. The agency says the reconstruction work has stalled because it has spent much time coordinating with local residents and local governments.

Conspicuously, 32.1 percent of the budget for decontamination work was unused in fiscal 2012. The budget is supposed to be used for decontamination in 11 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture that were designated as evacuation zones and were subject to decontamination work to be done by the central government as well as in 101 municipalities outside evacuation zones that were designated as "priority areas" for decontamination. But the decontamination work has not been carried out as fast as originally scheduled.

Behind uranium prices

August 2, 2013

Slow reactor restart process rattles energy markets as uranium piles up

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/02/business/slow-reactor-restart-process-rattles-energy-markets-as-uranium-piles-up/#.UfvaX6xSab0>

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"The process for restarts is clearly going to take some time," said Jonathan Hinze, a senior vice president at Ux, which provides research on the nuclear industry. "Japanese utilities are unlikely to require any new fuel until 2014 at the earliest. There is a realization that the uranium demand from Japan is unlikely to dramatically change anytime soon, especially this year."

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NRMC urges TEPCO on safety

August 5, 2013

05.08.2013_No193 / News in Brief

Committee Criticises Tepco On Safety Reforms And Communications

<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2013/08/05/committee-criticises-tepco-on-safety-reforms-and-communications>

Security & Safety

5 Aug (NucNet): A committee headed by the former head of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission has urged Tokyo Electric Power Corporation (Tepco) to speed up nuclear safety reforms and has criticised the company's attitude towards disclosing information.

Dale Klein, chairman of the Nuclear Reform Monitoring Committee (NRMC), urged Tepco to speed up its efforts under a nuclear safety reform plan, and to solve issues at the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear plant such as contaminated water leaking from storage tanks.

Mr Klein criticised Tepco's attitude towards information disclosure, saying, "This lack of an effective communication programme diminishes the hard work a lot of people have been doing for Tepco."

Mr Klein is chairman of the NRMC, which includes nuclear experts from both Japan and abroad. The third-party committee was set up in September 2012 to oversee the reform of Tepco's nuclear power division with an eye towards restarting reactors that have been offline since the March 2011 Fukushima-Daiichi accident.

The Japan Atomic Industrial Forum (Jaif) said the NRMC reports to Tepco's board of directors.

Jaif said the NRMC has finalised a report on its monitoring of Tepco's progress with safety reforms originally announced by Tepco in March 2013. The report has been submitted to the utility's board of directors, Jaif said.

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Gov't to take much bigger (financial) role in clean-up

August 7, 2013

Government to step in, provide funding for Fukushima clean-up

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201308070044>

REUTERS

The Japanese government will take a significantly bigger role in the massive clean-up at the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant and **may spend taxpayer money to contain the build-up of radioactive water**, officials said on Aug. 7.

The move comes as operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. struggles to contain toxic water flowing into the ocean from the plant.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said the buildup of the radioactive water was a very serious issue and that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe would order the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which regulates power utilities, to step in.

The ministry is considering requesting public funds for the cleanup, Suga told reporters.

"The government must take a step forward and get involved in achieving this (coping with the contaminated water)," Suga told a regular news conference.

"I understand that METI is considering the budget. The prime minister will instruct the METI minister to quickly take measures," Suga said.

The government moves appear to be in response to warnings by industry experts that TEPCO's failure to address the problem questioned its ability to safely decommission the Fukushima No. 1 plant, 220 km northeast of Tokyo.

The utility has been widely castigated for its failure to prepare for the massive 2011 tsunami and earthquake that devastated the plant and led to the worst nuclear disaster in the world since Chernobyl.

It has also been criticized for its inept response to the disaster and covering up shortcomings.

TEPCO's handling of the clean-up has also complicated Japan's efforts to restart its 50 nuclear power plants, almost all of which have been shut since the disaster because of safety concerns.

That has made Japan dependent on expensive imported fuels for virtually all its energy.

CREATING EMERGENCY

An official from the country's nuclear watchdog told Reuters on Aug. 5 that the highly radioactive water seeping into the ocean from the Fukushima plant was creating an "emergency" that TEPCO was not successfully containing on its own.

The utility pumps out some 400 tons a day of groundwater flowing from the hills above the nuclear plant into the basements of the destroyed buildings, which mixes with highly irradiated water that is used to cool the reactors.

TEPCO is trying to prevent groundwater from reaching the plant by building a "bypass," but recent spikes of radioactive elements in sea water has prompted the utility to reverse months of denials and finally admit that tainted water is reaching the sea.

One more measure both TEPCO and METI have been working on since May is freezing the soil to prevent groundwater from leaking into the reactor buildings. Similar technology is used in preventing groundwater flooding in subway construction.

The technology was originally proposed by one of Japan's largest construction companies, Kajima Corp. that is already heavily involved in the clean-up.

Experts say, however, that maintaining the ground temperatures for months, if not years, would be costly. "Right now there are no details (of the project yet). There's no blueprint, no nothing yet, so there's no way we can scrutinize it," said Shinji Kinjo, head of a Nuclear Regulatory Authority (NRA) task force set up to deal with the Fukushima water issue.

METI has requested a budget allocation to help address the water problem, an official told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

"It is incredibly difficult to completely block the groundwater like this. It would be better if they could pump clean water before it reaches the plant," said Kotaro Ohga, research fellow at Hokkaido University and groundwater expert.

Gov't mulls providing funds to block toxic water at Fukushima plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130807p2g00m0dm077000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The government must step in to financially assist Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s efforts to prevent further accumulation of radioactive water at its crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant by freezing the soil around the reactor buildings, the top government spokesman said Wednesday.

"There is no precedent in the world to create a water-shielding wall with frozen soil on such a large scale (as planned now at the Fukushima complex). To build that, I think the state has to move a step further to support its realization," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a press conference.

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry is considering including the costs in the fiscal 2014 budget request. If the request is approved, it will be the first government funding to help the plant operator tackle the problem of groundwater seeping to mix with contaminated water in the reactor buildings.

The government has so far allocated taxpayer money for research and development related to reactor decommissioning at the Fukushima plant, which suffered meltdowns in the aftermath of the massive earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

To create frozen soil, pipes to run coolant will be inserted around the Nos. 1 to 4 reactor buildings, three of which house meltdown reactors. **The wall is expected to be 1.4 kilometers long, possibly costing tens of billions of yen.**

About 400 tons of groundwater seep into the reactor buildings every day and get mixed with toxic water that has been used to cool the crippled reactors. This means that the total volume of contaminated water is increasing by the same amount daily.

Dealing with the massive accumulation of radioactive water at the plant has remained a concern for TEPCO since the nuclear crisis.

Most recently, the utility admitted that toxic water is escaping into the adjacent Pacific Ocean from the plant's site and it is trying to prevent the spread of contamination.

Public cash for TEPCO

August 7, 2013

Tepco needs public cash to dig deep wall

Radioactive flow to sea 300 tons daily; Suga says utility can't halt it

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/07/national/tepcu-needs-public-cash-to-dig-deep-wall/#.UgMwbqxSab0>

Kyodo

The public must help fund Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s effort to freeze the soil around the reactor buildings at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, creating a barrier to prevent more groundwater from becoming radioactive, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said Wednesday.

It was revealed the same day that 300 tons of tainted water is flowing to the Pacific daily from the stricken plant.

"There is no precedent in the world to create a water-shielding wall with frozen soil on such a large scale (as planned now at the Fukushima complex). To build that, I think the state has to move a step further to support its realization," Suga told reporters.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is considering including the costs in the fiscal 2014 budget request. If approved, it will be the first time the government has provided money to Tepco to help it contain the groundwater mixing with radioactive water in the reactor buildings.

The government has so far allocated taxpayer money for research and development related to reactor decommissioning at the Fukushima plant, which suffered three meltdowns in the aftermath of the massive earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

A 1.4-km barrier of frozen soil will be created by sinking pipes around the buildings housing reactors 1 to 4 and then running coolant through them. According to major contractor Kajima Corp., which proposed the project, construction is expected to cost ¥30 billion to ¥40 billion.

At the end of May, a government panel adopted the project as the best way to reduce radioactive groundwater at the plant. METI Minister Toshimitsu Motegi instructed Tepco to go ahead with the project.

About 400 tons of groundwater seep into the reactor buildings every day and mix with toxic water that has been used to cool the crippled reactors.

On Wednesday, the Natural Resources and Energy Agency said about 300 tons of radioactive water per day is flowing out to the sea.

Dealing with the massive accumulation of radioactive water at the plant has remained a concern for Tepco since the nuclear crisis began.

Most recently, the utility admitted highly radioactive water is escaping into the Pacific from the plant and it is trying to prevent the spread of contamination.

Meanwhile on Wednesday, a fisheries cooperative in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, decided to postpone a plan to resume test fishing from September due to the radioactive flow into the sea.

Masakazu Yabuki, head of the co-op, said delaying the operation ensures consumers won't be sold unsafe marine products.

August 7, 2013

Govt. to help TEPCO handle nuclear water leak

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130807_35.html

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has instructed the industry ministry to take immediate action to prevent further leakage of radiation-tainted water into the sea from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Abe gave the order to Industry Minister Toshimitsu Motegi at a meeting of government officials on the nuclear disaster.

Abe told the officials that people are extremely concerned about the leaks and that it's an urgent problem that must be dealt with.

He said the government will not leave the issue entirely up to the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, and that officials must take steps to help the utility.

Abe told Motegi that he wants him to instruct the utility to promptly take all possible measures to deal with the leaking water.

On Thursday, the industry ministry will discuss details of a project to build a large underground wall for damming groundwater by freezing the soil at the plant.

The ministry will also examine the possibility of using government funds to pay for the wall-construction project.

Aug. 7, 2013 - Updated 09:20 UTC

Govt. considers financing nuclear water-leak work

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130807_22.html

The Japanese government is considering a plan to fund efforts being made by the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant to contain radioactive groundwater from leaking into the sea.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said on Wednesday that the government should support the efforts being made by Tokyo Electric Power Company.

TEPCO has been trying to prevent contaminated water from leaking into the sea by solidifying an embankment on the grounds of the plant.

But the utility discovered last week that water was likely spilling over the top of the hardened soil.

Suga said TEPCO has now decided to create an underground wall that surrounds the crippled reactors and prevents contaminated groundwater from leaking.

He added the government needs to think about helping the company pay for the project, as building such a large underground wall for damming water is unprecedented.

The walls will be made by freezing the soil around the reactor buildings.

Suga said the industry ministry is studying the costs of the project. He said Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will instruct industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi to quickly deal with the matter at a meeting of government officials on the nuclear disaster.

Aug. 7, 2013 - Updated 06:24 UTC

New rules for utilities deciding to scrap their nuclear reactors?

August 7, 2013

Panel drafts accounting rule revision for reactor decommissioning

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130807p2g00m0dm042000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- An industry ministry panel on Tuesday drafted changes in accounting rules for electric power companies to prevent their business from deteriorating sharply if they decide to scrap nuclear reactors earlier than planned.

Utilities are currently required to set aside reserves for decommissioning each of their reactors while the facility is in service. The draft allows them to continue to set aside the funds for 10 years beyond the end of a reactor's operation.

The rule change, expected to be finalized later in the year, would enable a utility to avoid booking a large extraordinary charge in a single year to cover a shortfall in decommissioning funds.

The revision would also include measures to prevent a utility from facing a sudden drop in the asset value of the nuclear facility.

The review comes as Japan introduced new safety requirements for reactors in early July, which could lead utilities to give up restarting some of their reactors rather than invest in costly safety measures to meet the new regulations compiled in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi complex disaster.

The draft, compiled by the panel, will be finalized after soliciting public comments.

Taxpayers to foot the bill?

August 8, 2013

ANALYSIS: Taxpayers hit as framework to resolve Fukushima crisis hits wall

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201308080051>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s continuing futility in resolving the Fukushima nuclear crisis is threatening to unravel the government's framework for dealing with the disaster.

Radioactive water continues to spill into the ocean from the site of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, and the government is now being forced to change course and inject public funds to help deal with the water problem.

However, with no end in sight to the Fukushima nuclear crisis and with costs piling up, taxpayers could end up footing the enormous bill for the entire decommissioning process.

After the disaster started in March 2011, the government created a framework under which TEPCO pays for compensating disaster victims, decontaminating affected areas and decommissioning the crippled reactors. The government's stance holds the utility responsible for resolving the accident—without the use of taxpayer money.

That framework is now running into the wall.

TEPCO says the company is doing everything within its power at the nuclear plant site. But it has been able to take only stopgap measures to contain the ever-increasing amount of radioactive water.

At a meeting of the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters on Aug. 7, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe instructed industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi to speed up steps to contain the radioactive water at the Fukushima plant.

The government plans to shoulder part of the estimated tens of billions of yen required to surround the reactor and turbine buildings with an underground wall of frozen soil to prevent groundwater from flowing into the facilities.

The industry ministry will include the costs in a fiscal 2014 budget request, without specifying an amount. The funding--technically--will not break away from the existing framework.

"We cannot disburse money that will support TEPCO," a senior industry ministry official said. "We have no other choice but to make a request in the name of research and development."

Under the framework, TEPCO mainly uses revenue from electricity charges for the decommissioning work, including disposal of radioactive water.

For compensation and decontamination, the utility can borrow up to 5 trillion yen (\$52 billion) from the government-backed Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund. But it must pay back the amount.

The costs for compensation and decontamination are estimated to total 10 trillion yen, double the credit line from the state-backed fund.

In a meeting with Abe in April, TEPCO Chairman Kazuhiko Shimokobe and other executives asked for greater state involvement.

"The government wants to take a step forward and work with TEPCO on the challenges the company faces and for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Fukushima," Abe said.

But the government has remained cautious about injecting taxpayer money.

"We cannot bear the costs for decommissioning," a senior Finance Ministry official said. "We will closely examine whether a line is drawn."

It remains unclear if the government will create a new framework under which it will take responsibility for decommissioning the plant, compensation and decontamination by spending taxpayer money.

If the current framework is maintained, the government may raise the amount of loans available from the state-backed fund and allow TEPCO to further increase electricity rates to secure more funds.

The nuclear crisis will not be brought under control if makeshift measures continue without deciding who will shoulder the costs for dealing with the accident.

No guidelines for exporting nukes

August 7, 2013

Japan gov't failing to keep promises on nuclear tech exports

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130807p2a00m0na018000c.html>

Amid Japan's ongoing push to export nuclear power technology, the Mainichi Shimbun has discovered that **the Japanese government has failed to sufficiently evaluate client nations' nuclear regulatory regimes as well as awareness of nuclear safety issues among the public of those nations.**

In 2008, the administration of then Prime Minister Taro Aso pledged to create guidelines that would block Japanese financing for nuclear exports if residents of the importing nation were not properly aware of safety issues related to nuclear power.

The Aso administration made the promise in a written response to a query from then Social Democratic Party lawmaker Masamichi Kondo. The response stated that it would create guidelines directing the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) "not to provide financing" for nuclear power technology exports if the public in the importing nation "has not been appropriately informed of" the guaranteed safety level, measures to be taken in the event of a nuclear accident, and how nuclear waste including spent fuel would be handled.

No tangible progress was made, however, on creating the guidelines. In December 2010, seven non-governmental organizations including the environmental NGO FoE Japan addressed the 2008 promise during a regular meeting with the Ministry of Finance, the parent ministry of the JBIC. An official from the ministry's international section stated that "the JBIC has said the content of the guidelines and when they'll be finalized are both being considered with the utmost gravity." Asked by the NGOs what the ministry's position was on the issue, the official apparently replied that the ministry was "in full agreement with the written reply to House of Councillors member Masamichi Kondo" from two years before.

Three years later, with a nuclear technology deal in place with Turkey and another possible with Jordan, those guidelines have yet to be completed.

In a related development, information obtained by the Mainichi has furthermore shown that the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is considering action to deal with the inability to conduct checks on importing nations' nuclear regulatory and safety apparatus -- previously conducted by the now defunct Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) -- which apparently became even more slipshod beginning in September last year. This is because **the Nuclear Regulation Authority set up following the Fukushima**

nuclear disaster has refused to take over the duty from the NISA on the grounds that it could not ensure its independence as a regulatory body if it were involved in the export of nuclear plant technology.

The JBIC and the Finance Ministry admitted to the Mainichi that the public information guidelines remain undecided, but that they would be "drawn up in line with the trade ministry's response to the safety regime evaluation issue."

FoE Director Kanna Mitsuta poured cold water on the JBIC and Finance Ministry comments, saying, "That's not a real answer. Government checks of an importing nation's nuclear safety apparatus and confirming the people of that country have access to the information they need about nuclear power are completely different issues."

The JBIC will finance purchases of Japanese nuclear reactors -- just one of which costs hundreds of billions of yen -- by developing nations unable to pay the hefty price tag up-front in a single payment.

"If the (public information) guidelines are not in place, then the JBIC cannot provide financing, and nuclear technology exports become impossible," a senior trade ministry official told the Mainichi.

TEPCO overwhelmed - What is Gov't waiting for?

August 9, 2013

EDITORIAL: Total overhaul needed of way TEPCO operates

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201308090054>

The central government has decided to use public funds to contain the problem of radioactive water flowing into the ocean from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co.

According to the government, there is a possibility that 300 tons of contaminated water is flowing into the ocean daily. From the way TEPCO has kept falling behind in its measures to effectively deal with the problem, it is clear that the company is incapable of dealing with the situation.

Thus, it is quite natural for the government to step in. Still, the decision should have been made much earlier.

This is not to say that the problem will now be sorted out merely because the government is taking the lead. **This type of project has never been attempted before and all sorts of difficulties could arise.**

The authorities need to avail themselves of all conceivable wisdom and technology to stop the situation from getting any worse.

Thus, it is absolutely vital that a system be established that enables all parties concerned to promptly share information gathered on site.

Instead of leaving the actual work to TEPCO alone, the government must create a process by which it can always monitor and assess the situation, and make whatever decisions necessary, while keeping in close contact with related organizations and local governments.

There is another problem that must be dealt with promptly. TEPCO's corporate rehabilitation plan must be subject to a fundamental review.

While the government decided to include expenses for measures to deal with the contaminated water problem in the fiscal 2014 budget, the amount makes up only a small fraction of huge expenses to be borne by TEPCO and is no more than a stopgap remedy.

Under the existing framework, TEPCO must single-handedly shoulder all expenses--costs to deal with the accident, compensation and financial support for those affected by the disaster, and expenses for decontamination work and future decommissioning of the crippled reactors. The process has long been in deadlock.

TEPCO is planning to seek permission to restart its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture in accordance with the existing rehabilitation plan. This is an outrageous idea, given what is happening in Fukushima. It beggars belief that TEPCO is even considering it.

TEPCO's responsibility must not be alleviated in any way.

That said, TEPCO is confronted by massive burdens that far exceed its capability. If the situation is left unattended, it could have a negative effect on the reconstruction of stricken areas and the power supply to the Tokyo metropolitan area.

What part of the existing setup is unreasonable? How much money will be needed in the future? Who should shoulder the expenses and how? It is time for the government to squarely face reality and discuss these issues. At the same time, it must scrupulously disclose every scrap of information on the issue.

Whatever happens, an additional injection of taxpayers' money will be unavoidable. That being the case, the government needs to go back to the starting point of the debate on liquidating insolvent TEPCO and seeking to impose financial burdens on its creditors.

Once again, we realize the huge impact of the Fukushima disaster on the lives of citizens. In the face of hard facts, it is clear how the Abe administration must deal with the situation.

It must abandon its stance of promoting nuclear power generation and clearly show how Japan can reduce its dependence on nuclear power plants.

8 highschoools stored radioactive materials on shelves

August 8, 2013

Schools stored radioactive materials without permission

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201308080060>

By YUSUKE YAMADA/ Staff Writer

Eight high schools in the central Japan prefecture of Nagano stocked radioactive materials for their physics labs without government permission, the Nuclear Regulation Authority and other sources said Aug. 7.

This surprising finding emerged in a checkup requested by the Nagano Prefectural Board of Education.

The board reported the matter to the NRA on June 20, but did not make it public.

The schools are all operated by the prefectural government.

The schools kept uranyl nitrate, uranium oxide, uranium acetate and americium, the sources said.

They are legally obliged to notify the central government if they are storing those substances.

It appeared likely that some substances were used in lab experiments years ago and before the schools were required to seek permission from the government to keep such stocks.

The schools in question are: **Nagano Technical High School; Komoro Business High School; Iida High School; Shimo-Ina Agriculture Senior High School; Kiso Seiho High School; Matsumoto Fukushima High School; Minami-Azumi Agricultural High School; and Hakuba High School.**

The materials were kept in glass vials and other containers on shelves in physics preparation rooms or related facilities. The measurements ranged from 10 grams or so to 180 grams.

Due to the small amounts, there was no risk to health or the environment, the sources said.

It remains unclear how the schools obtained the radioactive materials. They have since applied to the government for a permit to store the substances.

Atomic Energy Commission "just a rubber stamp"

August 8, 2013

Panel chief: Nuclear safeguard work just formality

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130809_06.html

The head of a government panel on nuclear energy has revealed the truth about its work. He said the commission's task to verify the peaceful use of nuclear power is just a formality.

The head of the Atomic Energy Commission, Shunsuke Kondo, made the remark on Thursday at a meeting of experts reviewing its organization and operations.

The commission is tasked with ensuring that nuclear facilities be built only for peaceful aims and not for the development of nuclear weapons.

Kondo said there is little point in making judgments based on the words "for peaceful purposes" written on documents submitted by nuclear facility operators.

His comment indicates that his commission is just a rubber stamp for such documents.

Kondo also touched on measures to prevent nuclear materials at facilities from falling into the hands of terrorists. He said his commission has not even heard from regulatory offices on whether internationally accepted standards are in place.

An expert group overhauling the commission's structure plans to reach conclusions by the end of the year.

Gov't + TEPCO + taxpayers

August 8, 2013

Japan to use public funds to deal with radioactive water in Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201308080053>

August 08, 2013

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The central government is going ahead with a plan to use public funds in an attempt to stop radioactive water at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant from flowing into the ocean, as operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. is seen as incapable of coping with the problem on its own.

"The problem of contaminated water is the most pressing. Rather than leave it up to TEPCO, the central government will come up with the measures to deal with it. The industry minister will instruct TEPCO in order to implement swift and multilayered measures," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told a meeting of the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters on Aug. 7.

The Agency for Natural Resources and Energy released the results of a study that estimated about 1,000 tons of groundwater was flowing daily from nearby mountains to the ocean in the vicinity of the Fukushima No. 1 plant. Of that amount, about 400 tons is being contaminated with radiation after flowing into reactor buildings and other facilities at the plant site.

Of the remaining 600 tons of groundwater, about half was coming into contact with soil contaminated by radioactive materials around the reactor buildings and flowing into the ocean, according to the report.

Those involved in the study have been unable to determine when the contaminated water began flowing into the ocean. The possibility that contaminated water has been flowing into the ocean from the outset of the disaster cannot be denied.

The remaining 300 tons of groundwater is believed to be flowing into the ocean without being contaminated and poses no risk.

TEPCO plans to begin pumping up contaminated groundwater from wells on the plant site from Aug. 9. While about 100 tons will be pumped up daily at first, plans also call for digging more wells. The contaminated water will be stored in tanks on site.

According to TEPCO officials, tanks that have already been installed can hold about 380,000 tons. They are at the 320,000-ton mark now.

Plans call for installing tanks to increase the capacity to 700,000 tons by 2015 and 800,000 tons by fiscal 2016.

TEPCO officials hope to reduce the volume of contaminated groundwater to 60 tons a day and store that water in the tanks. One measure being considered for that reduction is to solidify contaminated soil with chemicals to construct a wall that would block out groundwater.

However, TEPCO plans do not take into consideration the possibility that contaminated water may leak from the reactor buildings.

Moreover, while the concentration of radioactive materials in the water is being measured at the wells, the results have fluctuated depending on the timing and location for the collection of the water samples. That makes it difficult to determine the level of radioactive materials in the water.

TEPCO officials have also been unable to determine where the water is leaking from, nor the extent of the area that has been contaminated.

Such uncertainty will likely force the utility to undertake a comprehensive review of measures that have been implemented until now to deal with the problem.

TEPCO also has an untested plan to freeze soil around the Fukushima No. 1 plant to block the flow of groundwater into the reactor and turbine buildings. However, because the project would cost several tens of billions of yen, TEPCO alone will be unable to finance it. The central government will cover part of the costs.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry plans to ask for funds in the fiscal 2014 budget for research purposes for the soil freezing project without specifying how much it wants.

The central government and TEPCO finalized the plan in May and are planning to complete the project by the first half of fiscal 2015.

Under the proposal, the wall of frozen soil will be built by inserting cooling pipes into the ground at intervals of about one meter around the buildings. The pipes would be inserted as deep as 30 meters into the ground. Coolant of about minus 50 degrees would be circulated through the pipes to freeze the surrounding soil.

Compared to constructing walls using clay or concrete, the frozen soil wall would better block the water and the time needed for completing the project would also be shorter.

TEPCO officials are confident they can surround all the buildings reasonably quickly.

One problem is that a huge amount of funds would be needed to continuously circulate the coolant.

In the meantime, TEPCO has other plans to construct a wall to block out water by injecting chemicals into the foundation near the levee to prevent contaminated water from flowing into the ocean. The utility will also pump up contaminated water.

However, those measures would not completely stop the flow of water into the ocean. An additional problem is where to store the pumped water.

If the water can be blocked from flowing into the reactor buildings, the contaminated water now accumulated in the basement of the buildings could be extracted to allow for the decommissioning of the

reactors. However, the extraction of that water will likely be a difficult task because workers are unable to approach the buildings because of high levels of radiation.

No indictment for officials

August 9, 2013

Charges not expected for TEPCO, Kan over Fukushima nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201308090084>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Although 15,000 people have filed criminal complaints, **prosecutors will likely not indict any official of the government or Tokyo Electric Power Co. for the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant**, sources said.

Investigators could not find sufficient evidence to prove criminal responsibility for Japan's worst-ever nuclear accident, the sources said Aug. 8.

Despite reports to the contrary, including TEPCO's own studies, prosecutors concluded that the strength of the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake and the height of the tsunami that caused the nuclear disaster in 2011 were unforeseeable, they said.

An official decision on the criminal complaints, accepted by prosecutors in Tokyo and Fukushima last August, is expected this month.

Individuals and residents' groups are demanding that the officials be indicted on charges of professional negligence resulting in death, referring to the hundreds of people who died during the frantic forced evacuation from areas around the stricken plant, as well as those who have died in evacuation centers.

Others accuse officials of professional negligence resulting in injuries related to radiation exposure from the nuclear plant.

Those named in the criminal complaints include people who held key posts in government and at TEPCO when the nuclear disaster was set in motion on March 11, 2011.

The politicians and government officials include former Prime Minister Naoto Kan, Haruki Madarame, former chairman of the Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan, former Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano, and Banri Kaieda, who was industry minister.

The TEPCO officials named include former Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and former President Masataka Shimizu.

Prosecutors have requested an interview with Kan to ask about his response to the accident, the sources said. But Kan, who has said his actions prevented the nuclear disaster from spreading, is expected to deny any criminal responsibility.

The quake and tsunami knocked out all power to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, causing the cooling systems to shut down and resulting in the meltdowns of three reactors.

Prosecutors decided they could not recognize injuries resulting from radiation exposure at this stage, the sources said.

However, they concluded that a causal link between the nuclear accident and the deaths of evacuees "cannot be ruled out."

But to prove that professional negligence was involved, they needed evidence to show that the officials were able to foresee a tsunami of that scale and with the potential to cause a loss of all power sources at the nuclear plant.

They also looked into whether officials took safety precautions that reflected the maximum size of a natural disaster that they believed could strike.

Prosecutors determined that before the accident, few experts had predicted an earthquake or tsunami of that scale, the sources said.

The criminal complaints also accused officials of negligence for the delays in easing pressure within reactor buildings that led to a series of hydrogen explosions.

Prosecutors, however, concluded that high radiation levels and the lack of electricity caused the delay in work to vent the reactor containment vessels.

A senior official with the prosecution authorities said although indictments may not be coming, the government and utility should take the investigation as a serious warning.

“If a similar accident takes place again, they cannot argue that it was triggered by a disaster that was beyond the scale they could foresee,” the official said. “Those concerned should take necessary precautions, rather than admitting that the measures put in place turned out to be insufficient.”

The tsunami was 15.5 meters at the highest point and inundated the reactor buildings that were located 10 meters above sea level.

Prosecutors interviewed government and TEPCO officials, as well as dozens of experts on earthquakes and tsunami, to determine if the utility was well prepared for natural disasters.

They found that before the 2011 disaster, the prevailing view among experts was that the maximum magnitude of an earthquake in that area would be 8.3.

They also concluded that only a few specialists had explicitly warned of the need to take measures to prepare for a catastrophic tsunami.

Some experts had, in fact, repeatedly pointed out the likelihood of a huge tsunami hitting northern Japan.

Even a TEPCO study in 2008 estimated that a tsunami could reach as high as 15.7 meters at the plant, based on expert research.

The Diet’s Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission noted TEPCO’s earlier estimate and other factors in its report on the causes of the nuclear crisis. It held TEPCO and nuclear industry regulators responsible for “the profoundly man-made disaster that could and should have been foreseen and prevented.”

The commission’s report stated that the officials had a chance to draw up measures to prepare for such a disaster, but TEPCO and the regulation authorities deliberately put them off.

Prosecutors, however, said experts in 2008 were divided over the research on which TEPCO based its prediction for possible tsunami to hit the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Officials of the utility told prosecuting authorities that despite that estimate, they decided not to put safeguard measures in place after concluding that a tsunami of that scale was unlikely in reality.

Prosecutors concluded that although TEPCO was insufficiently prepared for a huge tsunami, it would be difficult to pursue the officials' criminal responsibility and establish a case against them.

According to the Reconstruction Agency, 92,770 people in Fukushima Prefecture were still displaced from their homes as of July 4. The Fukushima prefectural government said 53,277 residents were still living outside the prefecture because of the series of disasters.

TEPCO is still struggling to resolve the crisis at the nuclear plant.

Doubts about clean-up of unprecedented scale

August 15, 2013

INSIGHT: Japan's nuclear clean-up costly, complex and at risk of failing

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201308150021>

REUTERS

KAWAUCHI, Fukushima Prefecture--The most ambitious radiation clean-up ever attempted has proved costly, complex and time-consuming since the Japanese government began it more than two years ago in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear meltdown. It may also fail.

Doubts are mounting that the effort to decontaminate hotspots in an area the size of Connecticut will succeed in its ultimate aim - luring more than 100,000 nuclear evacuees back home.

If thousands of former residents cannot or will not return, parts of the farming and fishing region could remain an abandoned wilderness for decades.

In many areas, radiation remains well above targeted levels because of bureaucratic delays and ineffective work on the ground. As a result, **some experts fears the \$15 billion allocated to the scheme so far will be largely squandered.**

The deep-seated problems facing the clean-up are **both economic and operational**, according to a Reuters review of decontamination contracts and interviews with dozens of workers, managers and officials involved.

In Kawauchi, a heavily forested village in Fukushima Prefecture, decontamination crews have finished cleaning up houses, but few of their former inhabitants are prepared to move back. Just over 500 of the

3,000 people who once lived here have returned since the March 2011 meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear plant 25 kilometers (15 miles) to the east.

Even after being deemed safe enough for people to return, Kawauchi has no functioning hospital or high school.

The mushrooms that used to provide a livelihood for foragers are now steeped in dangerous levels of cesium. The only jobs on offer in town are menial. Some houses are so mildewed after three summers of abandonment that they need to be torn down.

The village has not only shrunk; its population has also aged. While the elderly used to make up a third of the town, they now account for 70 percent of residents.

The same pattern has played out across Fukushima as the nuclear accident turned the slow drip of urban flight by younger residents into a torrent, creating a demographic skew that decontamination is unlikely to reverse.

Kawauchi is one of the 11 townships that were most heavily contaminated after the accident, when rain and snow showered radioactive particles onto the verdant hills here as the plume from the plant passed overhead. Half of it lies in the still-evacuated area where the national government has assumed control of the clean-up.

"There is no comprehensive plan on how to rebuild the village," said Yasutsugu Igari, 34, who works in the reconstruction department at Kawauchi's village office. "It's the government that destroyed it, but now it's doing very little to help us re-create our lives."

UNPRECEDENTED SCALE

Masayoshi Yokota, who is in charge of decontamination, says he has heard that frustration before.

"First they said they wouldn't come back unless we decontaminated. So we did that and told them they could come back," he said. "But then it was about jobs or that they didn't want to come back because they have children."

Japan's plan to scrub clean the area around Fukushima and remove radioactive debris was beset by difficulties from the beginning.

Nothing on the same scale had ever been attempted before. After the Chernobyl accident in 1986, highly contaminated houses were entombed in concrete and the surrounding area was abandoned.

By contrast, Japan's government is attempting to bring background radiation levels in the most highly contaminated evacuation zone to an average of 1 millisievert per year once all the work is completed.

That would be twice the background radiation level in Denver, or a sixth of the annual dose for the average American when all sources of radiation are taken into account.

Japanese nuclear workers are limited to an accumulative exposure of 100 millisieverts over five years. Although radiation health experts assume that any incremental exposure to radiation increases risks for later cancers, the International Atomic Energy Agency says a statistically significant correlation only shows up at doses over that higher threshold.

The Japanese government decided to allow people to move back to areas with an average annual dose of less than 20 millisieverts in December 2011.

In an attempt to reach the tougher radiation target, thousands of temporary workers have been put to work scrubbing houses and roads, digging up topsoil and stripping trees of leaves into which invisible cesium particles have wormed.

Few of the hundreds of companies and small firms involved have any experience with radiation. Some workers have said they have been told to flush contaminated leaves away in rivers by supervisors to speed the job up and reduce waste, since storage remains a problem.

On a recent Saturday, a crew of 10 workers in jumpsuits, hardhats and surgical masks were clearing a roadside outside Kawauchi, picking up leaves and trimming weeds. The lower half of nearby forest slopes were stripped of saplings and shrubbery.

"That's lovely," Yokota told a visitor. "They've got it nice and clean."

Some experts are doubtful about the payback of that effort. First, there is a risk that radioactive isotopes can return to decontaminated areas via wind and rain. Officials in the village of Yugawa found snowfall earlier this year caused radiation levels to spike.

At the same time, the protocols for how to complete the same job vary depending on location. For example, Fukushima city has banned the use of high-pressure water hoses for fear that they simply scatter radioactive particles rather than remove them. Other areas have allowed the hoses to be used, but filtering the collected water produces highly radioactive residue.

"The truth of the matter is that from the European experience (after Chernobyl), remediation factors are disappointing," said David Sanderson, a professor of environmental science at the University of Glasgow and an expert in radiation who has made numerous trips to Fukushima to map the fallout.

"And it's very expensive. I fear there's a chance the experience in Japan might be pointing to the same conclusion. Unless it succeeds in putting people back in their homes, the benefit is difficult to see."

Tokyo has budgeted \$15 billion for the effort over the past three years, but only a quarter of the \$6.5 billion of that provided to the Ministry of the Environment has been spent, according to data provided to Reuters. The target is to finish the project by the end of 2016, although the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has pledged to go faster.

NOT COMING BACK

There is also the **problem of storage**. Most of the contaminated soil and leaves remain piled up in driveways and empty lots because of fierce opposition from local communities to storing it in one place until the Ministry of Environment secures a central site that could hold it for the longer term.

Residents of Tamura, a village in the evacuated zone, were encouraged recently to begin preparing to return to their decontaminated houses--armed with Geiger counters. Some areas still show radiation at twice the target level.

"Decontamination in the true sense of the word is not being carried out," said Tomoya Yamauchi, a professor of radiation physics at Kobe University. Yamauchi said he found that some decontaminated road surfaces in Fukushima had readings 18 times the target level because cesium had accumulated in cracks in the asphalt.

"I think the government recognizes that Fukushima cannot be returned to how it was."

Many have given up hope of ever returning to live in the shadow of the Fukushima nuclear plant. A survey in June showed that a third of the former residents of Iitate, a lush village famed for its fresh produce before the disaster, never want to move back. Half of those said they would prefer to be compensated enough to move elsewhere in Japan to farm.

Nuclear evacuees currently receive a living allowance from plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), which is cut off when the government decides they are able to move home again.

"I feel like some people don't want to go back because they're happy living off the compensation money from TEPCO and they don't want that to end," said Hiroaki Inoue, an official from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry spending a year working at the Kawauchi village office to monitor the spending of the reconstruction budget.

But some evacuees say it is unfair to cut off financial support when their previous homes and villages remain unlivable.

"There's no jobs, no shops open, nothing. It's become an incredibly difficult place to live and yet they're saying 'You can go home now'," said a single mother evacuated from near Kawauchi, who declined to be named for fear of retribution from the authorities.

"It's so unfair to say that. It's not that simple."

In Tomioka, a coastal ghost town north of the Fukushima plant, ambient radiation remains at 10 times the government's target. Wild boar wander the streets.

"This could be fixed," said Yokota on a recent visit. "They could get these levels right down. But the thing is, people didn't come back quickly enough. That's fatal."

Kan denies liability for Fukushima disaster

August 15, 2013

Ex-PM Kan denies criminal liability for Fukushima disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130815p2g00m0dm038000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Former Prime Minister Naoto Kan, who led the government's response to the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011, denied Wednesday he is criminally responsible for the crisis, sources close to the issue said.

While residents groups across Japan, mainly in Fukushima Prefecture, filed complaints against 40 people including Kan and his Cabinet members on suspicion of professional negligence resulting in injuries, Kan said in a document submitted to prosecutors through his lawyers that "there was no problem" with his immediate response to the crisis triggered, the sources said.

In their criminal complaints, the residents accused Kan and two of his ministers of failing to take prompt venting measures to lessen the pressure within the reactor containers before it caused hydrogen explosions and injured workers at the Fukushima Daiichi plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co.

The two ministers are then Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Banri Kaieda, who now heads the opposition Democratic Party of Japan, and then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano. Kan served as prime minister from June 2010 through September 2011.

Kan's visit to the plant on the morning of March 12, 2011, the day after it was crippled by a massive earthquake and tsunami, has been criticized for supposedly distracting the attention of its workers who should have been focusing on containing the crisis.

In the document, the former premier said he had given the green light to venting operations requested by TEPCO before visiting the plant and that his trip to the facility did not cause any problem.

A government-appointed panel investigating the nuclear disaster concluded in July last year that Kan could have dispatched other officials for on-site inspection, but that his visit did not affect venting operations at the facility.

After receiving claims by Kaieda and Edano, the prosecutors are expected to wrap up their investigations launched in August last year on their suspected negligence without indicting any of the 40 people, according to the sources.

They also include Tsunehisa Katsumata and Masataka Shimizu -- then chairman and president of TEPCO - - and Haruki Madarame, then chairman of the now-defunct Nuclear Safety Commission.

The prosecutors have decided, based on the testimony of tsunami experts, that the government and TEPCO could not have expected such a large tsunami due to the lack of unified knowledge on the height of tsunami.

If the prosecutors refrain from indicting them, the residents plan to ask an 11-member independent panel to seek indictments against the government and TEPCO officials.

August 13, 2013

Kan denies criminal liability for Fukushima crisis

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130814_27.html

Former Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan has denied criminal responsibility in the government's response to the 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis.

Kan gave a written statement to Tokyo prosecutors on Wednesday. He denied he was negligent in dealing with the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Prosecutors have been investigating the case for more than a year following complaints from residents of Fukushima Prefecture and others.

The residents accused Kan of professional negligence that resulted in injuries to workers at the plant and radiation exposure among local residents.

Some workers were injured in a hydrogen explosion at the plant's No.1 reactor building at 3 PM on March 12th.

That's one day after the quake and tsunami damaged the plant.

The complaints say Kan's visit to the plant that morning hindered plant workers' efforts to contain the crisis. They say the resulting delay in a venting operation to ease pressure in the reactor containment vessel led to the explosion.

Sources close to the former prime minister say Kan insists in his statement that the workers could have conducted the operation early in the morning but did not.

Kan reportedly says he visited the plant to press for a quick response, not to delay it.

Criminal complaints have also been filed against former executives of the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, and officials at Japan's former nuclear regulatory agency.

The prosecutors are expected to make a final decision as early as this month on whether to press charges.

What reform for JAEA?

August 15, 2013

Editorial: Plan to reform Japan Atomic Energy Agency a major challenge

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130814p2a00m0na017000c.html>

The Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry has drawn up a plan to reform the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA), the operator of the trouble-plagued "Monju" prototype fast-breeder nuclear reactor in Fukui Prefecture.

The ministry emphasizes that the plan would fundamentally overhaul the entity following revelations that the JAEA had failed to inspect about 10,000 parts of the reactor. However, the plan is nothing but superficial reform centering on partially downsizing the organization. The ministry should go ahead with the reform of the JAEA after thoroughly discussing the role of the nuclear fuel cycle project in Japan's future energy policy.

As such, the plan, which has been worked out on the premise that the Monju reactor will be retained, represents a serious challenge to the public.

The JAEA is a huge organization with an annual budget of some 180 billion yen and about 3,900 employees.

The reform plan calls for a split of the nuclear fusion research and other divisions from the JAEA while prioritizing the nuclear fuel cycle project centering on Monju, a response to the crisis at the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, atomic power safety research and human resource development. The reform would reduce the number of its employees by around 500.

Monju would be transformed into the "Monju power station" under the direct control of the JAEA president as an organization only responsible for operating and maintaining the reactor. However, as the plan calls for the establishment of a separate organization responsible for public relations on Monju, the number of workers assigned to the fast-breeder project would rather increase. Those who have served as top officials of private power stations would be appointed as JAEA board members in charge of safety measures. Moreover, mid-ranking JAEA staffers would be dispatched to railway companies or airlines to learn how they can operate JAEA facilities while placing top priority on human lives.

The reform is aimed at using private-sector funds to drastically restructure the organization. However, such an idea is what has been called for whenever a technical problem occurred in the past and is nothing new.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) pointed out in May this year that the JAEA's safety culture had deteriorated following revelations that the agency omitted examinations of approximately 10,000 parts of Monju, and banned the body from making preparations to restart the reactor.

The JAEA can in no way nurture its own safety culture even if it asks the private sector for cooperation without scrutinizing why it had previously failed to carry out its own reform. **The Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry is responsible for the JAEA's deteriorating safety culture as its government regulator.**

It's easy to see that the government's nuclear fuel cycle policy has already failed. More than 1 trillion yen in taxpayers' money has been invested in Monju, which would have been the core facility in the project, but there is no prospect that fast-breeder reactors will be put into practical use in the foreseeable future. There are suspicions that an active fault is situated just below the reactor. The facility costs about 20 billion yen a year although its operations have been suspended. Most other developed countries have abandoned developing fast-breeder reactors.

The completion of a spent nuclear fuel reprocessing plant under construction in Aomori Prefecture, which is another core facility in the project, has repeatedly been postponed.

Nearly 2 1/2 years have passed since the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis. Some 150,000 residents of Fukushima Prefecture are still taking shelter within or outside the prefecture, while workers at the crippled nuclear plant are struggling to deal with radioactive water accumulating on the premises of the power station.

Instead of sticking to the continuation of the Monju project, it would be better for Japan in the long run to let the JAEA concentrate on its response to the nuclear disaster and decommissioning the disaster-hit reactors, while conducting research on nuclear safety.

Japan's "nightmare"

Two recent articles by William Pesek . (Bloomberg)

William Pesek is based in Tokyo and writes on economics, markets and politics throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

August 12, 2013

Abe's Japan Is Blind to Scary Nuclear Reality

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-08-12/abe-s-japan-is-blind-to-scary-nuclear-reality.html>

By William Pesek *Aug 12, 2013 11:00 PM GMT+0200*

Forget Abenomics. Ignore Shinzo Abe's efforts to rejuvenate Japan's diplomatic and military clout. Look past the quest to rewrite the constitution. History will judge this prime minister by one thing alone: what he did, or didn't do, to end the worst nuclear crisis since Chernobyl.

It's mind-boggling how disengaged Japan's leaders have been since their "BP moment" -- the March 2011 near-meltdown at the Fukushima Dai-Ichi nuclear plant. Abe's predecessors Naoto Kan and Yoshihiko Noda virtually ignored the radiation leaks and spent fuel rods sitting 135 miles (217 kilometers) from Tokyo. In December, Abe became the third prime minister to pretend all was well at Fukushima after a devastating earthquake and tsunami that flooded the plant.

The official line on Fukushima is depressingly familiar: The folks at Greenpeace International are trouble makers bent on scaring Japanese; the alarmists at the World Health Organization should mind their own business; the international news media needs to discover decaffeinated coffee. Nuclear power is clean, safe and -- most important, now that a weakened yen has driven up energy bills -- cheap.

Reality made an inconvenient reappearance last week. Mounting evidence that radioactive groundwater is gushing into the Pacific Ocean forced Abe to admit that plant owner Tokyo Electric Power Co. Inc. isn't up to the task of containing the disaster. Under international pressure, he pledged the government would "make sure there is a swift and multifaceted approach in place" to stop the leak.

Abe's Seriousness

Pardon me for doubting Abe's seriousness. It's not just the sketchiness of the suggested remedy: freezing the ground around Fukushima, a tactic scientists fear will prove inadequate. It's not the fact that nuclear regulators remain more focused on restarting reactors than on neutralizing the one that's polluting North Asia. It's not that no one at Tepco has gone to jail or been shamed. (BP Plc's former chief executive officer,

Tony Hayward, was fired and sued over the 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.) Tepco is leaking something far worse and lying through its teeth. Yet it hasn't been nationalized, and its executives remain in their offices.

No, my real worry is that official Japan is still stuck on "how" Fukushima become synonymous with Chernobyl, not "why" it happened or "what" it means for the world.

The "how" is the stuff of the gods, according to conventional wisdom. The event Japanese call 3/11 was an act of the heavens that no one could have foreseen. There was no way to plan for it, no way Tepco could have known not to place all of its backup generators in the same place underground, just steps away from the sea in a tsunami-prone nation.

This storyline ignores the "why." Fukushima was a preventable, man-made disaster stemming from the worst conformist tendencies of Japan Inc. Look, if executives got together globally and created a Hall of Shame for the greedy, corrupt and clueless along them, Tepco would deserve its own wing. All Enron Corp. and Bernie Madoff did was manufacture fake profits. Tepco fudged its safety record and put the lives of tens of millions of people at risk.

But it takes a village to breed such a corrupt and dangerous system. Tepco got away with its negligence for years because of the cozy ties between power companies and the regulators, bureaucrats and researchers that champion the industry -- the "nuclear village." Backed by its connections, money and control of the media, Tepco has brazenly continued to cook its radiation data for the last two and a half years. It matters little that the government is finally commandeering Tepco's cleanup: The government is Tepco.

Dollar Signs

Abe's Liberal Democratic Party is blinded by dollar signs. In May, Abe visited Turkey to help close a \$22 billion deal for Japan to build nuclear power plants in that seismically active nation. That kind of cash makes power companies virtually untouchable. And it raises doubts about Tepco's admission that 300 tons of water laced with strontium and other particles is pouring into the Pacific each day. One can't help but wonder if the leak is of a much greater magnitude.

It's time for the government to face reality and do six things: decommission Fukushima; invite independent auditors from overseas to assess the magnitude of the damage; admit the surrounding area might not be safe for inhabitants, fishing or farming for decades; scour the world for innovative solutions; break up the nuclear village; and level with the Japanese about cleanup costs that will be in the hundreds of billions of dollars.

That brings us to the "what." Fukushima is a growing embarrassment for Japan on the international stage. Oceans don't have boundaries. Radioactive traces have been found in bluefin tuna -- not to mention on secondhand cars and auto parts imported by Russia from Japan. Another earthquake -- a live possibility -- could damage Fukushima anew or take out another reactor between now and the 2020 Summer Olympics that Tokyo hopes to host. The world won't give Japan a pass twice on what would have been a perfectly preventable disaster.

Analysts are rating Abe on his success in cleaning up Japan's finances. Posterity will judge him on whether he cleaned up the mess Tepco and the nuclear village have created.

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August 7, 2013

Japan's Nuclear Nightmare

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-08-07/japan-s-nuclear-nightmare.html>

By William Pesek *Aug 7, 2013 3:12 PM GMT+0200*

I had a terrible dream last night. I imagined it had been 29 months since a giant earthquake and tsunami wrecked the Fukushima Dai-Ichi nuclear plant, the reactor continued to spew radiation into the sea just 135 miles away from my home in Tokyo -- and the Japanese government was standing by and doing nothing. Wait! Sadly, until earlier today, that was reality.

The real nightmare for me and the 126 million people who reside in Japan was that it took Prime Minister Shinzo Abe this long to step in to help Tokyo Electric Power -- the plant's owner -- to deal with tons of radioactive groundwater spilling into the Pacific Ocean. Stopping the leakage could cost tens of millions of dollars; Tepco, which continues to insist that the contamination is minor, would clearly not have been eager to pony up.

Really, a little government intervention would have been even nicer two years ago, when Naoto Kan occupied Abe's office. Back then, scientists and academics urged Japan to nationalize Tepco and decommission that plants it ran with such abandon and arrogance.

Intervention would have been more helpful even one year ago, when Yoshihiko Noda was prime minister. Experts tried to get Noda to take seriously evidence that radioactive discharge from Fukushima was exceeding legal limits. They nudged him to hold someone, anyone, at Tepco accountable. Prosecutors had arrested and charged Olympus Corp. executives for cooking the accounting books. Why not the folks at Tepco, whose flouting of safety rules almost cooked Tokyo? Literally -- most people still have no idea how close we came to losing the world's biggest city in March 2011.

It also would have been great if Abe himself had cared more about nuclear safety than dollars when he assumed the premiership in December. His focus was on restarting the 52 reactors taken offline out of an abundance of caution after the earthquake. Never mind that most Japanese want them to remain mothballed. Japan's potent "nuclear village," the nexus of power companies and pro-nuclear regulators, bureaucrats and researchers, packs way too much political firepower. This nuclear-industrial complex is one of the nation's biggest advertisers, which keeps the Japanese media in line. That's partly why

international campaigners like Greenpeace received so few column inches as they presented report after report showing radiation levels far above what Tepco would admit. (Tepco was eventually forced to come clean.)

So, is Abe's sudden interest in Fukushima's radiation mess for real? Well, it has to be at this point. Aside from the risk to his approval ratings, Tokyo is actively vying for the 2020 Summer Olympics. International Olympic Committee officials might find the threat of protests in Istanbul preferable to jokes about Tokyo hosting the Chernobyl Games.

The first thing Abe must do is shift the Nuclear Regulation Authority's focus away from evaluating the safety of atomic plants for restart, back to the fast-growing crisis of toxic sludge flowing into the sea around Fukushima. Really folks, first things first. Let's first make sure children living within a 100 mile radius won't develop cancer 10 years from now.

Abe also should nationalize the Fukushima site. Yes it will be messy, sure it will cause a tempest in financial circles when investors and creditors fight over money and indeed it will put Japan's government into uncharted territory. But Tepco isn't up to the task of managing life-and-death matters in what's arguably the world's most seismically-active nation. Each time I read quotes by one of their executives explaining how the company learned from its mistakes and is being reborn, I check and make sure I'm not reading TheOnion.com.

Sometimes comedy is the only reasonable default at times like this. Tepco's logo, after all, looks suspiciously like Mickey Mouse (no joke). So I'll ask: Who put Homer Simpson in charge of Japan's nuclear safety? For such a rules-based, technologically proficient nation, Japan's nuclear safety record these last 15 years seems no sounder than that of the fictional Springfield Nuclear Power Plant, where Homer is head of safety. Only, this is no laughing matter.

So better late than never, Mr. Prime Minister. We Tokyoites are glad you are finally on the case. But please excuse us for having our doubts that a year from today, things in Fukushima will be any safer. Welcome to our nightmare.

New providers for Tokyo metro government

August 16, 2013

Chubu Electric affiliate to power some TMG facilities instead of Tepco

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/16/business/chubu-electric-affiliate-to-power-some-tmg-facilities-instead-of-tepco/#.Ug5wN6xSab0>

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government said Friday that a Chubu Electric Power Co.-affiliated firm will supply power to 48 of its facilities instead of Tokyo Electric Power Co.

The metro government contracted with **Diamond Power Corp.**, based in Tokyo, in which Nagoya-based Chubu Electric plans to take an 80 percent stake soon, to supply a total of 9,850 kw to the 48 facilities, including vocational skills development centers, from Oct. 1.

Before the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster devastated the Tohoku region and led to three reactor meltdowns at Tepco's Fukushima No. 1 atomic plant and the effective shutdown of the nation's overall nuclear energy system, the metro government had relied on Tepco to supply most of 1 million kw for about 1,200 facilities, including the main government buildings in the Shinjuku area.

The metro government plans to set up new power supply contracts for a total of 271 facilities with **four new energy providers, including Diamond Power, from October.**

As power supply by new providers is expected to increase from 40,000 kw in April to 96,000 kw, the metro government is anticipating yearly savings of about ¥300 million in power costs.

TEPCO replies to Asahi's attack

Announcements

(Aug 01,2013)

Regarding the Asahi Shimbun article "TEPCO did nothing about radioactive water leak for 2 years" on August 1, 2013

http://www.tepco.co.jp/en/announcements/2013/1229541_5502.html

The Asahi Shimbun reported in its front page on August 1, 2013 that: TEPCO did nothing for more than two years despite having pledged to seal a leaking hole between a turbine building (the leakage source) and an underground pit (a trench) in April 2011 when water contaminated with radioactive materials from Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station was found to have leaked into the ocean; and the company

only began preparing for shielding tests this summer after contaminated water was found to be leaking into the sea this time. However, the facts regarding this issue are as follows:

- In "Roadmap towards Restoration from the Accident" we released on April 17, 2011, we included "blockage between trenches and buildings" (corresponding to "shielding the connection between the trench and the turbine building" in the article) among the measures that we had "considered" or "taken" to prevent a recurrence of the leakage of highly radioactive contaminated water from Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station Unit 2. On April 30, however, we announced that we encountered technical difficulties in blocking a vertical shaft at the connection between the turbine building and the trench, and planned instead to block a vertical shaft located between the turbine building and the sea. Accordingly, we completed blocking of the latter vertical shaft in early May 2011.

- Further, on May 12, 2012, we disclosed "Implementation Plan on Reliability Improvement Measures at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station", where we clearly stated our plan to study construction techniques for shutting off water at the connection between the turbine building and the trench within FY2012 and then spend several years implementing measures to shut off, collect, and apply treatment to water accumulated in such locations as trenches. Although technical difficulties and a severe work environment should be overcome in implementing this plan, we adopted the plan in order to further reduce the risk of having outflow of contaminated water beyond the trench.

- Since then, we have been bringing forward consideration according to this plan. In our report submitted at a meeting of the committee on countermeasures for contaminated water treatment on May 30, 2013, we disclosed, as one step to implement a concrete measure to remove water from the trench, our plan to conduct a verification test for removing water from the trench after blocking water flow by freezing the connection between the turbine building and the trench and complete evaluation of this measure by the end of December 2013.

- The above facts conflict with the claim in the article that TEPCO completely neglected advancing the consideration and making preparations for more than two years while leaving a leaking hole at the turbine building unsealed.

With regards to the current contaminated water leakage into the port, we deeply apologize to the society for concern and anxiety caused not only by the fact that the leakage occurred, but also by our attitude toward publication about the leakage. We are committed to making further progress in the effort to cleanse contaminated water inside the trench, and to accelerating and devoting ourselves to such efforts as to remove contaminated water from the trench by blocking the connection between the turbine building and the trench.

Gov't should clearly define responsibilities

August 17, 2013

EDITORIAL: Clearer government role needed for Fukushima cleanup

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201308170027>

The crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant is far from over. The government has yet to call off the state of nuclear emergency it declared on March 11, 2011, when the catastrophic earthquake and tsunami set off the nuclear accident.

Water contaminated with radioactive materials keeps leaking from the crippled plant, polluting underground soil and the sea in the area.

This fact clearly shows that the nuclear disaster is still going on.

Last week, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said the continued leakage of contaminated water is "a pressing problem."

"The government will take effective measures to tackle the problem instead of leaving it entirely to Tokyo Electric Power," he said.

Abe made these remarks at a meeting of the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters, set up in line with the government's declaration of the state of nuclear emergency. Abe is head of the task force.

By clearly defining the respective responsibilities of the utility and the government organizations involved in responding to the situation, the government needs to make flat-out efforts to contain radiation and resolve the crisis.

The government has made a big mistake by leaving it entirely to TEPCO. As a result, measures to stop leaks of radioactive water have been ineffective, allowing environmental pollution to escalate. The government's move to step in and get involved in the efforts to sort out the problem came far too late.

Abe told industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi to give appropriate instructions to TEPCO as soon as possible. He also called on Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, to ensure that the nuclear regulatory body will direct all its efforts toward identifying the causes of the problem and take effective steps to secure safety.

Although TEPCO will remain in charge of cleanup work at the site, the government said it will now take concrete actions to support the efforts. The industry ministry has indicated it will cover part of the costs of implementing a plan to freeze soil around the nuclear facilities to prevent groundwater from flowing into the contaminated areas of the plant.

But the ministry will provide the money to partly finance the measure as research expenses. Given the urgency of the situation, the ministry's commitment to tackling the situation is far too weak.

The NRA is not showing an all-out commitment to the challenge, either.

"TEPCO and the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy are playing a central role (in dealing with the problem)," Tanaka said. "Our role is to provide advice (for the efforts) as an observer."

It would be shameful if TEPCO, the industry ministry, which has been a champion of nuclear power generation, and the NRA, the nuclear regulator, try to shuffle off responsibility onto one another or make their responsibility vague, thereby causing delays in the implementation of necessary measures.

The NRA's role is crucial.

Ahead of receiving the request from Abe, the nuclear watchdog set up a task force to discuss measures to stop leaks of contaminated water.

The group has shown a willingness to provide guidance for TEPCO's efforts to deal with the situation by raising some specific questions that need to be answered, such as: "How effective will it be to pump up groundwater?" "How far has polluted water spread in power cable ducts?"

The NRA should demonstrate a stronger commitment to the challenge and offer useful ideas by using all its expertise and other intellectual resources.

The chief of the now defunct Nuclear Safety Commission was not even a member of the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters, but the NRA chairman is deputy chief of the headquarters. The entity should make the most of the powers vested in it according to lessons learned from the disaster.

No gauge?

August 21, 2013

Leaking tank at Fukushima plant has no water gauge

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130821_30.html

The operator of Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant says it may have failed to find a leak of radioactive wastewater from a tank because it lacks a water gauge.

Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, on Monday found a massive leak of highly contaminated wastewater from a tank near the No.4 reactor. Water had seeped outside the barrier around the tank.

The tank is 11 meters high and can store up to 1,000 tons of wastewater. TEPCO said the tank's water level had dropped nearly three meters. That means more than 300 tons had been lost.

The utility says the tank has no water gauge, so workers at the plant did not notice the leak until they saw water outside the barrier.

The tank is one of about 350 at the plant made from steel plates and bolts. Four cases of leaks have been reported so far.

TEPCO officials say workers conduct patrols twice a day to check the tanks for possible leaks.

Tokyo Electric is trying to find the cause and location of the current leak. It will carry out emergency inspections on other tanks, and determine whether other tanks have water gauges.

Nuclear power chief should be on site

August 21, 2013

TEPCO nuclear chief to be stationed in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130821_35.html

The operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant says it will station its nuclear power chief near the facility to oversee its decommissioning process, particularly handling of radioactive water.

Tokyo Electric Power Company revealed last month that contaminated groundwater at the plant is seeping into the sea. This week, it said more than 300 tons of wastewater had leaked from a storage tank there.

On Wednesday, the utility said it will send Vice President Zengo Aizawa, who heads the firm's nuclear power division, to Fukushima Prefecture to take direct command of decommissioning efforts. It said the

move is aimed at clarifying the chain of command and facilitating information sharing among TEPCO officials in charge.

In a news conference on Wednesday, Aizawa apologized for the utility's continuing to cause so much trouble and concern nearly 2 and a half years after the accident at the plant. He said he will tackle the water leaks as an issue of the highest priority.

"The biggest management crisis"

August 22, 2013

TEPCO faces 'biggest management crisis' after toxic water leak from Fukushima tank

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130822p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)'s ambitious scheme to deal with contaminated water at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant is on the verge of collapsing, as the safety of storage tanks built on the complex has been called into question after highly radioactive water leaked from one of the aboveground storage tanks.

TEPCO, the operator of the badly-damaged nuclear power station, has been building one tank after another in a "shoestring operation" to store ever-increasing highly contaminated water. The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) said the severity of the leakage of highly radioactive water is on par with a level-3 (serious incident) on the International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale. But because the nuclear crisis has remained unresolved with no end in sight, the current situation cannot be assessed easily by conventional yardsticks.

TEPCO Executive Vice President Zengo Aizawa exhibited a sense of crisis, saying at a news conference on Aug. 21, "This is the biggest management crisis. Taking it as a pressing matter of the highest priority, we want to respond to this problem." He made the comment because about 300 metric tons of highly contaminated water leaked from one of the aboveground storage tanks. The leakage of the contaminated water from the tank set off alarm bells about TEPCO's scheme to store radioactive water.

Contaminated water continues to increase over time because about 400 tons of groundwater flows into damaged reactor buildings each day and comes into contact with melted nuclear fuel, turning itself into highly radioactive water. This process started immediately after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima plant. There is also water contaminated with relatively low levels of radioactive substances that are produced after highly radioactive water has been treated by purification equipment.

If contaminated water, regardless of the levels of radiation, flows out of the complex, it will contaminate the environment. Therefore, TEPCO has been storing such water in tanks and other containers on the premises of the nuclear complex. As of Aug. 20, the total volume of such water stood at about 430,000 tons.

Initially, TEPCO had built seven underground storage tanks (for a total of 58,000 tons of water) that could store a lot more water at once than aboveground storage tanks that cannot be built easily and quickly. But contaminated water was found to be leaking from underground storage tanks in April this year. Thus, far more than 20,000 tons of contaminated water was hastily transferred from the underground tanks to aboveground tanks that were hurriedly built. The situation worsened to a level so bad at one time that experts predicted that only 3,600 tons of additional water could be stored in the aboveground tanks.

TEPCO aims for full-scale operations of its water decontamination system, called the Multi-nuclide Removal Equipment (ALPS), which could remove up to 62 kinds of radioactive substances from up to 500 tons of water each day. TEPCO also worked out a plan to build an "underground water bypass" system to pump up uncontaminated water before flowing it into the damaged reactor buildings and release it outside. On Aug. 7, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said, "Instead of leaving it to TEPCO, the government will take measures." The government then started to extend financial assistance for a project to build walls of frozen soil to reduce the amount of groundwater flowing into reactor buildings.

The government and TEPCO had believed that if such measures worked to stop water from being contaminated with radioactive substances, they would be able to deal with the problem of the contaminated water under the current plan by increasing the total volume of storage tanks to about 800,000 tons of water by fiscal 2016.

But the ALPS system that began to run on a trial basis at the end of March this year was forced to shut down after it was found to have been leaking water in June. Furthermore, the device is not technically capable of removing radioactive tritium. The underground bypass system has not been built yet because of opposition from local fisheries cooperative associations that are concerned about harmful rumors about radioactive contamination.

There has been no successful case elsewhere in the world of a large-scale project to build walls of frozen soil, and therefore it remains unclear whether the project under consideration will actually be effective. The life span of the storage tank in question is five years, and therefore the tanks should be regularly replaced with new ones. The cause of the leakage of the radioactive water has yet to be found, and **TEPCO is faced with another task of checking more than 1,000 small and large tanks on the premises of the nuclear complex.**

At a working-group meeting of the NRA held on the evening of Aug. 21, some of the participants proposed that water-level gauges should be installed in the same type of storage tanks that leaked contaminated water. Other participants also urged TEPCO to transfer contaminated water to different types of tanks. But it is not easy to obtain such storage tanks.

NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka said, "We fear a situation in which we have no control unless (contaminated water) is dumped into the ocean as the number of tanks keeps increasing rapidly." He stressed that it is necessary to release water into the ocean after treating it with the ALPS system. But the consent of local residents and communities is needed to do so. It has become even harder for TEPCO, therefore, to secure the understanding of local residents and communities to release water into the ocean because of revelations in July of contaminated underground water flowing into the ocean and the "level 3" leakage of radioactive water from the aboveground storage tanks.

Yuzo Onishi, chairman of the government committee on contaminated water treatment countermeasures, said, "**Unless drastic measures are taken promptly, the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant will collapse at some point.**" (By Shinpei Torii and Motofumi Fujino, Tokyo Science and Environment News Department)

Gov't not playing its role

August 22, 2013

Editorial: Gov't lacks sense of responsibility over Fukushima radioactive water leak

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130822p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Revelations that about 300 tons of water contaminated with radioactive substances has leaked from an above-ground tank at the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant have demonstrated that the nuclear crisis has not yet been brought under control.

It was the largest amount of radioactive water that has leaked from a tank on the premises of the power station, and the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) is considering rating the accident as Level 3, or a serious incident, on the International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said the government will take countermeasures against the leakage of contaminated water. Actually, however, the government has failed to play a key role in efforts to bring the crisis under control while basically leaving the daily response to the crisis to plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO). The government should have a sense of responsibility and play a more active role in responding to the crisis.

Radioactive water has leaked from a cylindrical tank with a capacity of 1,000 tons, which was assembled by joining steel plates with bolts. The tank contained water used to cool down nuclear reactors, from which radioactive cesium was removed.

Of some 1,000 tanks at the crippled plant containing radioactive water, about 350 were built by joining steel plates with bolts and the rest of them were built by welding steel plates.

It's quicker to assemble tanks by joining steel plates with bolts, but water can leak from joint areas more easily than welded tanks. Water leakage from such tanks had previously occurred four times. In the latest case, it remains to be seen from which part radioactive water leaked, and the possibility cannot be ruled out that further water leakages will occur.

Following the latest revelations, TEPCO began to examine tanks with bolts and is set to increase the frequency of daily inspections on such tanks from two to three times a day. The utility needs to clarify the cause of the leakage and the reason why it was slow to detect the problem, and fundamentally review the

way it inspects and maintains the tanks. It must also confirm if radioactive water has leaked from the tank into the sea and whether the tainted water contaminated underground water in the area.

TEPCO is supposed to treat radioactive water in multi-nuclide removal equipment after radioactive cesium is removed from it. However, the equipment remains stalled after it developed trouble during its trial operations. To reduce the risk the contaminated water poses to the environment, TEPCO should quickly repair and reactivate the equipment.

TEPCO is considering what it calls an underground water bypass system as an emergency countermeasure against the influx of underground water onto the premises of the power station, which is the primary cause of an increase in the amount of contaminated water. In the system, a well will be drilled into the plant's mountainside area to allow underground water to be pumped up before being contaminated with radioactive substances and discharged into the sea. However, the plan still cannot win consent from the local communities hosting the power station for fear that it could fuel harmful rumors about local agricultural and fisheries products.

It came to light in April this year that tainted water was leaking from an underground water tank at the plant. It then surfaced last month that underground water on the premises of the power station got mixed with highly contaminated water and was leaking into the ocean. As the leakage of radioactive water is drawing worldwide attention, it could adversely affect the international community's confidence in Japan.

The NRA has set up a panel to study the impact that radioactive water on the premises of the crippled nuclear plant has on the sea. The panel should objectively analyze relevant data that can provide a basis for judging whether the water is posing a threat to the environment, and actively dispatch such information to the world.

If TEPCO goes ahead with the creation of the underground water bypass system, the national government must do its best to convince local communities as well as the general public of the entire plan, **including a response to possible contamination that could occur as a result of the system's operation.**

Abe's political leadership sorely tested

August 22, 2013

EDITORIAL: Abe needs to step up and lead crisis response at Fukushima plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201308220040>

The crisis at the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has taken another turn. As much as 300 tons of highly radioactive water has leaked from a surface storage tank.

On Aug. 21, the Nuclear Regulation Authority said the leak is the equivalent of Level 3 on the eight-level International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale. That means it is a “serious incident.”

Radioactive materials have to be kept in secure storage. The fact that a huge amount was released into the environment is a very alarming situation.

There is growing international concern over the leak.

This is a crisis that is threatening not just the safety of surrounding areas, but also international confidence in Japan. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe should take charge of the situation by making a swift and effective response.

The Fukushima nuclear disaster has been rated as a “Level 7,” or “major accident,” the highest severity level on the international nuclear event scale. The only other Level-7 nuclear accident was the Chernobyl disaster in 1986.

Work to deal with the consequences of the Level-7 accident at the Fukushima nuclear plant is far from over. The environment is still being contaminated by radioactive materials from the plant.

Because the leak of polluted water from a storage tank occurred during the process of dealing with the aftermath of the nuclear disaster, some people dispute the appropriateness of declaring it to be a new Level-3 incident.

But the question that must be asked is why the leak couldn't be prevented.

The tank in question is one of 350 or so lower-quality containers among the 1,000 tanks installed to store contaminated water. These makeshift tanks have a useful life span of only five years.

From the outset, experts have warned there is a possibility of leakage from these tanks.

The massive leak of radioactive water is clearly the result of a poor response to the problem. The task of dealing with accumulating contaminated water has been left to Tokyo Electric Power Co., the embattled utility that operated the Fukushima No. 1 plant. Consequently, only insufficient, stopgap measures have been taken to cope with the situation.

In an Aug. 7 meeting of the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters, Abe said, “The government will take effective measures to tackle the problem (of continued leakage of polluted water) instead of leaving it entirely to Tokyo Electric Power.” His remarks have finally made ministries and agencies willing to cooperate with one another to tackle this formidable challenge, according to administration officials.

Plans to deal with contaminated water have been developed by the task force for decommissioning reactors under the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters. TEPCO and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry have been playing the central role in working out the plans. This approach has proved misguided.

Tackling the problem entails a range of tasks that all require swift and all-out efforts by the entire government. These efforts cannot be hampered by the walls between ministries and agencies. They include assessing the current situation accurately, explaining the situation to the general public at home and abroad, gaining cooperation from other countries in efforts to fix the situation and securing and allocating necessary funds.

The challenge sorely tests Abe's political leadership.

The government should improve its preparedness for new developments to levels close to those required for responding to a full-fledged nuclear accident. It should, for instance, make sure that all information related to the situation at the Fukushima plant be reported to the deputy chief Cabinet secretary for crisis

management to ensure proper sharing of information so that the appropriate ministries and agencies can make a coordinated response.

The NRA is also responsible for the leak because it has endorsed the flawed framework for efforts to deal with the problem by TEPCO alone. The NRA has provided nothing more than weak oversight.

Its role is to keep sounding the alarm about the worst that could happen while guarding itself against unwarranted optimism.

The nuclear regulatory body should act swiftly to come up with specific measures to cope with the situation based on the latest knowledge and cutting-edge expertise available at home and abroad. It should, for instance, ensure that more than one alternative plan be prepared for preventing additional leaks and start rigorous monitoring of environmental pollution.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Aug. 22

Gov't cannot wash its hands of Fukushima disaster

VOX POPULI: Government cannot wash away its responsibility for Fukushima disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/vox/AJ201308220050>

Vox Populi, Vox Dei is a daily column that runs on Page 1 of the vernacular Asahi Shimbun.

Apparently because Japan is blessed with abundant water, the Japanese language is rich in metaphorical expressions that use water, writes tanka poet Akiko Baba, who is also an editor for The Asahi Shimbun's tanka column. Indeed, anyone can cite many examples, such as "mizu mo shitataru" (dripping with water), which means good-looking, or "mizu o mukeru" (to direct water), an expression that means to try to draw information from someone.

But now, the phrase "mizu mo morasanu" (watertight) sounds hollow. It became clear that highly radioactive water has leaked from a tank at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Much of the 300 tons of contaminated water, equivalent to what can be held in 1,500 drums, is believed to have seeped into the ground. High levels of radiation have been detected near the tank.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority determined that the leak represents "a serious incident," equivalent to a Level 3 on the eight-level International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale. The March 2011 nuclear disaster was so serious that it's hard to grasp the implications of the leak. But if it had happened in ordinary times, such an incident would have set off an uproar. The cause of the leak remains unknown.

Be that as it may, serious situations that have to do with water have developed one after another. It was just the other day that the government released an estimate that said about 300 tons of contaminated water is leaking into the ocean daily. It's always one thing or another. Tokyo Electric Power Co., which operates the plant, is like a boxer who is having trouble staying on his feet and about to be knocked down.

There is no way we can leave a single company, which can barely stand itself, to deal with the aftermath of the accident on its own. In order to expedite restarts of idle nuclear reactors and exports of nuclear technology, it seems the government wants to leave TEPCO to the enormous task of dismantling the stricken nuclear reactors and bring the situation under control while shrugging off its own responsibilities.

"Mizu ni nagasu," or to let water carry something away, means to pretend the whole thing never happened. Maybe the government is letting water carry it away, to use a water-related idiom. It is said that behind this is also the idea of performing ablutions or purifying oneself with water. Performing ablutions is a specialty of politicians, but still, it is impossible to wipe away the fact that the government has promoted nuclear power generation as a national policy. Am I being too suspicious about the government's intentions? The Fukushima nuclear disaster is still going on.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Aug. 22

* * *

Vox Populi, Vox Dei is a popular daily column that takes up a wide range of topics, including culture, arts and social trends and developments. Written by veteran Asahi Shimbun writers, the column provides useful perspectives on and insights into contemporary Japan and its culture.

Strange priorities

August 23, 2013

OLYMPICS/ Tokyo governor says nuclear crisis won't affect Games bid

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/sports/topics/AJ201308230094>

REUTERS

Radiation levels in Tokyo are no different from those of other major world cities and the worsening crisis at Fukushima nuclear plant should have no impact on the city's bid to host the 2020 Olympics, Tokyo's governor said on Aug. 23.

The nuclear crisis escalated this week to its worst level since a massive earthquake and tsunami crippled the plant more than two years ago, with a tank holding highly contaminated water leaking 300 tons of radioactive liquid.

But Tokyo governor Naoki Inose told a news conference roughly two weeks before the decision is due that he was confident the problem would be resolved, citing promises from Prime Minister Shinzo Abe that the government as a whole will take a proactive role.

"Our food and water are totally safe and all the data is published on our home page. Right now, there's absolutely no difference between the radiation levels in Tokyo, London, New York and Paris," Inose said.

"As a result, the Fukushima issue is one that must be solved swiftly, but I think there is no direct connection to the hosting of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games."

Tokyo is competing with Istanbul and Madrid to host the 2020 Games, with the final decision set for Sept. 7 in Buenos Aires. Tokyo hosted the Summer Olympics in 1964 and Japan has twice hosted the Winter Olympics.

Anybody in charge?

August 24, 2013

Column] Is Tepco in charge or JP Gov ? -Gov intentionally making it unclear not to pay compensation

<http://fukushima-diary.com/2013/08/column-is-tepco-in-charge-or-jp-gov-gov-intentionally-making-it-unclear-not-to-pay-compensation/>

Japan is going to have to pay astronomical value of compensation for the world.

This is why Japan is making it unclear who is in charge of Fukushima, -Tepco ? or Japanese government ? Due to the series of recent leakage, media coverage came back to Fukushima again. Fukushima has actually been in the spot light for long compared to other industrial accidents. but we will not see the end of the media coverage.

What media wants to know is who is responsible for the leakage, and also the whole decommissioning project of Fukushima plant.

Now nobody thinks Tepco is capable of doing it. It looks strange for the government to leave just one company in charge.

In this emergency, Japanese Prime Minister doesn't even make an official announcement.

He doesn't even mention the leakage.

It's possibly because if he steps to Fukushima, it would look like Japanese government is finally going to take over the decommissioning project for the international world.

The bottom line is there is no technology to settle it down whoever becomes responsible.

However, the difference of when Tepco takes responsibility and when Japanese government takes responsibility is the solvency.

On 8/23/2013, China Central TV attended Tepco's press conference and asked about the international effect of the unstoppable leakage.

International world is becoming seriously worried about the endless contamination of the Pacific.

In short, they are wanting to know if they can be properly compensated.

It has been anticipated since day 0 that Japan is going to have to pay astronomical amount of compensation.

Japanese government is gaining time by having Tepco the scapegoat.

However, it's only the matter of time.

Japanese people may need the compensation for medical care in a few years, but it would be paid from their own savings.

Fukushima nuclear plant accident was a little bit too big for one government to pay for.

Iori Mochizuki

TEPCO's "inept management"

August 24, 2013

Strong oversight of Tepco needed

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/08/24/commentary/strong-oversight-of-tepco-needed/#.Uhmkg9Sab0>

The discovery last week that about 300 tons of highly radioactive water leaked from a tank at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has reminded both people in Japan and around the world that the nation's nuclear crisis is far from over and that radioactive substances are continuing to be released into the environment.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority proposed raising the severity level of the leak from the earlier level 1 on the International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale (INES) of 8 to level 3. The nuclear catastrophe at the plant, as a whole, is rated as level 7.

The massive water leak is only the latest in a series of accidents that have plagued the plant since the disaster started on March 11, 2011. It highlights the inability of Tepco to manage the crisis — which in large part was caused by Tepco's inept management of the nuclear plant.

It is suspected that up to 300 tons of the water leaked into the ocean. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and other government leaders must realize that the ongoing leakage, which is polluting the Pacific Ocean — a shared resource — is undermining Japan's trustworthiness in the international community.

The government must acknowledge that Tepco cannot manage the crisis by itself and take a commanding role to ensure that it is handled in the most competent manner possible.

The latest leak occurred in a tank that is a temporary structure. It is made of steel sheets bolted together with their seams sealed with rubber packing. Some 1,000 tanks are being used at the plant site to store radioactive water that had been used to cool the three reactors that suffered core meltdowns. Of those tanks, about 350 are of the temporary type and the remaining are more reliable welded tanks. The service life of the temporary tanks is said to be five years.

It should have been clear to Tepco from the beginning that storing radioactive water in such tanks is inappropriate. It is likely that more leaks will occur. Tepco estimates that 10 tons of contaminated water leaked daily from the tank in question for the past month. One wonders why the leak was not detected sooner.

Tepco also estimates that water containing as much as 10 trillion becquerels of radioactive strontium and 20 trillion becquerels of radioactive cesium-137 from the Fukushima No. 1 power plant has flowed into the Pacific Ocean since May 2011. It must be pointed out that the crippled nuclear plant has only a makeshift system to contain radioactive water.

The sloppiness of Tepco and other parties is clear. For example, Tepco had to abandon tests of equipment, scheduled to start early this month, for removing 62 kinds of radioactive nuclides from contaminated water when leaks from the equipment were detected.

The government must end its “hands off” attitude regarding the management of the nuclear crisis and take on an active role drawing on all available resources. Its first step should be to mobilize the NRA, Tepco, corporations and nuclear experts to stop the outflow of toxic water into the Pacific Ocean.

Brain drain at TEPCO's

Plugging Tepco's brain drain

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/08/26/commentary/plugging-tepcos-brain-drain/#.Uhtkc9Sab0>

On July 22, Tokyo Electric Power Co. paid a uniform ¥100,000 special summer bonus to each of its some 5,000 employees in managerial positions.

Tepco President Naomi Hirose told reporters that the company wanted to express its appreciation for their hard work although he conceded some may doubt if this small sum would serve that purpose.

Needless to say, boosting the morale of employees in managerial posts was not the only reason for paying the bonus. Another obvious reason was to put the brakes on a recent sharp rise in the number of employees who are resigning.

Having faced a managerial crisis due to the severe accident at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011, Tepco carried out salary cuts of 20 percent for ordinary employees and 25 percent for those in managerial posts in fiscal 2011 (April 2011 through March 2012). As the company's balance sheet deteriorated further as the costs of importing fuels soared due to the declining value of the yen currency, the pay cut rate for managers rose to 31 percent in fiscal 2012.

These measures did serve to reduce total personnel costs by ¥177.9 billion annually. But the downside of the measures is the emergence of cases in which lower-ranking employees who are paid for overtime work earn more than some of employees in managerial posts. This has lowered the morale of employees in the managerial class, accelerating a move among them to leave Tepco and look for other jobs.

In fiscal 2011, 465 managerial and nonmanagerial employees voluntarily quit Tepco. The number shot up by more than 50 percent to 712 in fiscal 2012, which was 5.3 times the corresponding figure in the pre-disaster fiscal 2010. This is quite serious for Tepco, as one company insider pointed out that of those who voluntarily quit, 40 percent were “core employees” who were either already holding managerial posts or about to be promoted to such posts.

This trend shows no sign of ending. From April to the end of June 2013, 109 employees voluntarily quit. A high-ranking official of the Tepco group said the drain of human resources is accelerating among employees close to the hub of Tepco management.

An official of the trade and industry ministry said that Tepco may well already be in a state of “imminent brain death.”

The company’s financial straits stem from mounting expenditures to deal with the Fukushima nuclear crisis: (1) compensation paid to victims of the nuclear accident, (2) decontamination of soil and buildings contaminated by radioactive substances and (3) dismantling of the damaged reactors.

Compensation to victims will be paid out of up to ¥5 trillion to be provided by the government-funded Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund (NDLFF) in aid. Tepco will have to pay the money back from future profits. The sum committed by the NDLFF had already reached ¥3.909 trillion as of June 25. The scope of the compensation will further grow as compensation covers citizens originally excluded from coverage, such as those who voluntarily evacuated. Soon the total amount of compensation will reach the ¥5 trillion ceiling in aid from the NDLFF.

Decontamination of polluted areas and decommissioning of the reactors are also serious problems for the company because it has to bear all the costs by itself. The cost needed to reduce the annual radiation dose to the targeted 1 millisievert is estimated to be at least ¥5 trillion. A Tepco official says the sum could reach ¥10 trillion.

For decommissioning the damaged reactors, Tepco has set aside nearly ¥1 trillion. But ¥300 billion has already been spent to cope with 400 tons of underground water flowing into the reactor buildings every day, even before any concrete action for decommissioning has been taken.

The entire process of decommissioning is expected to take 30 to 40 years. No decision has been made on where to bury high-level radioactive wastes. A reactor manufacturing industry insider has said ¥5 trillion will be required to dispose of such wastes and turn the nuclear power station site into raw land.

Another headache for Tepco is the delay in restarting the operation of its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture. The company hopes to restart it in order to avoid high costs of purchasing imported fuels to run thermal power plants.

In an effort to get consent for its plan to restart the Nos. 6 and 7 reactors at the plant from the Niigata prefectural government, Tepco President Hirose visited Niigata on July 5 only to encounter staunch opposition from Gov. Hirohiko Izumida. The governor repeatedly asked, “Why do you hurry to restart the plant?”

It is estimated that if one reactor is stopped for a year, incremental fuel costs and other factors will reduce the company’s profit by ¥96 billion to ¥132 billion. This means a failure of Tepco’s “comprehensive special business plan” to achieve a current account surplus in fiscal 2013.

For fiscal 2012, Tepco reported a consolidated current account deficit of ¥326.9 billion despite raising electricity rates for business enterprises as well as private consumers and reducing labor, materials and other costs by ¥496.9 billion — 40 percent more than the original cost reduction goal of ¥351.8 billion.

A current account deficit for fiscal 2013 would mean losses for three straight years. This would make it extremely difficult for Tepco to secure new bank loans.

As of the end of March, Tepco’s long-term debts of more than ¥3.5 trillion were owed to 77 financial institutions. Over ¥1 trillion becomes due during fiscal 2013, including redemption of corporate bonds worth more than ¥580 billion.

Tepco hopes to straighten out the situation by raising electricity fees and by obtaining additional funds from the NDLEF with the support of the Liberal Democratic Party on the strength of its overwhelming victory in the Upper House election in July.

But a banking source says that in order to turn the company’s balance sheet into the black, Tepco will have to raise electricity fees by nearly 20 percent. The fees have already been raised since March and the average household fees in August are ¥705 higher than in February. Meanwhile, the consumption tax rate is scheduled to go up April 2014. Enterprises and consumers will not accept such an additional fee increase of nearly 20 percent.

It will not be easy either to win general public support for funneling more taxpayer money through the NDLEF if creditors — such as shareholders, bondholders and banks — continue to remain protected.

According to a government insider, there is mounting opinion within the trade and industry ministry that Tepco should be placed under legal liquidation. Specifically, most of its operations for compensation payments and part of its operations for decontamination and reactor decommissioning would be placed under government control and the rest would undergo legal liquidation. Its electricity generating and supplying operations would be sold to other power companies.

An official of the ministry said if such a scheme is adopted, an increase in taxpayers' burden may be accepted by the public. But at this point, how to divide Tepco's assets and liabilities is unclear.

A major bank official said if banks were asked to forgive a large portion of Tepco's debts in order to reduce burdens on taxpayers, the scheme would "disintegrate in midair." This is because banks have long assured their shareholders that loans to Tepco will be safe and paid back.

The drain on human resources from Tepco in the form of employees in managerial positions running away from it all represents a "funeral march" for its organizational collapse.

This is an abridged translation of an article from the August issue of Sentaku, a monthly magazine covering Japanese political, social and economic scenes.

Motegi promises to act

August 26, 2013

Trade minister vows help in resolving nuke crisis

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201308260117>

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--Trade Minister Toshimitsu Motegi pledged on Aug. 26 an urgent government action to curb leaks of radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Motegi told reporters that lax maintenance by the plant's operator was largely to blame for the series of leaks from storage tanks at the plant, which was damaged by a massive earthquake and tsunami in 2011. "The urgency of the situation is very high," Motegi said. "From here on the government will take charge."

The leaks have shaken confidence in the reliability of about 1,000 tanks that are crucial for storing water that has been pumped into three damaged reactors to keep their radioactive fuel cool.

At least five of the tanks at the plant on Japan's northeastern coast have leaked.

Last week, Tokyo Electric Power Co., said 300 tons of highly contaminated water had flowed from one tank, in the worst leak so far.

Most of the water is thought to have seeped into the ground, but some may have entered the sea through a rainwater gutter, it said.

The tanks contain nearly 300,000 tons of partially treated radioactive water.

Motegi, who toured the plant on Aug. 26, said inspections of the tanks would be doubled to four times a day. "Water control is a very important issue. We have to prevent contaminated water from reaching the sea," he said.

TEPCO President Naomi Hirose, who accompanied Motegi, apologized for the leaks. He said the company is setting up a new taskforce to better deal with the problem of radioactive water and will step up efforts to assess the extent of underground water contamination and prevent leakage into the sea.

TEPCO plans to build more tanks to store another 800,000 tons of water, which combined with plans to pump out uncontaminated underground water should prevent the situation from becoming dire for another three to four years.

"But we cannot keep making tanks endlessly," Hirose said.

The chief of Japan's nuclear watchdog, Toyoshi Fuketa, who inspected the plant last Friday, also criticized the plant's management of the tanks, some of which have hoses running directly on the ground.

TEPCO spokesman Noriyuki Imaizumi said Aug. 24 that a two-person team has been inspecting the 1,000 tanks during twice-daily "patrols," which regulators have criticized as just a walk. He acknowledged that the workers usually did not carry dosimeters to measure radioactivity, and did not keep full inspection records unless there were notable irregularities such as major rust spots or leaks.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said the recent major leak was "extremely regrettable," though he said it arose "largely because of sloppy valve operation and patrols," apparently trying to calm deepening fears of additional leaks.

"Our position is to do everything we can to help resolve the problem as quickly as possible," he said.

Motegi is expected to compile a support plan, and the ruling coalition will set up a taskforce to handle the water problem, Suga said.

As the crisis drags on, costs are mounting.

TEPCO's stock price plunged nearly 6.9 percent on Monday following the release over the weekend of further details of the crisis.

Fishermen working from a port in the nearby city of Iwaki had hoped to resume test catches next month after sampling showed a decline in radioactivity over the past two years.

But those plans were scrapped, and fisheries operations in Fukushima remained suspended indefinitely, after news of the latest leak from the plant.

It remains unclear what the environmental impact from the contamination will be on sea life, but the frustrations of those who rely on the fisheries industry for their livelihood is evident.

"The operators (of the plant) are reacting too late every time in whatever they do," said Fumio Suzuki, whose boat has been part of the sampling trips since the 2011 disaster.

"People in the fishing business have no choice but to give up. There are many (fishermen) who have mostly given up already," Suzuki added.

Still, fisherman and researchers continue to survey the sea life.

Sampling results from over 170 types of fish showed 40 percent of fish with signs of contamination.

Nobuyuki Hatta, director of the Fukushima Prefecture Fisheries Research Center, said the trend had been positive before the latest leaks, with fewer fish found exceeding radiation limits.

More official promises

Suga: Govt. to rein in radioactive water problems

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130826_24.html

Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary says the government will do more to help contain radioactive water leaks at the troubled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Yoshihide Suga said on Monday that it's unacceptable to have contaminated water leak from the plant's storage tank and flow into the ocean.

He pointed to poor management as a likely cause. He said this case is different from the contaminated groundwater now seeping from the plant into the ocean.

Suga said the government needs to play a more active role in taking countermeasures.

He said industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi was instructed several weeks ago to involve the government in solving this problem. This includes earmarking public money to tackle the storage tank leak.

Suga dismissed the idea that the leakage will negatively impact Japan's bid for the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics. He said the foreign ministry should be providing proper information on the matter.

Let's use reserve funds

August 26, 2013

Japan may dip into budget reserves to fight Fukushima toxic water

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201308260090>

REUTERS

Japan may use emergency reserve funds from this year's budget to help Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant, deal with escalating radioactive water problems at the site.

TEPCO acknowledged last week that hundreds of tons of highly radioactive water had leaked from a tank, one of around 350 assembled quickly after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that triggered nuclear meltdowns at the site.

The tanks are used to store water pumped through the reactors to keep fuel in the melted cores from overheating.

The latest revelation is the most serious problem in a series of recent mishaps, including power outages, contaminated workers and other leaks.

TEPCO also said last month--after repeated denials--that the Fukushima plant was leaking contaminated water into the Pacific Ocean from trenches between the reactor buildings and the shoreline.

"It's deplorable," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a news conference on Aug. 26. "It is necessary for the country to step forward and offer support to solve the problem as well as prevent a recurrence."

Suga said trade and industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi had been instructed to come up with measures, including the possible use of reserve funds from the state budget for the year ending March 2014.

Japan put aside a total of 350 billion yen (\$3.55 billion) in reserves for natural disasters and other emergencies in the budget.

Motegi and TEPCO President Naomi Hirose will visit the Fukushima site later on Aug. 26.

Japan is under increasing pressure to contain the toxic water problem at the plant.

The new crisis comes as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is pitching the country's nuclear technology abroad to countries like Turkey, promising that its nuclear reactor makers have learned vital safety lessons from the disaster.

TEPCO shares fell as much as 10 percent on Aug. 26 to their lowest in 12 weeks.

On Aug. 25, Chinese government said it was paying close attention to developments at Fukushima, noting it has the right to request entry into waters near the facility to conduct checks and assess the impact of the nuclear accident on the Western Pacific.

The country's State Oceanic Administration said it hadn't found any evidence of a "direct impact" from radiation on Chinese waters, but will closely monitor developments.

Reserve funds may be used on Fukushima plant

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130826_39.html

Japan's industry minister says the government may use public funds to prevent further leakage of radioactive groundwater from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant into the sea.

Toshimitsu Motegi spoke to reporters on Monday after inspecting the crippled plant.

He visited the area where contaminated groundwater is being pumped out to prevent it from seeping into the ocean.

He also viewed the site where about 300 tons of highly radioactive water leaked from one of the plant's storage tanks.

Motegi instructed plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Company to take several measures. These include enhanced monitoring of the tanks and installing more welded tanks. The storage tank that leaked was made of steel plates attached by bolts rather than by welding.

Motegi told reporters that so far the government has let the operator deal with the situation each time a problem has come up. But he said that from now on, the government will take full charge.

Motegi said the government will also consult with fiscal authorities on the possibility of using this year's reserve funds to build an underground frozen soil wall to stop contaminated groundwater from leaking into the ocean.

Mismanaged' leaks to require reserve funds

Jiji, AP, Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/26/national/mismanaged-leaks-to-require-reserve-funds/#.Uhtje39Sab0>

The government is considering using reserves from the fiscal 2013 budget to deal with the leaks of radioactive water at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 power plant, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said Monday.

Suga said he has instructed industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi to pursue all possible measures to deal with the leaks, including the money.

Motegi, who visited the plant Monday for an inspection, said Tepco's lax maintenance was largely to blame for the leaking storage tanks surrounding the poorly protected 40-year-old plant hit by the earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

He said the government would be taking charge and stepping up patrols of the tanks to prevent more problems.

Suga said the big problem is that Tepco has failed to properly manage tanks for storing contaminated water, unlike the structural factors behind the contamination of groundwater at the plant.

The building crisis involving leaks of radioactive water from the crippled plant will not hamper Japan's bid to host the 2020 Summer Olympics, Suga also said at the same press conference.

He acknowledged that Japanese diplomats have been briefing other countries on the escalating crisis at the plant, but added, "I believe this will not influence" the Olympics bid.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is scheduled to join a general meeting of the International Olympic Committee on Sept. 7 in Buenos Aires and make a final presentation for Tokyo's bid to host the games, which Madrid and Istanbul are also seeking to host.

91% of Japanese want Gov't intervention - Mainichi poll

August 26, 2013

91 percent of Japanese want gov't to step in at Fukushima nuke plant: Mainichi poll

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130826p2a00m0na004000c.html>

Some 91 percent of Japanese believe that the national government should play a larger role in dealing with the contaminated water leaks at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, a Mainichi poll has found.

The government has already announced plans to commit funds to dealing with the massive leaks, in which hundreds of metric tons of radioactive substance-contaminated water are thought to have leaked into the ground and seeped into the ocean. The Aug. 24-25 nationwide poll shows, however, that many people across Japan do not trust plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) to competently carry out leak countermeasures and other cleanup operations on its own.

Public doubts have emerged after repeated signs of TEPCO mismanagement at the Fukushima plant, including using recycled tanks to hold toxic water. At least one of those tanks is thought to have leaked some 300 tons of contaminated water.

On other major issues, 68 percent of respondents told the Mainichi that they thought Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's decision to forgo a visit to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine on Aug. 15 -- the 68th anniversary of the end of World War II -- was appropriate. Just 25 percent of respondents disagreed with Abe's decision. Even among respondents who said they actively support the Abe Cabinet, 73 percent said

they believed Abe was right not to visit the shrine where Class A war criminals are enshrined along with Japan's war dead -- virtually identical to the 74 percent of respondents who said they did not support the Cabinet.

Meanwhile, on Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso's July comments referencing Nazi Germany in connection with Japan's current constitutional reform debate, 54 percent of respondents said the gaffe had "worsened" Japan's image in the world, while 1 percent said it had actually bettered Japan's image.

When asked what Japan's opposition parties should focus on with the governing Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito now in firm control of both houses of the Diet, 42 percent of respondents said they should "concentrate on rebuilding," while 25 percent said they should "get themselves in order to create a powerful opposition force." In fact, some opposition parties are now attempting to reorganize to better oppose the LDP. The poll numbers suggest, however, that most voters would rather see them steady their own footing before going after the governing parties.

Among respondents backing the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) -- which lost a staggering number of seats in both the last House of Representatives and House of Councillors elections -- about half said the party should focus on rebuilding, as against some 30 percent who wanted the DPJ to join hands with other opposition parties to go on the political offensive.

DPJ wants Diet to debate leakage

Diet debates on Fukushima tank leak asked

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130826_40.html

Japan's main opposition Democratic Party wants the Diet to debate the leakage of radioactive water from a storage tank at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Senior DPJ officials met on Monday to discuss the crisis in which contaminated water may have leaked into the ocean.

Some expressed concern that the government's response has been too slow despite the seriousness of the problem.

Others said the government must investigate the leaks immediately and take necessary measures.

The lawmakers decided to call on other opposition parties to jointly demand the government take up the matter in the Diet, even though the Diet is in a closed session.

They will also dispatch their own inspection team led by former foreign minister Koichiro Gamba. He heads the DPJ's task force on the nuclear crisis.

Party President Banri Kaieda told reporters that the government has failed to acknowledge the seriousness of the problem.

He urged the government to actively work to maintain its credibility in the international community.

So money is no problem

Industry minister eyes reserve fund use for plant

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130827_33.html

Japan's industry minister has pledged to work quickly on allocating public funds to prevent more radioactive water from leaking into the sea.

Toshimitsu Motegi said officials will study the possibility of using this year's reserve funds to deal with the crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Motegi made the comments on Tuesday, the day after visiting the plant. Proposed measures include building an underground frozen soil wall to stop contaminated groundwater from leaking into the ocean.

Motegi called the issue urgent and said the government wants to tackle it quickly. He said officials will discuss the scale and other details of the budget with fiscal authorities so that the measures will not be delayed.

Motegi said the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, should do what it can to try to stop further leakage. But he said the government is taking full charge to move things forward in handling the leaks.

The blind leading the blind?

August 27, 2013

Abe offers Kuwait support in nuclear crisis

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130827_15.html

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe says Japan will help Kuwait respond to a nuclear disaster in its neighboring countries.

Abe met Kuwaiti Prime Minister Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on Monday, on the second leg of his 4-nation Middle East and African tour.

Abe first thanked Kuwait for donating 5 million barrels of oil following Japan's 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

He said he hoped both countries will deepen ties to build a comprehensive partnership, not only in the energy sector but also in politics and security.

Abe is being accompanied by a delegation of Japanese business leaders. Jaber said the delegation represents Japan's eagerness to contribute to Kuwait's development.

The two agreed to strengthen bilateral ties to ensure a stable supply of oil to Japan, which has been hit by higher fuel costs caused by a weaker yen.

They also agreed that senior officials in charge of defense and foreign policies will hold security talks.

Abe pledged Japan's commitment to helping Kuwait build sewage, subways and other basic infrastructure.

Abe also offered support to Kuwait in the event of a nuclear disaster in a neighboring country, such as Iran. He said Japan would help with decontamination, based on its experience with the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The 2 ministers shared grave concern about the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria, and expressed hope that a UN inspection team will determine what happened in the ongoing civil war.

Stop TEPCO's "whack-a-mole" game & let Gov't step in

August 27, 2013

Fukushima water leaks overwhelming utility

'Whack-a-mole' Tepco can't cut it, so state steps in

Bloomberg

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/27/national/tepcos-whack-a-mole-prompts-government-take-over-in-fukushima/#.Uhyftn9Sb9k>

The government will lead “emergency measures” to combat the radioactive water leaks at the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, wresting control of the disaster recovery from the besieged Tokyo Electric Power Co.

“We’ve allowed Tepco to deal with the contaminated water situation on its own and they’ve essentially turned it into a game of ‘whack-a-mole,’ ” Industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi told reporters Monday night in Fukushima. “From now on, the government will move to the forefront.”

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which is led by Motegi, “is working to draw up, sometime in September, both emergency measures and more fundamental steps to eliminate the roots of the contaminated water problem, as well as measures to be carried out going forward,” the prime minister’s office said in a response to written questions.

More than two years after the March 2011 nuclear disaster started, Tepco’s recovery effort has taken a turn for the worse.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority last week questioned the utility’s ability to deal with the crisis, echoing comments earlier in the month by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Motegi’s visit to the plant comes a week after a storage tank leaked 300 tons of highly radioactive water, which the NRA labeled a “serious incident” in its worst assessment of the problems at Fukushima since the earthquake and tsunami of 2011 caused three reactor meltdowns.

It’s now up to the government to manage the radioactive water building up in tanks at the plant at a rate of 400 tons a day, and leaking from underground tunnels into the ocean, Motegi said.

He told Tepco to monitor its storage tanks more frequently and replace the type that leaked.

“Mr. Motegi said that this leak was caused by human error,” Tepco President Naomi Hirose said in a separate news conference Monday night in Fukushima. “We are very grateful that we are getting government support.”

In its response to questions, the prime minister’s office said METI will pump more “liquid glass” or sodium silicate into the ground as one measure to block radioactive groundwater from spreading and reaching the sea.

In addition to the leaky tank, Tepco has admitted that radioactive groundwater is flowing into the Pacific. The government estimates the flow at 300 tons a day.

Other steps listed under the government's emergency measures include using a subterranean bypass to stop groundwater from reaching the reactor building basements, according to the prime minister's office.

Measures under consideration for the next one to two years include fencing off the reactor building basements with what would be the world's longest underground "ice walls."

These comprise coolant pipes, sunk as deep as 40 meters underground, to turn soil into permafrost. One wall would prevent water flowing from nearby mountains from coming into contact with radioactive coolant water leaking into the basements of the buildings housing the three melted reactors, the other would block radioactive water from reaching the ocean. The government is still working out how much this would cost, according to the prime minister's office.

Tepco initially floated the sunken wall system.

Motegi also gave Tepco until mid-September to restart the advanced liquid processing system to filter radioactive isotopes out of the coolant water. ALPS was taken offline Aug. 8 due to corrosion. The loss of ALPS, one of two systems for filtering water used to cool the reactors, adds to the contamination levels of water in the plant's storage tanks. ALPS is designed to strip out radiation such as strontium, which has been linked to bone cancer.

The tank that leaked had levels of beta radiation of 80 million becquerels per liter, including strontium, Tepco said Aug. 20. That's 8 million times the limit for drinking water under health ministry guidelines.

There are about 350 tanks of similar design to the one that leaked. The NRA has called the danger of other tanks leaking the biggest concern at the site.

Leak likely unnoticed for at least a month

August 28, 2013

Fukushima water leak likely went undetected for more than a month

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201308280059>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The leakage of about 300 tons of highly radioactive water from a surface tank at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant **may have gone unnoticed for more than a month before it was discovered on Aug. 19**, according to **a spike in workers' beta-ray exposure levels**.

A representative of Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant operator, told a meeting of a working subcommittee of the Nuclear Regulation Authority on Aug. 27 that the leak had likely already begun by July. He said that inference is based on a study of beta-ray doses in workers who each spent about 2.5 hours a day at a radio relay station, some 20 meters from the storage tank where the leak occurred.

He said the worker dosage readings began to rise some time around mid-July, adding that **TEPCO had yet to investigate the data taken before July**.

TEPCO officials said they believe the leak initially involved only tiny amounts of contaminated water but gradually gained strength. They said rainfall of up to 30 millimeters was recorded on some days in mid-July and later, and **the rainwater likely spread the radioactive water and helped it seep into the ground**.

The NRA on Aug. 27 called on TEPCO not only to investigate the cause of the leak, but also dig wells in an area surrounding the leak site to gauge the spread of radioactive substances. TEPCO has admitted that the leaking water may have reached the ocean.

The leaking tank, which utilizes steel sheets connected by bolts, entered service in October 2011. It used to hold highly radioactive water, one liter of which contained 136,000 becquerels of radioactive cesium in addition to 200 million becquerels of beta-ray source materials, which include radioactive strontium. Of the 1,000 surface tanks in use at the Fukushima plant, about 350 are of a similar design.

Government will take the initiative

August 29, 2013

Abe: Government will take charge of Fukushima radioactive water leak

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201308290044>

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said his government will take the initiative in dealing with the leak of radioactive water from a storage tank at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"The government will work as one to do its utmost," Abe said at an Aug. 28 news conference in Qatar, a stop on his tour of Middle East nations. "The government will deal with the situation responsibly, and will keep both domestic and foreign audiences well informed."

Abe also emphasized that the Fukushima nuclear disaster should not be left for Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant operator, to handle alone, but that the government should also engage in earnest efforts to tackle the situation, including how to deal with the growing stockpile of radioactive water.

Meantime, industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi said Aug. 28 that he will consider using taxpayer money to expand the Alps, a device designed to remove radioactive substances from contaminated water at the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

"The central government will take it upon itself to install more channels if there is a need to do so," Motegi told Yuhei Sato, the governor of Fukushima Prefecture.

The Alps device, which currently has three channels, has yet to finish trial runs prior to becoming fully operational.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority said Aug. 28 that it has formally raised the severity evaluation of the leak of 300 tons of highly radioactive water from a surface tank to Level 3 (serious incident) on the eight-level International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale (INES). The leak was discovered Aug. 19.

The crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant caused by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, which involved triple reactor meltdowns and hydrogen explosions, was evaluated as a "major accident," the highest on the INES scale at Level 7.

Fukushima Pref asks for Gov't help

August 28, 2013

Fukushima governor urges govt. to address leakage

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130828_44.html

The governor of Fukushima Prefecture has asked the central government to take the lead in dealing with the seemingly endless problems of water leakage at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Highly radioactive groundwater has been found to be seeping out to sea from the plant. This month, more than 300 tons of contaminated wastewater was revealed to have leaked from a storage tank. Some of it may have reached the ocean.

Governor Yuhei Sato visited the Nuclear Regulation Authority in Tokyo on Wednesday.

Sato told the authority's chairman Shunichi Tanaka that the situation can no longer be handled solely by the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company.

He asked the government to regard the problem as a national emergency and step up monitoring of the plant and guidance of the firm.

Tanaka promised quick action in dealing with the leaks.

Nuclear regulators had ordered TEPCO to swiftly determine the cause of the tank leak and take preventive measures for about 300 other tanks that hold highly radioactive wastewater.

Sato also visited Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and handed him a letter outlining similar requests.

Motegi said the government hopes to draw up by early next month measures for dealing with groundwater contamination.

Gov't will take the initiative (2)

August 29, 2013

Abe: government will resolve tainted water crisis

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130829_09.html

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe says he intends to spearhead efforts to contain leakage of highly radioactive water at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Abe met with reporters in Qatar, the last leg of his 4-nation tour in the Middle East and Africa, on Wednesday.

He acknowledged the need for the state to deal with the crisis at the plant, hit by a nuclear disaster in March 2011. He said it cannot leave it up to its operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company.

Abe disclosed that he had instructed the industry minister and the head of the state's Nuclear Regulation Authority to look into why massive amounts of contaminated water had leaked from a storage tank earlier this month.

Some of the water may have seeped into the Pacific Ocean.

Abe also said the industry minister has begun drawing up responses to deal with the contaminated water.

The prime minister pledged to be open about its plans both domestically and abroad.

In regards to his overseas tour, Abe said the lives of Japanese nationals would not be the same if it were not for the Middle East. He said Japan must contribute to the advancement of Middle East nations, and not only through energy alone.

Abe said he came to an agreement with the leaders of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Djibouti for closer cooperation in politics, security and the economy.

Aug. 28, 2013 - Updated 23:06 UTC

Abe says gov't to take charge of toxic water leak at Fukushima plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130829p2g00m0dm002000c.html>

DOHA (Kyodo) -- Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said Wednesday his government will take charge of efforts to contain the nuclear disaster in northeastern Japan following a recent toxic water leak at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

"There is a need for the state to address the issue with a sense of urgency and not just leave it all up to Tokyo Electric Power Co.," Abe said at a press conference.

Abe's remarks came after the plant's operator, known as TEPCO, recently said the leak of highly radioactive water from a huge steel storage tank was estimated at 300 tons, some of which could have flowed into the adjacent Pacific Ocean. It was the worst leak from the containers at the complex.

Abe, who is in Qatar on the last leg of his trip to the Middle East and Africa, said the government will thoroughly disseminate to people in Japan and abroad information about efforts to contain the disaster at the Fukushima plant.

Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority decided the same day to raise its assessment of the severity of the leak to level 3, which is defined as a "serious incident," on an eight-point international scale.

The Fukushima nuclear accident, triggered by the huge earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, was rated at the maximum level 7, on a par with the 1986 Chernobyl disaster.

TEPCO's sloppiness can be counted on

August 29, 2013

TEPCO's sloppy oversight of radioactive water tanks continued even after advice

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130829p2a00m0na006000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) continued conducting sloppy oversight of tanks containing highly radioactive water at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant even after advice was offered by the Nuclear Regulation Authority's secretariat from around a year ago, it has been learned.

Had TEPCO improved its oversight according to the secretariat's advice, it may have been able to reduce the severity of the massive leak of contaminated water at the plant.

According to the secretariat, TEPCO has been conducting twice daily patrols of around 930 tanks holding radioactive water, sending two of nine workers at a time to carry out the inspections. Each worker checks over 450 tanks over the course of two to three hours, and the secretariat is worried that these patrols are insufficient for promptly discovering if one of the tanks is leaking.

From July 2012 to June this year, secretariat officials on site made recommendations or issued instructions around 10 times to beef up patrols and to install more observation cameras and water gauges, among other measures.

TEPCO replied to the secretariat that it had made improvements, but it only upped its patrols from an original once a day to twice a day, without stationing more personnel, and installed more cameras, while still leaving blind spots.

There was also an instance in which a secretariat inspection found a crack in a barrier that was meant to stop contaminated water that had leaked from the tanks from escaping outside the plant.

The leak of radioactive water from the tanks is thought to have started in early July, but it took time to be noticed and as much as around 300 tons of contaminated water escaped.

This month, the Nuclear Regulation Authority also instructed TEPCO to make improvements at the plant. The utility has indicated it will increase its patrol staff by 50 people, boost the number of daily patrols to four and install water gauges in the tanks.

A TEPCO official declined to comment on the matter, saying they did not know enough about the secretariat's instructions.

Don't worry, says Gov't

August 29, 2013

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"The tanks were built in a rush and we couldn't handle all the work"

August 28, 2013

TEPCO didn't take measurements of problem tank after ground sank

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130828p2a00m0na010000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) performed only one check to make sure new storage tanks that were built to hold highly radioactive water at its Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant were in the right position and weren't on a lean, it has been learned.

The finding comes after 300 tons of highly radioactive water leaked from one of the tanks in what the Nuclear Regulation Authority deemed to be on par with a Level 3 (serious incident) on the International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale.

It is believed that the leak occurred as a result of the ground beneath the tank sinking, warping its steel body, but TEPCO didn't take any new measurements after this -- a fact highlighting the sloppy management of contaminated water at the plant.

In July 2011, TEPCO noticed that the concrete base for new tanks that were being tested had sunk about 20 centimeters into the ground. The utility disassembled the tanks and moved them to another location, but this month one tank was found to be leaking.

In a probe after the leak was detected, TEPCO learned that the leaking tank was built about one month before the ground was found to be sinking. However, detailed measurements including those to check whether the tank was leaning even slightly were conducted only once, before it was put into use. It also

emerged that the reason TEPCO realized the ground was sinking was because there was a visible crack in the concrete base.

There are currently about 1,000 tanks on the premises of the crippled nuclear plant, including 350 of the same type as the one which leaked, but measurements were taken only once for each tank.

TEPCO is aware that the ground at the nuclear plant sank as a result of the March 2011 earthquake. When asked why the company was not more thorough when it came to checks, a representative explained, "**The tanks were built in a rush and we couldn't handle all the work.**" In light of the possibility of similar problems occurring with other tanks, TEPCO set up a headquarters handling measures on contaminated water and storage tanks on Aug. 26, and will consider how to approach the situation.

Yuzo Onishi, a member of the government committee managing contaminated water who is versed in civil engineering work, said that when handling highly contaminated water, it is advisable to take measurements regularly to reduce risks.

At a Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) working group meeting on Aug. 27, TEPCO expressed the view that the radioactively contaminated water began leaking from the tank in early July, as radiation dosages of workers near the tanks started rising around July 9. Furthermore, based on the rate at which water was leaking, it had been previously calculated that the water started leaking about one month before the leak was detected on Aug. 19.

The NRA has cited the possibility of the leaking section being located at the bottom of the tank, and had instructed TEPCO to conduct a focused inspection. It says that if TEPCO does not adopt an appropriate response, it will consider issuing an order to TEPCO to take action.

But we'll need money

Industry ministry to demand funds to tackle radioactive water leaks

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130828p2a00m0na011000c.html>

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry is set to demand a non-specific budget appropriation amount next fiscal year for measures to prevent leaks of radioactive water at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, ministry sources said.

The ministry will stop short of specifying the amount as the cost to implement measures to prevent contaminated water from accumulating on the grounds of the nuclear plant is not yet known.

In a related development, ministry officials had said on Aug. 26 that it will disburse money from the 350 billion yen reserve fund for fiscal 2013 to deal with the radioactive water.

With these decisions, the national government has demonstrated to the public that it will work hard to respond to the problem. Moreover, the ministry is poised to demand 12.5 billion yen from the fiscal 2014 state budget to encourage power companies to decommission aging nuclear reactors, up 44 percent from the current fiscal year.

The ministry presented the latest proposal at a meeting of the economy, trade and industry division of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) on Aug. 27.

To prevent contaminated water on the Fukushima plant property from increasing further, the ministry is mainly considering freezing soil around the reactor buildings to block underground water from flowing into their basements. However, the durability of such a method remains unknown as there is no precedent for using it over an extended period.

Citing the tremendous amount of public funds required, some LDP legislators underscore the need to examine the effectiveness of the technique before committing to it.

The central government had previously insisted that plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), primarily responsible for the nuclear disaster, foot the entire cost of decommissioning crippled reactors and dealing with radioactive water. Moreover, funds allocated to decommissioning the Fukushima reactors are regarded as "research and development funds" for developing a robot capable of extracting melted fuel from the reactors.

Behind such prudence is the fact that the government is wary that the unlimited use of a massive amount of taxpayers' money to bring the nuclear crisis under control could be seen by a critical public as a government bailout for TEPCO.

However, as Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Toshimitsu Motegi says, the government "cannot just leave the crisis response entirely to TEPCO," as the international community views the leak of contaminated water as the most serious crisis at the plant since the meltdowns triggered by the March 2011 quake and tsunami.

However, neither the ministry nor TEPCO have worked out the details of their response to accumulating radioactive water. The ministry intends to only demand funds be allocated for dealing with contaminated water without specifying the amount because TEPCO is still calculating how much it will cost to freeze soil around reactor buildings and operate the system.

Gov't takeover can't be put off any longer

Government must take over Fukushima nuclear cleanup

by Andrew Dewit and Christopher Hobson
Special To The Japan Times

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/08/29/commentary/government-must-take-over-fukushima-nuclear-cleanup/#.UiBF39Sb9k>

Recent weeks have seen increasingly concerned calls, from within and without Japan, for the Japanese government to take a direct role in managing the multifaceted crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The most recent opinion poll shows 91 percent of the Japanese public wants the government to intervene.

The Economist calls Fukushima a “nightmare,” and the editors of Bloomberg deem it “ground zero” for the Abe government. Tepco’s handling of the stricken plant continues to be a litany of negligence and error, raising grave doubts over whether the company is up to the incredibly difficult and important task of decommissioning the plant. While it may be politically inconvenient for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to accept, it is time to intervene and take over the plant before it is too late.

Understandably, most commentary on the Fukushima plant focuses on the multiple leaks of water laced with high- and low-level radiation. An estimated 300 tons of highly toxic water, including Strontium-90, has leaked from a hastily constructed tank. This became a level-3 crisis on Aug. 21, “serious” on the United Nation’s 7-point International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale, and represents the most urgent reported problem at the plant since the initial meltdowns.

The leaks closely follow Tepco’s admission that contaminated water has been flowing into the ocean since the accident took place in on March 11, 2011. Crises have been arising with such frequency that NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka has described the plant as being like a “haunted house” in which “mishaps keep happening one after the other.”

Yet Japan has been very lucky that nothing worse has occurred at the plant. But luck eventually runs out. The longer Tepco stays in charge of the decommissioning process, the worse the odds become. Without downplaying the seriousness of leaks and the other setbacks at the plant, it is important to recognize that things could very quickly get much worse.

In November, Tepco plans to begin the delicate operation of removing spent fuel from Reactor No. 4. There are 1,300 used fuel rod assemblies in a pool above the reactor. They weigh a total of 400 tons, and contain radiation equivalent to 14,000 times the amount released by the Hiroshima atomic bomb. The spent-fuel pool, standing 18 meters above ground, was damaged by the earthquake and tsunami and is in a deteriorating condition. It remains vulnerable to any further shocks, and is also at risk from ground liquefaction. Removing its spent fuel, which contains deadly plutonium, is an urgent task.

Even under ordinary circumstances spent-fuel removal is a difficult task, normally requiring the aid of computers. But due to the damage, removal of spent fuel from Reactor No. 4 and the five other reactors will have to be done manually. This work will be undertaken in arduous conditions, increasing the risk of yet another mishap.

And if something does go wrong, the consequences could be far more severe than any nuclear accident the world has ever seen. If a fuel rod is dropped, breaks or becomes entangled while being removed, possible worst case scenarios include a big explosion, a meltdown in the pool, or a large fire. Any of these situations could lead to massive releases of deadly radionuclides into the atmosphere, putting much of Japan — including Tokyo and Yokohama — and even neighboring countries at serious risk.

When the stakes are this high, who do you want to bet on? Tepco's abysmal track record is characterized by repeated blunders. Even now there are few signs that Tepco fully understands the magnitude of the situation they — and we — collectively face. It is therefore vital, literally a matter of national security, that Fukushima No. 1's decommissioning be taken over by the government with the assistance of an international task force of experts.

Regarding the contaminated water problem, industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi announced on Monday that, "from now on, the government will move to the forefront." This is a start, but not enough. Tepco must be relieved of control of the whole decommissioning process.

One of the key findings of the independent commissions that studied the accident at Fukushima No. 1 was that it was a "manmade disaster" because the risks and warning signs were repeatedly down-played or ignored. These kinds of warnings have been streaming from the plant since the crisis began. How many more alarm bells does Abe need before he recognizes the gravity of the problem and intervenes?

It is understandable why Abe and his backers do not want to directly take on this toxic job. They risk being tarred with responsibility for further mishaps. But this crisis is too big for Tepco, and the public wants decisive intervention. So the buck stops at the prime minister's desk.

Moreover, many of Abe's key aims as leader — including restoring Japan's economy and national pride — are dependent on successfully managing the precarious situation at Fukushima No. 1. Even his pro-nuclear agenda is reliant upon what happens there: With each new problem or revelation, public skepticism towards nuclear power deepens. Ultimately this is what Abe's prime ministership will be judged on, whether he likes it or not. Now is the time for action, before it is too late.

Andrew DeWit is a professor in the School of Policy Studies, Rikkyo University. Dr. Christopher Hobson is a research fellow at the Institute for Sustainability and Peace, United Nations University, Tokyo.

TEPCO busy launching joint venture with Toshiba

BIZ BRIEF: Toshiba, TEPCO to form global power transmission business venture

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/economy/biz_briefs/AJ201308290062

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Toshiba Corp. and Tokyo Electric Power Co. announced Aug. 29 that they have agreed to establish a joint venture that will undertake the engineering support, operation and service business of power transmission and distribution systems in overseas markets.

The new company, T.T. Network Infrastructure Japan Corp., will be established in Tokyo on Sept. 2 and be capitalized at 100 million yen (\$1 million). Toshiba will hold a 85.1-percent stake, while TEPCO will have the remaining 14.9 percent.

T.T. Network Infrastructure Japan will integrate Toshiba's technologies in power transformation and power grid solutions with TEPCO's know-how in grid planning, system design, operation and maintenance.

The company will provide engineering support for overseas transmission and distribution infrastructure projects, initially those promoted by Toshiba. The company will also develop a new, community-based business model, **offering solutions proposals from consulting and system supply through to construction, operation and maintenance.**

Gov't under fire for tepid response

August 30, 2013

Government under fire for slow response to Fukushima leak

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201308300066>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been forced to vow to take all-out efforts to contain the Fukushima nuclear crisis as his administration is roundly criticized for its tepid response to the recent leak of 300 tons of highly radioactive water.

“It should not be left entirely in the hands of Tokyo Electric Power Co. to deal with the accident,” Abe said in Qatar on Aug. 28, citing the plant’s operator. “The government should face up to the situation with a sense of urgency, including the problem of radioactive water.”

The government has come under fire from overseas media organizations, ruling party politicians and fishermen worried about radioactive water contaminating the ocean.

In a meeting at the ruling Liberal Democratic Party headquarters on Aug. 29, party lawmaker Yasuhisa Shiozaki lashed out at the Abe administration’s “lack of a sense of crisis,” singling out Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga.

“The issue of radioactive water is increasingly seen as an international problem, and lawsuits may be filed overseas,” said Shiozaki, acting chairman of the LDP Policy Research Council and a former chief Cabinet secretary.

Shiozaki’s anger can be seen as the first explicit criticism of the government from the ruling party since the LDP returned to power in December.

Later in the day, Suga received a visit from Hiroshi Kishi, head of the National Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations, and Tetsu Nozaki, head of the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations, at the prime minister’s office.

“We must say that TEPCO’s system of handling radioactive water has broken down,” Kishi said. “We want the government to take the initiative in dealing with the situation immediately.”

South Koreans are also worried about the contamination of seawater.

In a statement released on Aug. 26, an environmental protection group based in Seoul called for an outright ban on seafood imports from Japan.

The Chosun Ilbo newspaper said the same day, "The South Korean government should take preventive actions based on a worst-case scenario, without relying only on information from the Japanese government and TEPCO."

Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, said Aug. 29 Japan should provide information to foreign countries to dispel growing concerns over the leak.

In Qatar, Abe, in the midst of a four-nation swing through the Middle East and Africa, also said, "The government will deal with the situation responsibly, and will keep both domestic and overseas audiences well informed."

When TEPCO discovered that 300 tons of radioactive water escaped a surface tank in mid-August, many administration officials did not take the leakage seriously.

"It is not a big issue," a senior government official said at the time. "All they should do is to patrol the area carefully and stop the spill."

Successive administrations following the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant that stemmed from the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami argued that TEPCO is responsible for bringing the crisis under control. They were reluctant to spend taxpayers' money, fearing criticism that the government was bailing out the embattled utility.

The Abe administration has been forced to break with the traditional approach because TEPCO has failed to hold the ever-increasing radioactive water in check.

However, government officials are still lagging behind the deteriorating situation at the Fukushima plant.

An estimated 400 tons of groundwater flow into the reactor and turbine buildings daily and mix with radioactive water generated in reactor cooling operations.

TEPCO and the government plan to freeze the soil and create a wall to keep some of the groundwater from flowing into the buildings, possibly from the first half of fiscal 2015.

In early August, the industry ministry decided to include part of the costs in the fiscal 2014 budget following a leak of radioactive water into the ocean. The fiscal year starts in April.

But the ministry had to decide to tap into reserve funds under the fiscal 2013 budget and move up the schedule after the disclosure of radioactive water leaking from the storage tank.

"We know complaining will not help, but we feel as if we are playing whack-a-mole because (new problems crop up one after another as) the abnormal situation continues," a government source said.

Just "a ploy to avoid negative publicity" before the Olympics bid?

August 31, 2013

Fishermen ponder whether Olympic bid, not safety is priority for Diet

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201308310042>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A Diet committee has decided to push back a session on the problem of water contaminated with radiation from the Fukushima nuclear accident, ostensibly to wait to see what measures the Abe administration comes up with first.

But fishermen and others directly affected by the hundreds of tons of contaminated water flowing into the sea are skeptical, and believe the stalling tactic is simply **a ploy to avoid negative publicity ahead of a Sept. 7 vote by the International Olympic Committee** to decide the host city for the 2020 Summer Games, of which Tokyo is a leading candidate.

"If they think it is all right to delay dealing with the contaminated water, that shows an extremely low sense of what the problem is," said Masakazu Yabuki, head of the Iwaki city fisheries cooperative in Fukushima Prefecture. "I have gone beyond angry to being completely astounded."

Although the Diet is currently not in session, there are provisions that allow for the holding of committee sessions on urgent matters. For the fishermen and others in Fukushima, it is a highly urgent matter and they want swift action to deal with the problem.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority has classified the water leak as a "serious incident," a Level 3 event on the eight-level International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale (INES), and the leakage of radioactive materials into the Pacific Ocean has now garnered international attention.

But directors of the Lower House Economy, Trade and Industry Committee met on Aug. 30 and decided to hold off on a session on the problem until mid-September or later. Among the reasons given for that decision was a desire to first look at what the central government was putting together in terms of measures to deal with the leaking contaminated water.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry said that it would present such measures next week.

Some committee members also proposed visiting the Fukushima site to check on the leakage before holding a committee session.

The Abe administration plans to announce specific measures to deal with the leaking problem ahead of the IOC vote in order to placate international concerns about radiation in Tokyo.

At the same time, the decision by the Diet committee to wait to see what the government plans to do will likely raise criticism that lawmakers were more concerned about bringing the Olympics to Tokyo than dealing with a problem that has already hurt the fishing industry in Fukushima Prefecture.

The Iwaki fisheries cooperative postponed its initial plan to begin test fishing in September. It has submitted a request to the central government asking that it deal with the leaking water as quickly as possible.

IAEA demands "appropriate communication" plan from Japan

August 28, 2013

IAEA Document Reveals Concerns Over Fukushima Communications

<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2013/08/28/iaea-document-reveals-concerns-over-fukushima-communications>

Security & Safety

28 Aug (NucNet): The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has told Japan to consider producing an “appropriate communications” plan to explain the safety significance of incidents at the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear plant and to avoid sending “possibly confusing” messages to the media and the public.

In a document responding to questions from Japan’s permanent mission to the Vienna-based agency, the IAEA says that with “clear content and appropriate frequency of messages” such a plan would be “highly effective” and would avoid sending confusing messages on a possibly long series of low-level International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale (INES) incidents throughout the recovery operation at the plant.

The document, posted online by Japan’s Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA), was a response to questions from Japan about whether or not it should apply an INES rating in the case of a leak earlier this month of contaminated water from a tank.

The leak was first reported on 19 August 2013 when water was discovered inside and outside a dike surrounding the water tank. On 21 August the NRA revised its initial rating of the leak from a Level 1 to a provisional Level 3 on INES.

The IAEA document notes that the leak was the latest in a number of similar events that were not given an INES rating.

It says the application of an INES rating is a national responsibility, but whatever communications strategy is adopted, it is important that the information needed to properly determine an INES rating is collated and that “a defensible” rating is determined.

“Frequent changes of rating will not help to communicate the actual situation in a clear manner,” the document says.

The document is online: www.nsr.go.jp/activity/bousai/trouble/data/20130828-1.pdf

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- Japan NRA Revises Classification Of Water Tank Leak To INES Level 3 (News in Brief No.206, 21 August 2013)

"All the tanks are makeshift"

September 2, 2013

No. 1 worker knew spill risk in '11

Tanks said built in haste, bound to leak

Kyodo, AFP-Jiji

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/02/national/leaks-feared-when-fukushima-no-1-water-tanks-constructed/#.UiR2aH9Sb9k>

FUKUSHIMA – A subcontractor who was involved in building water storage tanks at the damaged Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant said late last month that concerns about leaks emerged after workers were told to build the vessels as quickly as possible.

As feared, one of the tanks at the plant leaked 300 tons of highly radioactive water last month, Tokyo Electric Power Co. recently disclosed.

“We were required to build the tanks in quick succession,” the man said, recalling his experience building a group of tanks in the H4 area of the plant two years ago. **“We were told to put priority on making the tanks, rather than quality control.** There were fears that toxic water may leak.”

With some 400 tons of the radioactive coolant accumulating at the plant after the three reactor core meltdowns, workers rushed to slap together a 1,000-ton tank every three days, he said. The water, highly radioactive, was stored after being used to cool the melted fuel in the three reactors.

The tanks were flange-type units, which are less watertight than those with welded seams because they have many bolted parts that spring leaks.

The man said the workers were ordered by Tepco and its subcontractor to meet a deadline for the tanks because the amount of coolant water was rising and needed to be stored.

He said management of the tanks' construction was poor, with necessary materials sometimes not delivered on time and rusty bolts found among the materials.

The tank that was confirmed to have leaked was originally constructed in the H1 area of the plant in June 2011, around three months after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami helped trigger the three

meltdowns. After terrain instability was detected in H1, the tank was dismantled and later reassembled in H4, he said.

He said he was involved in sealing the bolted parts and in waterproofing the insides of the tanks to prevent leaks. Currently, the work of waterproofing the insides is done by a company specialized in the field.

He also said the workers checked for cracks and leaks by injecting water.

“We never cut any corners in constructing the tanks and we used the latest technology,” he said. That said, the man noted the average life span of the water tanks is only five years.

“All of the tanks are makeshift. So more toxic water may leak as they deteriorate,” he said.

There are around 350 such water tanks at the plant.

Speaking on Tepco’s current efforts to deal with the huge volume of radioactive water accumulating daily, the man said, “Everyone is working so hard, but I don’t know whether this method is the right answer.”

On Monday, Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, said Tepco cannot store huge amounts of coolant water at the plant indefinitely.

“I’m afraid that it is unavoidable to dump or release the water into the sea” after it is purified to levels recognized as safe under international standards, Tanaka told a news conference.

Other officials said the government will present a set of emergency measures Tuesday to deal with the radioactive water problem. It’s not clear if the steps are also meant to curb the roughly 300 tons of highly radioactive groundwater that is believed flowing toward the Pacific Ocean daily, after running under the plant and possibly mixing with water in the basements of the stricken reactor buildings.

The measures to address the buildup of contaminated water, possibly including steps financed by the state budget, will be presented at a ministerial meeting headed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Fukushima plant worker says leaks were feared when water tanks constructed

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130902p2g00m0dm002000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA (Kyodo) -- The water storage tanks at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant were built hastily and it was feared at the time that toxic water could leak from them, a male utility worker involved in their construction told Kyodo News recently.

As feared, one of the tanks was found last month to have leaked 300 tons of highly radioactive water, according to Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the plant.

"We were required to build the tanks in succession," the male worker said, recalling his experience of constructing the group of tanks in the "H4" area two years ago. "We gave priority to making the tanks, rather than quality control. There were fears that toxic water may leak."

With contaminated water accumulating at the plant that suffered a triple meltdown, workers constructed one 1,000-ton tank every three days, he said.

The procurement of materials was not managed well, with necessary materials sometimes not delivered on time.

The tank confirmed to have leaked was built in June 2011, around three months after the plant was damaged by a huge earthquake and tsunami, but it was dismantled after sinking into the ground and later reassembled in the H4 area, he said.

He said the workers made utmost efforts to prevent leakage by waterproofing the inner sides of the tanks and checking for cracks and leaks by injecting water.

"We never cut corners in constructing the tanks and we used the latest technology," he said.

Given that the life span of the tanks is only around 5 years, he said, "All of the tanks are makeshift. More toxic water may leak as they deteriorate."

There are around 350 such tanks at the plant.

Mycle Schneider - the scale of Fukushima disaster

August 30, 2013

<http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2013/08/30/why-fukushima-is-worse-than-you-think/>

Why Fukushima is worse than you think

By **Mycle Schneider**, Special to CNN

Editor's note: Mycle Schneider is an independent international consultant on energy and nuclear policy based in Paris. He is the coordinator and lead author of the World Nuclear Industry Status Report. The views expressed are his own.

“Careless” was how Toyoshi Fuketa, commissioner of the Japanese Nuclear Regulation Authority, reportedly described the inspection quality of hundreds of water tanks at the crippled Fukushima plant following the recent discovery of a serious radioactive spill. China’s Foreign Ministry went further, saying it was “shocking” that radioactive water was still leaking into the Pacific Ocean two years after the Fukushima incident.

Both comments are to the point, and although many inside and outside Japan surely did not realize how bad the March 11, 2011 disaster was – and how bad it could get – it seems clear now that we have been misled about the scale of the problem confronting Japan. The country needs international help – and quickly.

While the amount of radioactivity released into the environment in March 2011 has been estimated as between 10 percent and 50 percent of the fallout from the Chernobyl accident, the 400,000 tons of contaminated water stored on the Fukushima site contain more than 2.5 times the amount of radioactive cesium dispersed during the 1986 catastrophe in Ukraine.

So, where has this huge amount of highly contaminated water – enough to fill 160 Olympic-size swimming pools – come from? In the aftermath of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, the reactor cores of units 1, 2 and 3 melted through the reactor vessels into the concrete. Nobody knows how far the molten fuel went through the containment – radiation levels in the reactor buildings are lethal, while robots got stuck in the rubble and some never came back out.

More from CNN: What Japanese leaders can learn

The molten fuel still needs to be cooled constantly and the operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), injects about 400 tons of water into the perforated reactor vessels *every day*. That water washes out radioactive elements and runs straight through into the basements that were flooded during the tsunami. By 2015, over 600,000 tons of highly radioactive liquid are expected to have accumulated in temporary tanks, some underground, many bolted rather than welded together, and none ever conceived to hold this kind of liquid over the long term. The dangerous fluid is pumped around in four kilometer long makeshift tubes, many of them made of vinyl rather than steel, and plagued with numerous leaks in the winter when the above ground lines get hit by frost.

TEPCO’s account of the discovery this month of the leak of 300 tons of highly radioactive water showed a frightening level of amateurism:

“We found water spread at the bottom level of tanks near the tank No.5... Therefore, we checked the water level of this tank, and... confirmed that the current water level is lower by approximately 3 meters than the normal level.”

TEPCO reportedly admitted that only 60 of 350 tanks in that area are equipped with volume gauges. “Inspection” is done visually by a worker with a radiation detector. Meanwhile, the soil around the leaking tank delivered a dose per hour equivalent to the legal limit for nuclear workers for five *years*. No remote radiation measuring devices, no remote handling.

The tank leak is just the latest in a long list of signs that things are going fundamentally wrong at the site of what could still turn out to be the most serious radiological event in history. And the situation could still get a lot worse. A massive spent fuel fire would likely dwarf the current dimensions of the catastrophe and could exceed the radioactivity releases of Chernobyl dozens of times. First, the pool walls could leak beyond the capacity to deliver cooling water or a reactor building could collapse following one of the hundreds of aftershocks. Then, the fuel cladding could ignite spontaneously releasing its entire radioactive inventory.

More from CNN: Japan ponders freezing ground

TEPCO’s inability to stabilize the site, and the dramatic failure of the Japanese government, now majority owner of TEPCO, should come as no surprise. Indeed, so far, the Nuclear Regulation Authority has seemed too busy trying to help restart the country’s stranded reactors to put adequate attention on stabilizing the Fukushima site.

The fact is that the Fukushima Daiichi site represents challenges of unprecedented complexity. Maintaining the cooling of three molten reactor cores and five spent fuel pools in a disaster zone is a job of titanic proportions. That is why two weeks after the crisis first erupted I suggested the creation of an International Task Force Fukushima (ITFF) that would pull together the world’s experts in key areas of concern: nuclear physics and engineering, core cooling, water management, spent fuel and radioactive waste storage, building integrity and radiation protection.

Two and a half years on, the need for such a taskforce has only grown.

An ITFF would need to be established for at least two years to be effective, and could have two co-chairpersons – one Japanese, one from abroad. A core group of about a dozen experts would work full-time on the project and could draw at will on the expertise of several dozen corresponding experts that are carefully selected by the core group. A significant share of the core group should be independent experts (i.e. with no link to corporate or state interests). In addition, the ITFF would work in an open expert network, free to draw on any expertise in any field that it judges pertinent. It could openly invite feedback to its recommendations and would do its utmost to assess comments and suggestions.

Of course, such a taskforce would not “supervise” or “control” – the responsibility for this would remain with the Japanese government and the regulator. But the ITFF could provide recommendations on short-, medium- and long-term strategies for site stabilization.

Will the call for such a taskforce gain any traction? I have presented the basic concept to safety authorities of several countries, acting and former ambassadors, ministers and the European Commission. But while some officials have pointed to some ongoing limited bilateral assistance, so far, the main stumbling block appears to be the “pattern of denial” in Japan, a problem that has affected not only TEPCO, but apparently the Japanese government and the safety authorities as well.

Thankfully, there have been some small signs in official declarations by TEPCO and the Japanese government in recent days that offer hope for a change in attitudes. And Japan’s image in the world – and the Japanese people’s trust in their institutions – would greatly profit from an explicit and concrete international project. The question is whether members of the international community can muster the will to put their own interests aside, and help Japan conquer the denial that is risking catastrophe.

47 billion yen to tackle water crisis

September 3, 2013

Japan to spend ¥47 billion to deal with water crisis at Fukushima No. 1

AFP-JJI, Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/03/national/japan-to-spend-47-billion-to-deal-with-water-crisis-at-fukushima-no-1/#.UiWsE39Sb9k>

The government will spend ¥47 billion in public funds to fight the radioactive water leaks at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, officials said Tuesday, as the state has vowed to take the lead in the cleanup.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe gathered members of his nuclear disaster response team to decide on the government response to stop radioactive water from flowing into the Pacific from the crippled plant, officials said. The toxic water is coming from not only leaking coolant water storage tankage, but on a daily basis, some 300 tons of toxic groundwater is also reaching the sea from under the complex.

The government plan will total ¥50 billion, including the costs to be shouldered by Tokyo Electric Power Co. The measures include an untested project to freeze the soil well below the water table around four reactor buildings, three of whose units suffered core meltdowns, to stop groundwater from entering and mixing with water being pumped into the leaking reactor cores to keep the melted fuel cool.

Water from nearby mountains flows under the plant and mixes with radioactive water that has already seeped into the ground, resulting in mildly radioactive water also reaching the sea.

Scientists want to circulate a special refrigerant through pipes in the soil to create a “frozen wall” that will stem the inflow of groundwater into the basements of the reactor buildings.

The government will also finance a project to upgrade nuclear decontamination systems at Fukushima. Of the planned spending, ¥21 billion is expected to be covered by emergency funds in the current fiscal year’s budget.

It was not immediately clear where the rest of the money would come from.

At a meeting of ruling party lawmakers Monday, Abe said: “The nation will stand at the forefront and carry out necessary measures without leaving the contamination water problems to Tepco.

“It is necessary to take radical measures, not a haphazard response,” he said.

Tepco has long struggled to deal with the huge amounts of water used to cool the three reactors that went into meltdown after the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority said Monday that ultimately some radioactive water would have to be released into the sea because it could not be stored in the temporary tanks at Fukushima permanently.

Neighboring countries and local fishermen have expressed concern at the mooted release from the plant, where vast amounts of radioactive water has already escaped into sea.

The cleanup at the plant has been hit by a series of mishaps that have cast doubt on the utility’s ability to contain the world’s worst atomic disaster since Chernobyl in 1986.

Gov't to spend 47 bil. yen to fight Fukushima toxic water

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130903p2g00m0dm055000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The government said Tuesday it will use about 47 billion yen to tackle a massive buildup of radioactive water at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, in the latest sign that the government is stepping in to address the issue that has heightened concerns in and outside Japan.

As part of a basic policy on the toxic water problem adopted the same day, the government pledged to finance measures involving technical difficulties such as a plan to freeze the soil around reactor buildings to stop groundwater from seeping into the buildings and getting mixed with contaminated water.

The government also said it will hold a meeting of ministers concerned and set up an office near the nuclear complex where government officials will stay. But the list of measures presented to prevent the situation from worsening was otherwise mostly what had been announced earlier.

There has been speculation the government wants to avoid any negative impact from the issue on Tokyo's bid to host the 2020 Summer Olympics. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is scheduled to make Japan's final presentation to the International Olympic Committee's general meeting in Buenos Aires on Saturday, after which the IOC will vote to choose the host city.

Plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. has tried to manage the accumulation of radioactive water at the plant since the nuclear crisis began more than two years ago. But it recently admitted that 300 tons of highly toxic water had leaked from a storage tank, some of which could have flowed into the adjacent Pacific Ocean.

Around 400 tons of groundwater seeps into the basement of reactor buildings every day and becomes contaminated as it mixes with highly toxic water that is used to cool the crippled reactors. Water is pumped out from the buildings and stored in tanks.

The plan to freeze a stretch up to 1.4 kilometers long of soil around the Nos. 1 to 4 reactor buildings is seen as a key measure to halt the further increase of radioactive water.

Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Toshimitsu Motegi said that about 32 billion yen in state funds will be used to build the ice wall, including 14 billion yen coming from reserve funds under the fiscal 2013 budget.

The government aims to put the wall in service by the end of March 2015 and a feasibility study is currently being carried out on the unprecedented plan, officials said.

About 15 billion yen, including 7 billion yen from reserve funds, will also be set aside for an experimental project to build a facility that can more efficiently reduce the radiation level of toxic water stored at the plant.

Govt. sets policy to tackle Fukushima leak

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130903_25.html

The Japanese government has decided to spend public funds of about 47 billion yen, or 470 million dollars, to deal with the massive buildup of radioactive water at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Industry Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and other members of the government's nuclear disaster taskforce approved the basic plan at a meeting on Tuesday.

They agreed the government should take the initiative in tackling technically challenging problems instead of leaving them for plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Company to deal with.

The money will be used to freeze soil to create an underground wall around the 4 damaged reactors.

The aim is to prevent groundwater from seeping through and becoming contaminated.

The government will also foot the bill for decontaminating radioactive water.

Of the funds, 210 million dollars will be financed with reserve funds from the fiscal 2013 budget.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga will head a new ministerial panel to address the radioactive water issue.

The government will also set up two liaison bodies so officials can coordinate with workers at the Daiichi plant and officials at TEPCO's head office.

Abe said the measures are intended to achieve a fundamental solution to the radioactive water problem instead of dealing with it in an ad hoc manner.

He said the government will work in a coordinated way, as the world is closely watching whether Japan can successfully resolve problems at the plant and decommission the reactors.

NRA chief Tanaka on TEPCO

September 3, 2013

NRA chief comments on TEPCO

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130903_33.html

Japan's nuclear regulator chief has pledged to give stricter instructions to the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant as the utility struggles to contain radioactive wastewater leaks.

In a news conference on Monday, Nuclear Regulation Authority chairman Shunichi Tanaka criticized Tokyo Electric Power Company for making only quick, patchwork fixes to a series of radioactive water leaks.

He said the agency has given spoken and written instructions to TEPCO for improving the situation, but the operator has obviously failed to follow them.

Tanaka stressed that the regulator will use its enforcing power, if needed, to make the company take the proper procedures.

The regulator's chief commented on the leak of 300 tons of radioactive wastewater from a tank last month and said reports on what caused it, how it happened, and how much leaked are still only estimates.

As for wastewater leaks at other tanks, he said they have been feared and suspected, but any signs of seeping water are too small to be classed as coming out of the tanks.

He also referred to the detection of 1,800 millisieverts per hour of beta-ray radiation at a joint on one of tanks. He said beta-rays are not as penetrating as gamma rays, and will not go through leather shoes, for example.

The chief also reiterated that some of the wastewater may have to be released into the ocean after radioactive substances in it are filtered to within the safety limit.

He said the release of water within safety limits is carried out by nuclear power plants around the world. But Tanaka added that **if Japan is to release the wastewater, the government will still have to explain what it's doing to the international community.**

We don't want another Guadalcanal

September 2, 2013

Don't let Fukushima nuke disaster devolve into another Battle of Guadalcanal

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130902p2a00m0na021000c.html>

Things are going badly. There's radioactive water leaking, and it can't be controlled.

The minister of economy, trade and industry has said that the central government will now "man the front lines" in the war to tame the Fukushima nuclear crisis, but if the workers on-site do not consent to join battle, if they cannot muster the courage to keep up the fight, then we cannot expect real progress. At least, that's the impression I got after talking with one of those workers, an employee of Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO).

"The managers don't go outside to the work sites," the worker told me last week. "There are a lot of managers who get almost no radiation exposure, and then they just quit. There's some unhappiness about that where I work. Some people actually tell the managers, 'Go out to the site!' and do the inspections or the maintenance. But in the (plant decommissioning) plan, it actually says that operations have to be 'directed from indoors.' The managers use that as an excuse."

I cannot write the worker's name, or age, or job description here. But I can say that he is not an agitator or loose cannon, stirring up dissatisfaction. Rather, he is a completely average employee, laboring in an environment plagued by a chronic lack of information, beset by haphazard orders, and hampered by poor communication.

"Now, at the plant, they're talking about how to assign people to the contaminated water tank patrols," the worker continued. "The (TEPCO) vice president went ahead and told a news conference that we'd do 'four checks a day,' didn't he? But we're not getting any extra staff. The management says 'do this' and 'do that,' but I don't think they really consider the workers' radiation exposure doses at all.

"Recently, some government minister came here (to the plant) and ran his mouth, right? When I see stuff like that, I think, 'Gimme a break! What the hell do you know about anything?'"

Some radioactive water was seen flowing into the ocean back in April 2011, soon after the three-reactor meltdowns. Sumio Mabuchi, a former minister of land, infrastructure, transport and tourism and an aide to then Prime Minister Naoto Kan, called immediately for an underground earthen wall to stop the flow of ground water beneath the plant grounds. TEPCO ignored him. After long and meandering discussions, that subterranean barrier plan is finally being implemented, but in this as in all else, TEPCO remains passive and reluctant to take action.

The contaminated water issue jumped back to the top of the priority list in April this year, when an underground storage tank for contaminated water sprang a leak. TEPCO had intended to begin dumping water detoxified with the Toshiba Corp.-built Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS) into the ocean after gaining the consent of local fisheries cooperatives. The ALPS equipment, however, broke down in June. Then in August, an aboveground storage tank erected to deal with the excess water also sprang a leak and yet more radioactively contaminated water flowed into the Pacific, spreading panic with it.

The government official overseeing the situation called the leak "incompetent management. It's just not acceptable." With matters coming to a head, the prime minister and the industry minister finally began saying the government would assume responsibility.

I've heard the officer in charge of the Self-Defense Forces efforts at the Fukushima plant describe the situation as being "the same as war." In fact, the chaos that has erupted because of the toxic water leaks reminds me of the Imperial Japanese Army's planning in World War II's Battle of Guadalcanal.

Almost 20,000 Japanese officers and men died of starvation on that southern Pacific island because they were not properly resupplied. This logistical failure was due to overconfidence and a critical underestimation of the American enemy. Japanese strategy in the battle lost view of the broader situation, and the operations ordered from on-high stank of grandstanding. Those at the top of the command structure, looking at their maps in Tokyo, could not grasp the realities of the hard-fought battle.

All this bears a striking similarity to the Fukushima nuclear crisis. Leadership has underestimated the contaminated water problem, put too much confidence in storage tanks and ALPS, and put the plant workers under ever greater strain as miscalculation is piled upon mistake.

We cannot let Fukushima devolve into another Guadalcanal. The government's real intentions, whether it really is willing to "man the front lines," will be revealed in the monies and personnel it commits to the nuclear disaster. On Aug. 27, the industry ministry named Director-General for Policy Planning and Coordination Toshihide Kasutani, 52, to lead the "contaminated water special policy secretariat," which will also be given a budget. I'd like to believe that this marks the end of putting lowered costs over safety.

The workers at the Fukushima plant deeply distrust those in Tokyo, and this must be wiped away. The waters next to the plant have been subject to unprecedented nuclear contamination, and this must be halted. Diet discussions must be put to practical use, to strengthen the distribution of information both domestically and internationally. After so much continuous failure, we must repair the damage done to Japan's international reputation. (By Takao Yamada, Expert Senior Writer)

Japan's crisis management ability under question

September 3, 2013

Editorial: Radioactive water leaks call Japan's crisis management capability into question

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130903p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Contaminated water at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) is becoming an increasingly serious problem. High levels of radiation were found near storage tanks similar to a tank where some 300 tons of radiation-tainted water was previously found to have leaked. Meanwhile, contaminated water continues to flow into the ocean.

Overseas media have reported the recent developments as the most serious crisis since the outbreak of the disaster two and a half years ago. Not only have we failed to bring the disaster under control, we are facing an extremely dire situation -- one in which the country's crisis management ability is being brought into question.

Addressing the water issue, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe previously said, "There is a need for the state to address the issue with a sense of urgency and not just leave it all up to Tokyo Electric Power Co." Thus far, however, we've seen little of Abe in the countermeasures that have been taken.

Since the beginning of his second stint as prime minister in December 2012, Abe has pushed for the resumed operation of nuclear reactors in Japan, while championing sales of Japanese nuclear reactors overseas as a component of his economic growth strategy.

However, bringing the disaster at the Fukushima nuclear plant under control and implementing measures against radioactive water leaks should be his top priority. **Without solving the problem of contaminated water in Fukushima, any talk of the safety of Japanese nuclear technology will lack all credibility.** It is the prime minister's duty to lead us to a solution as the head of the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters.

The volume of contaminated water continues to grow, because some 400 tons of groundwater flows into the plant's damaged reactor buildings every day, where it comes into contact with melted nuclear fuel. TEPCO removes cesium from this highly radioactive water, after which the water is stored in tanks on the plant grounds. Over 400,000 tons of water, including water with low levels of radiation, are now stored in these tanks. Meanwhile, part of the contaminated groundwater continues to leak into the ocean.

TEPCO plans to process the cesium-free water with ALPS, a multi-nuclide removal system that can eliminate 62 types of nuclear substances. ALPS operations have been put off, however, since water leaks were detected in a test run of the system. Meanwhile, our stopgap strategy of setting up more tanks as contaminated water continues to accumulate is near collapse.

Since the radioactive water leaks came to light, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) established a new director-level post dedicated to handling the contaminated water, and announced it would increase the number of resident staff at the Fukushima No. 1 plant. TEPCO, meanwhile, set up a contaminated water task force directly under the jurisdiction of the company president's office, to which the utility says it will invite experts from Japan and abroad. Such structural reinforcement is likely to have a certain level of impact, but they remain stopgap measures. Water contamination leaks and other crises are sure to arise again in the future.

In the coming days, the government is to announce a comprehensive strategy for the water crisis. Some of the challenges it faces include installing additional ALPS filtration systems and carrying out its underground water bypass plan, which would pump groundwater and release it into the ocean before it comes into contact with contaminated reactor buildings. The government says it will allocate supplemental budgets to the construction of an underground dam made from a wall of frozen soil around the reactor buildings to block groundwater leakage.

Experts have pointed out the necessity of an underground dam since soon after the nuclear disaster broke out. **Any delays in resolving the radioactive water crisis citing lack of funds or human resources are unacceptable.** The government, having effectively nationalized TEPCO, must take control of the chain of command, recognizing that merely handing down orders to TEPCO to implement countermeasures will not solve the problem. METI, the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) and other related agencies must work closely to confront the crisis we now face.

We also urge the government, in lieu of TEPCO, to explain the leakage of contaminated water into the ocean, which has caused concern in both Japan and overseas. TEPCO's handling of the disaster has shown that its tendency for cover-ups has not changed; any social credibility it may have had has been lost.

Similarly, the Diet, in its passivity, has shown that it still lacks awareness that the current situation is directly linked to the nation's crisis management capabilities.

Postponing discussion of the ongoing state of affairs until the extraordinary session of the Diet begins in October is out of the question. Lawmakers in both the ruling and opposition parties should be prepared to dedicate the next session to contaminated water, and consider convening the session earlier than scheduled.

Opposition lawmakers submitted a request for an assessment by the Lower House Committee on Economy, Trade and Industry -- attended by ministers and agency leaders -- while the Diet is not in session. In a response that strikingly indicated a lacking sense of crisis, members said they would go on an inspection tour of the Fukushima plant in the near future, without setting a specific date.

Diet discussions serve to force the government into becoming a centrally invested party in the issues that are debated, and particularly with the nuclear disaster, to release important information to the public. The development of an oversight and inspection framework that takes into consideration the contaminated water leaks, and what is required for a fundamental resolution, must be thoroughly debated as soon as possible. For example, an underground water bypass is a plan that must undergo a multifaceted assessment before politicians make a final decision on it.

What's especially disturbing is the sense that the political world is holding back on any discussion of the crisis out of concern that such talk could affect Tokyo's chances of winning the bid for the 2020 Olympics, a campaign that will end with the International Olympic Committee's announcement of the host on Sept. 7. Politicians, should, instead, realize that withholding an explanation on the crisis has the potential to further deepen the world's distrust toward Japan.

The ordinary session of the Diet earlier this year ended in June without any extensions due to the scheduling of the subsequent House of Councillors election, which makes it highly possible for the country to go without parliamentary debate for a very long time. As such, prompt discussion is crucial.

Opposition parties must avoid dedicating their energy into pointing out the faults of the ruling parties and emphasizing the differences between themselves and other opposition parties. Rather, what we need is for opposition parties to find common ground with each other in order to offer constructive counterproposals to the ruling coalition. Political parties' competence is being put to the test.

On Sept. 15, the No. 4 reactor at Oi Nuclear Power Plant operated by Kansai Electric Power Co. will be halted for a routine inspection. It will be the first time since July 2012 that no nuclear reactors will be running in all of Japan. In quake-prone Japan, we cannot return to an energy policy that depends on nuclear reactors. The latest contaminated water crisis is a reminder of this reality.

Gov't with the Olympic bid in mind

September 4, 2013

Prime minister's office rushes to address Fukushima contamination as Olympic vote nears

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130904p2a00m0na010000c.html>

The prime minister's office and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) began considering the use of reserve funds from this fiscal year's budget to fight a buildup of radioactive water at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant without consulting the Ministry of Finance, it has been learned.

The prime minister's office and METI considered using the funds in mid-August as part of the 47 billion yen allocation approved by the government's Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters to tackle radioactive contamination at the plant, which is operated by the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO).

The officials envisaged using 21 billion yen in reserve funds to increase and improve facilities to deal with contaminated water, and to construct a wall of frozen soil to stop groundwater from flowing into the nuclear reactor buildings.

It is believed that the prime minister's office and ministry moved quickly to address the contamination amid growing international concerns, which they feared could negatively affect the nation's bid to host the 2020 Olympic Games.

"The world is watching to see whether decommissioning of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant can be achieved, including the handling of contaminated water. The government will unite to solve this," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe commented at response headquarters on Sept. 3.

The flow of contaminated water into the sea had emerged as an issue during a meeting held at headquarters on Aug. 7, and it was learned on Aug. 19 that a storage tank had been leaking. Overseas

media organizations, mainly in Europe, were critical of the situation -- with the BBC quoting a nuclear expert as saying that the leaking was "much worse than we have been led to believe."

About 40 percent of the International Olympic Committee members are from Europe. During a news conference held Aug. 26, opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) leader Banri Kaieda commented, "Not only neighboring countries such as South Korea and Russia, but Europe, too, is keenly interested in the issue. There is a possibility that it could affect the Olympic bid."

Concern also arose within the government, with one source from the prime minister's office commenting, "The issue of the Olympic bid is at hand. We can't leave things unattended to forever."

In a separate news conference on Aug. 26, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga commented, "We have instructed the economy, trade and industry minister to do all he can, including utilizing reserve funds." Suga said that the instruction had been given to the minister "two weeks earlier."

Until that time, the Ministry of Finance had been left "out of the loop," and the perplexed Finance Ministry was left asking what the reserved funds would be used for. It appears that the prime minister's office adopted the view that if the government brought forward its plans to use a portion METI's "decommissioning research funds" from the 2014 budget to build a wall of frozen soil at the crisis-hit Fukushima plant, it would then be able to override the Ministry of Finance.

In another news conference on Sept. 3, Suga said, "Urgency over the issue of contaminated water is increasing day by day. The latest move shows the government's intention to stand at the fore to reach a solution without leaving everything up to TEPCO."

However, the government does not envisage boosting financial assistance to TEPCO beyond that earmarked for the handling of contaminated water.

"If the premise that TEPCO is responsible for cleaning up after the accident collapses, then there will be no limits," one government source said, stressing that the latest declaration of government assistance was an exception.

Masashi Waki, secretary-general for the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the House of Councillors, stated that there had also been "big problems" under the previous DPJ-led administration, and then added, "The measures have come a little too late."

For the time being, however, the LDP does not intend to comply with requests from the opposition parties to conduct reviews of the situation while the Diet session is not in progress. It is apparent that the party wants to avoid having the contaminated water issue turn into material that could be used to criticize the Abe administration.

On Sept. 4, Abe heads to a G20 summit in Russia, followed by an International Olympic Committee meeting in Argentina, where the host of the 2020 Olympic Games will be chosen. Several government officials commented that the government had been running at full speed to address the contamination issue, and that they could not deny that the government had the Olympic bid in mind.

Japan in contact with US experts

September 4, 2013

Trade minister says Japan in contact with U.S., others on Fukushima water crisis

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309040092>

REUTERS

Japan is in touch with experts in the United States and elsewhere on ways to control the spread of irradiated water at the wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant, trade and economics minister Toshimitsu Motegi told Reuters.

"We will be looking for the best knowledge, technology and information with regard to how to manage the contaminated water at the plant and how to decommission the complex," Motegi said in an interview on Sept. 4.

Japan was criticized for being slow to seek overseas help in the early stages of the response to the Fukushima disaster two and a half years ago.

Despite a pledge to tap global expertise to decommission crippled reactors, nuclear contractors in the United States and Europe have been largely shut out of the project.

Japan's government this week pledged nearly \$500 million to contain leaks and decontaminate radioactive water at the coastal Fukushima plant, which was hit by a massive earthquake and tsunami in March 2011 that triggered reactor meltdowns in the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl.

The steps come as the International Olympic Committee decides on Sept. 7 whether Tokyo--some 230 km from the stricken plant--will host the 2020 Olympic Games.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has helped lead the campaign to win the bid to host the Games and officials have been eager to show the crisis is under control, even as radiation levels at parts of the Fukushima plant have spiked to record highs.

Motegi, who has been sharply critical of the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co.--he has likened its response to an escalating problem with irradiated water to a game of "whack-a-mole"--said Japan has been in touch with a national research facility in the United States for ideas on how to deal with the contaminated water, as well as other overseas experts. He did not provide details.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry said no decision had been made on whether to use the technology suggested by overseas experts and declined to provide specifics on those exchanges.

DECOMMISSIONING AGENCY?

Motegi said it was too soon for Japan to consider a legal framework that would give the government sole oversight for scrapping the Fukushima reactors.

Yasuhisa Shiozaki, acting policy chief of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, has proposed creating an agency similar to Britain's National Decommissioning Authority, a public body charged with dismantling Britain's atomic power stations.

"This will take thinking through questions like our overall energy policy and taking a big-picture view of the situation," Motegi said. "To create a new agency with a single mission would not necessarily accelerate the work that needs to be done."

Japan's nuclear industry, which once provided a third of the nation's power, has nearly ground to a halt since the Fukushima disaster.

TEPCO has been pumping water over the reactors to keep them cool and storing the radioactive wastewater in above-ground tanks.

The utility said last month that at least one of those hastily built tanks was leaking.

It has also found high radiation levels just above the ground near other tanks, suggesting widespread structural problems.

Those revelations spurred the government intervention. Under the new steps, Tokyo will fund a \$400 million project spearheaded by Kajima Corp. to ring the area around four reactors with a wall of frozen earth to keep groundwater from seeping towards them and becoming contaminated.

More money will be used to build a water treatment facility that can remove all radioactive particles from water except tritium, considered the least harmful to humans.

Motegi said the Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS), developed by Toshiba Corp and Utah-based EnergySolutions but which has been stalled for months due to safety problems, would begin running this month.

Japan should swallow its pride, says Akio Matsumura

<http://akiomatsumura.com/2013/09/japan-swallow-your-pride-and-ask-for-help.html>

Japan, Swallow Your Pride and Ask for Help

September 3, 2013

A Choice for Japan. Prime Minister Abe and the Pacific Ocean.

Japan is an island nation, connected to the rest of the world through the Pacific Ocean's currents. For thousands of years those waterways have carried Japanese sailors to distant shores. Now they carry radioactivity to our coasts. Japan's reluctance to ask for international help in managing Fukushima's cleanup would be one thing if it put only its own people at risk. But with the rest of the world facing health risks, Japan's mismanagement of its nuclear crisis is irresponsible and should not be accepted by other governments, especially the United States, whose food supply stands to be contaminated.

The contaminated water is the result of a process that cools the spent fuel rods at the site. TEPCO is storing the water in almost 1000 tanks on the site. About one-third of these tanks are more vulnerable to leaks because their steel walls are bolted together rather than welded. TEPCO will have to continue to build several hundred more each year. And with the decommissioning of the power plant taking 40 years, where will the new water tanks go?

TEPCO is already having a tough time keeping up with the growing variety of problems that storing the water has caused. The Chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority described the plant to the Japan Times as being like a "haunted house" in which "mishaps keep happening one after the other." The Guardian reports reports that extremely high levels of radiation are coming from one tank. TEPCO does not know why the radiation levels spiked.

Through the summer, after TEPCO revealed contaminated water has leaked into the Pacific Ocean since the accident and proved its inability to handle the accident, Prime Minister Abe instructed the Nuclear Regulation Authority to take a more active role in decommissioning the plants. Its Chairman, Shunichi Tanaka, said: 'We cannot fully stop contaminated water leaks right away. That's the reality. The water is still leaking into the sea, and we should better assess its environment impact.'"

The irradiated water will continue to leak into the ocean. And with no room for new tanks, Japan will have to dump the irradiated water its holding now as well.

The effects this will have on the ocean is largely unknown. We must remember that the Pacific Ocean connects most of the world, reaching the shores of both Americas, the long coasts and islands of Asia, and the barrier reefs of Australia. The web of life it contains is complex and rich.

Still, it is our use of its resources that concerns us most. Salmon swim east to Alaska, tuna swim off the coast of Japan. For now, fisheries around Fukushima have been closed. Ken Buesseler, leader of a radiochemistry research team that just finished work off the coast of Fukushima, makes clear that we still know little about the accidents' effects on the marine ecosystem, but the increasing flow of irradiated water into the ocean is worrisome.

The Japanese formed a unique bond to the sea over thousands of years. In the last two years we have changed the legacy of that relationship forever. We cannot properly conceive of the effects on a network of life we know little about in the first place. As tenants of the planet, the Japanese and human beings have no right to pollute as we have.

The water crisis is just one thing that has gone wrong, and just one of many more that could go wrong but haven't yet. Many scientists have explained the worst case scenario for Fukushima: four nuclear reactors were damaged by the 2011 tsunami and earthquake. Of these, three reactors have not been repaired at all due to the high radiation and the fourth contains ten times the radioactivity of what Chernobyl released. If one of the reactors collapses, it will cause a global catastrophe. Earthquakes and structural damage contribute to this event's likelihood.

Crisis. Catastrophe. The words I choose are those of alarm.

But a quick look at Prime Minister Abe's agenda makes it clear that business continues as usual in Japan. Although he has come under recent criticism for mishandling the crisis (some have protested that Tokyo should not be a finalist for the 2020 Olympic Games), his strong position has let him carry on, his political course unchanged.

Instead, Prime Minister Abe should use his hard-won political independence to stave off a crisis. He has the opportunity to overcome Japan's incapacitating national pride and ask for the best technical support and expertise the world can offer. The world would no doubt quickly come to Japan's aid. Asking for assistance should be his first governing priority. Besides, it is good politics. How can he build a strong Japanese economy if a top export is radioactivity?

In fact, I find it hard to believe that preventing further disaster — a leaking water tank, a power failure to a cooling pool, another mega earthquake — is not his greatest concern. I believe he has grasped the huge challenge and the potential catastrophe, but with no clear solution to handle the damaged nuclear plants and underground contaminated water in ten years, Prime Minister Abe wishes to shift the public attention to the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Game. With this strategy he can only hope that the next crisis will not take place during his term.

The threshold for government action is foolishly high. Especially in the United States. Leaders say that the science is uncertain, that we need more definitive evidence. This is negligent. Government has the unique ability to convene resources and intervene early to take precautionary action for public good. While Germany, Russia, France, and England could certainly help, the United States is home to some of the best technology and experts in science, engineering, and health. Japan needs to ask for their help in stemming the flow of water and stabilizing the four damaged power plants. American and Japanese leaders should realize that the irreversible nature of a large crisis will leave us with radiation and other health risks for a minimum of several hundred years.

While a politician can skip out on his responsibility thanks to terms of office, we the people cannot avoid whatever health risks ensue. We as Japanese do not want to carry the legacy as those who irreparably harmed the Pacific Ocean and we as Americans do not want to be affected by this crisis. We as humans do not want to see the Pacific Ocean polluted. But by letting Prime Minister Abe choose wealth over health, we are cementing our joint roles in the history books.

Japan must swallow its national pride and ask the best minds and technology from abroad to save Japan and the world.

Asahi receives award for scoops on decontamination

September 4, 2013

Asahi Shimbun wins award for scoops on shoddy decontamination work

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201309040084

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The Asahi Shimbun on Sept. 4 won a Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association award for a series of scoops revealing the scope of slipshod work done by general contractors to decontaminate areas around the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Four Asahi Shimbun reporters camped out a total of 130 hours in areas around the plant where decontamination work was under way. They photographed workers dumping tainted grass and water, instead of collecting them for proper disposal, at 11 sites. Interviewing workers, they wrote a series of stories that showed the corners being cut on the central government-commissioned cleanup efforts.

The series prompted the Environment Ministry to launch an investigation, which resulted in three general contractors being ordered to take corrective action.

The honor from the newspaper association, the Japanese equivalent to the Pulitzer Prize, followed last year's award to The Asahi Shimbun for a long-running series under the title "The Prometheus Trap." The articles detailed the fast-spreading Fukushima nuclear crisis from various angles after it was triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

The articles on the shoddy decontamination work that contributed to the winning of the award are available at:

- (1): Radioactive waste dumped into rivers during decontamination work in Fukushima
- (2): Some decontamination workers sorry for following orders
- (3): Reporters document extent of shoddy decontamination practices
- (4): Government mishandled complaints about shoddy cleanup work
- (5): Government to investigate Fukushima decontamination
- (6): Ministry questions decontamination contractors; workers express hopelessness
- (7): Decontamination workers say cutting corners came naturally
- (8): Environment Ministry failed to act on Asahi tip-off
- (9): Fukushima city not sticking to plan to decontaminate homes
- (10): Ministry to investigate after companies admit only 3 violations in Fukushima
- (11): Photos, videos show contractors lied in decontamination reports
- (12): Government confirms 5 cases of shoddy decontamination work
- (13): Workers break silence to allege boss ordered corner-cutting
- (14): Yakuza taking slice of lucrative decontamination work

Olympics vs Fukushima crisis

September 5, 2013

Leader of Tokyo bid for Olympics dodges reporters' radiation questions

by Dave Hueston

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/05/national/leader-of-tokyo-bid-for-olympics-dodges-reporters-radiation-questions/#.UigvUH9Sb9k>

BUENOS AIRES – What should have been a resounding kickoff for the Tokyo 2020 bid with the International Olympic Committee's vote coming Saturday turned into **a fencing match as bid chief Tsunekazu Takeda tried to parry questions from the media about the Fukushima nuclear crisis.**

Takeda, who is president of the Japanese Olympic Committee, and Fujio Cho, president of the Japan Sports Association and honorary chairman of Toyota Motor Corp., held a media event Wednesday in Buenos Aires to pitch Tokyo's proposed marketing program and emphasize the capital's certainty to deliver the games in first-class style.

A space-aged, 34-cm robot called Mirata, was brought on stage as a symbol of Japan's technological excellence. It demonstrated exercises, stretches and fencing maneuvers with Yuki Ota, winner of two Olympic silver medals in fencing and a delegate for Tokyo 2020.

But it was Takeda, who spoke in English for most of the news conference, who appeared to be doing a robot act as he repeatedly delivered the same talking points. Four of the six questions asked by reporters were about Fukushima.

Takeda sent a letter to IOC members on Aug. 27, reassuring them that Tokyo is "completely unaffected" by the problem of radiation-contaminated water at Fukushima No. 1.

Asked whether he is more concerned privately than he is letting on publicly, Takeda said, "I sent a letter to IOC members, I think last week, and I mentioned Fukushima. Now, Tokyo is very safe. The water, the seafood and also the radiation is absolutely safe. Our prime minister, Mr. (Shinzo) Abe, officially announced the government's response for this problem and already started the project."

Takeda was referring to the government's announcement to provide ¥47 billion for measures to deal with the huge volume of radioactive water accumulating at the plant, but he failed to answer the question of how it might influence the vote. Abe is scheduled to give an explanation to IOC members on the day of the vote.

"The radiation level in Tokyo is the same as London, New York and Paris, like the major cities in the world. It's absolutely safe," Takeda said. "There are 35 million people living there in very normal conditions with no worries about this problem."

Asked whether worries from IOC members could weigh against the bid, Takeda again said: "I already explained the radiation level in the water or food is absolutely safe. Same as here (in Buenos Aires). We're not concerned about this problem in Tokyo and also 2020 Tokyo."

Finally, he was asked whether IOC members, who will vote Saturday on the host city, are questioning him about the crisis, irrespective of the safety of radiation levels, and he answered in Japanese.

"The prime minister will explain in a way that reassures people in the presentation," he said. "The water and food is absolutely safe. The radiation levels are the same as in London, Paris, New York or here."

He added that Fukushima is more than 200 km from the capital and in that sense there is no reason for alarm.

"They're not dealing with the issue," said Duncan Mackay, founder and publisher of *insidethegames*, a publication that features in-depth analyses of all things Olympic. "The issue isn't whether the (radiation) situation is the same as London, New York or Paris. London, Paris and New York aren't bidding for the games. Tokyo is. The perception internationally and among some IOC members is that Fukushima is an issue."

Fukushima was so much of a distraction that Tokyo's real agenda became almost an afterthought. Cho said Toyota is ready to become a sponsor of the 2020 Games if Tokyo, which is competing against Madrid and Istanbul, is selected as the host.

"Of course, if the Olympics come to Tokyo, Toyota plans to be a sponsor," he said. "We have already been helping the bid. You can be sure that Japanese companies will be lining up to become business partners of the 2020 Games."

Japan fends off Fukushima concern in Olympic bid

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130905_21.html

Japan's top government spokesman tried to fend off concerns about the leakage of radioactive water at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant ahead of the vote to choose the host of the 2020 Olympics.

Reporters from overseas media raised concerns about the leakage in a news conference by members of Japan's Olympic bid committee in Buenos Aires on Wednesday.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said in Tokyo on Thursday that the Japanese government has already made clear that it will lead the efforts to resolve the water leakage as soon as possible.

He said Japan will work to gather technology and expertise to tackle the issue.

The International Olympic Committee will choose the host city for the summer games on Saturday in the Argentine capital from 3 contenders -- Tokyo, Istanbul and Madrid.

NRA promises full disclosure of radioactivity data

September 6, 2013

Japan's NRA to fully disclose tainted water data

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130906_42.html

A senior official from Japan's nuclear power regulator says it will fully disclose information on radioactive substances leaked into the sea from the stricken Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Hideka Morimoto, the deputy secretary general at the secretariat of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, made the remarks at a news conference on Friday.

He offered no comment on the possible adverse effect the water leaks could have on Tokyo's bid to host the 2020 Summer Olympic Games.

He did not speak on South Korea's decision to ban imports of marine products from some parts of Japan either.

Morimoto said disclosing accurate information is important and the reporting provided by the regulator thus far has been insufficient.

He said how the tainted water is affecting the sea in particular is crucial and the NRA will fully disclose data about radioactive materials in that regard.

The NRA says the concentrations of radioactive substances at 1.3 kilometers south of the water outlet for the Number 1 reactor at the plant have fallen to below detectable levels. It adds that water contamination has not spread outside the port for the plant.

On Friday, the NRA uploaded data about water leaks and radioactive materials in the sea in English on its website. It also plans to send the data to foreign correspondents and embassies in Japan.

Lawmakers very timid in tackling the situation

September 6, 2013

Lawmakers wary of dealing with nuclear plant contaminated water leaks

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309060056>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Even as global concern increases over the radioactive water leaks from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, Japanese lawmakers are not aggressively tackling the problem.

The international focus comes only days before the International Olympic Committee selects the host for the 2020 Summer Olympics on Sept. 7. Tokyo is one of three cities in the running.

About the only lawmakers who have taken action is a small multi-partisan group calling for the elimination of all nuclear plants in Japan.

Tomoko Abe, a Lower House member in the group, said, "Now is not the time to be saying to the IOC, 'Japan is all right.' The Abe administration and the Diet lack a sense of crisis in dealing with the problem."

On Sept. 5, seven members of the group visited the Fukushima No. 1 plant for a close-up look at the tanks that have been the source of leaking contaminated water.

Wearing protective gear, the lawmakers spent about three hours at the plant, checking on the storage tanks, as well as the wells that have been dug to pump out groundwater that flows under the Fukushima plant site.

But despite the seriousness of the situation, other Diet members do not appear to be in a rush to deal with the problem.

While the Diet is currently not in session, members of the Lower House Economy, Trade and Industry Committee had decided to visit the Fukushima plant site. However, a definite schedule could not be put together because committee chairman Shigeyuki Tomita had an overseas business trip planned.

As a result, the group of no-nukes lawmakers was the first to visit the plant site, even though Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant operator, was at first reluctant to allow the visit because of the group's stance on nuclear energy.

No decision has yet been made on when committee sessions would be held to discuss what was learned from the plant site visit scheduled for Sep. 12.

Both the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and opposition Democratic Party of Japan have their own reasons for taking a cautious approach.

A joint session was held on Sept. 4 of the LDP research commission on natural resources and energy strategy as well as the economy, trade and industry policy division. Members welcomed the central government's involvement in handling the leaking water problem.

"There can be no closure on the nuclear accident unless something is done about the contaminated water," one participant said. "It is very encouraging to see the central government playing a leading role in dealing with the problem."

LDP lawmakers, though, were less eager to review the comprehensive plans to deal with the nuclear accident.

Tadamori Oshima, who heads the project team jointly set up by the LDP and New Komeito to deal with the contaminated water problem, said it would not be a simple matter to decide what legislative steps need to be taken to resolve the issue.

There are also concerns that if the central government has to provide public funds whenever there is a new development, there would be no end in sight for government involvement.

The DPJ is also treading lightly in dealing with the contaminated water problem.

A number of lawmakers, including Teruhiko Mashiko, an Upper House member representing Fukushima Prefecture, visited the plant site on Aug. 14. On Aug. 22, the party set up a headquarters to respond to the contaminated water problem.

In a Sept. 5 meeting, DPJ lawmakers decided to seek committee sessions in the Upper House while the Diet is not in session.

However, DPJ members are also aware of the strong criticism being voiced by LDP officials, who blame the DPJ government for leaving the contaminated water problem up to TEPCO.

Some DPJ lawmakers, therefore, are hesitant to criticize how the Abe administration deals with the problem, since the situation might not have become as serious as it is now if the DPJ government had dealt with it more aggressively when it was in power.

Why countries support the Olympic Games

September 6, 2013

Tokyo Olympic bid committee on the defensive over radioactive water at Fukushima nuke plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130906p2a00m0na027000c.html>

BUENOS AIRES -- Tokyo's Olympic bid committee remains on the defensive over how radioactive water accumulating at the tsunami-ravaged Fukushima nuclear power plant should be dealt with.

The bid committee of Tokyo and the two other candidate cities, Madrid and Istanbul, are all stepping up efforts to convince International Olympic Committee (IOC) members to support their bids in anticipation of the IOC vote on Sept. 7 to pick a host city.

The three bid committees are holding news conferences on a daily basis to convince the IOC -- as well as the international community -- that their respective cities are most suited to host the 2020 Games. The IOC is scheduled to announce the host city at 5 p.m. on Sept. 7 local time, which is 5 a.m. on Sept. 8 Japan time.

Of the 103 IOC members, 97 will cast their ballots, excluding President Jacques Rogge and members representing the candidate cities. If nobody abstains, a candidate city must garner at least 49 votes to be elected host city in the first round of voting.

It was widely viewed that Tokyo and Madrid were running in a dead heat, while Istanbul was on the back foot because of the chaotic situation in neighboring Syria. As the voting day draws near, however, the competition is now more complex.

In the vote four years ago to pick a city to host the 2016 Summer Olympics, Japan captured 22 votes in the initial round and 20 in the second round. A senior member of the bid committee said they believe that Tokyo will garner around 30 votes in the first round, judging from IOC members' reactions to the committee's campaigning. Still, this falls below the winning line.

Support from IOC members representing Japan's Asian neighbors is far from firm because of tensions in Japan's relations with China and South Korea.

Meanwhile, the Tokyo bid committee is presently undertaking efforts to win support from prominent figures in the international sports world. During his tour of the Middle East and Africa in late August, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe held talks with Olympic Council of Asia president Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah, who has a huge influence on Middle East and African countries. Abe is also scheduled to attend the upcoming IOC general meeting.

Tokyo's plan to host the Olympics and ability to organize the games have won high appreciation worldwide, with a number of British bookmakers rating Tokyo as No. 1. The contaminated water accumulating on the premises of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant is drawing increasing attention from the international community as the voting day draws near, however -- putting Tokyo on the defensive.

A source familiar with the IOC has told the Mainichi Shimbun that "Madrid has an edge even though the competition is close."

Madrid is believed to have gained the upper hand when Prince Felipe of Asturias, who participated in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics' yachting event, delivered an emotional speech during a presentation held in Lausanne, Switzerland in July behind closed doors.

Spain's capital has won firm support from IOC members representing Spanish-speaking countries in Central and South America. The city got 31 votes for its bid to host the 2012 Summer Olympics, and also won 32 votes in the runoff election to pick a city to host the 2016 Games -- although it ended up losing to Rio de Janeiro by a narrow margin.

Campaigning by Madrid's bid committee, which includes IOC member Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr. -- the son of a former IOC president -- and two other IOC members, has been intense. Major Spanish newspaper El Mundo predicted that Madrid would score an overwhelming victory, saying, "It'll certainly win at least 40 votes, and may even garner a majority in the first round of voting."

Bid committee head Alejandro Blanco Bravo is warning against such optimism, however. "We can't tell you about our prediction of how many votes we'll garner," he said. "We'll continue to lobby IOC members until the last minute to secure a majority."

Istanbul, which has aspired to become the first city in the Muslim world to host the Olympics, was initially in keen competition with its rivals. Its campaign later lost momentum, however, after a minority group's protest of a plan to redevelop the city center escalated into nationwide anti-government demonstrations. Tensions have also heightened in neighboring Syria, where the United States is considering a military intervention.

During voting to pick a host city for the 2008 Olympics, Istanbul garnered 17 votes in the first round -- and only nine in the second round.

Istanbul bid team leader Hasan Arat commented, "We'll bring back the gold medal." Observations are widespread, however, that the city's chances of being selected are slim.

Final presentations by representatives of the three candidate cities will largely determine whether they win the competition to host the Games.

Dick Pound, an IOC member representing Canada, pointed out that most members decide which city they will vote based not only on the quality of candidate cities' bidding plans -- but also on their own personal preferences.

Daily news conferences held in Buenos Aires by the three cities' bid committees serve as practice for their final presentations.

Istanbul's bid team has failed to make clear-cut assertions on their positions because of difficult problems both at home and overseas.

Fujio Cho, president of the Japan Sports Association and honorary chairman of Toyota Motor Corp., attended the Tokyo bid committee's first news conference in Buenos Aires on Sept. 4 to emphasize Japan's economic capacity.

However, four of the six questions posed to the committee officials focused on radioactive contamination and the leak of contaminated water at the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant.

Tsunekazu Takeda, head of the bid committee and president of the Japanese Olympic Committee, was desperate to dispel the concerns of the international community regarding the dangers that the nuclear crisis could pose to Tokyo.

"Tokyo is absolutely safe. It is 250 kilometers away from Fukushima, and the kind of danger that you imagine does not exist there," he told the news conference.

Tokyo must convince IOC members that radioactive water would not pose any threat to athletes and Olympics organizers in Tokyo in order to get the upper hand in its final presentation.

The bid team intends to emphasize that a disaster could occur anywhere in the world, and that sports have given encouragement to those affected by the March 2011 quake, tsunami and nuclear disaster.

During the final presentation, Princess Takamado will express appreciation to the international community for supporting areas hit by the disasters. IOC members have a respect for the Japanese Imperial Family because many are themselves from royal families. Moreover, the significance of Japan hosting the Olympics to support the restoration of disaster-hit areas is likely to win sympathy from many IOC members.

There is room for Japan to dispel the concerns of the international community regarding radioactive water at the nuclear plant if Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sincerely explains the situation during the final presentation.

At a Sept. 3 news conference, Istanbul's bid committee was bombarded with questions about the Syrian situation.

The following day, the team showed a promotion video emphasizing its efforts to serve as a bridge between the East and West by hosting the 2020 Games. Half of the questions posed to them, however, focused on a mass doping scandal involving many Turkish track-and-field athletes.

During a recent news conference, Madrid emphasized its recent opinion poll -- which showed that 91 percent of the public support the city's bid to host the 2020 Olympics.

In response to a question about its economic uncertainty, such as the high unemployment rate, Mayor Ana Botella said, "That's why we're bidding to host the Olympics: to vitalize the economy."

What to make of IOC's choice

September 8, 2013

UPDATE/ OLYMPICS: Tokyo emerges triumphant in race for 2020 Summer Games

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201309080027

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN AND WIRE REPORTS

The International Olympic Committee chose Tokyo as the host city for the 2020 Summer Olympics at the 125th session of the general assembly in Buenos Aires on Sept. 7, beating out other finalists Istanbul and Madrid.

With Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe reassuring IOC members that the Fukushima nuclear crisis is under control and poses no health threat, Tokyo handily defeated Istanbul 60-36 in the final round of secret voting. Madrid was eliminated in an earlier round after an initial tie with Istanbul.

Tokyo will host the Games for the second time, having been the site of the Summer Olympics in 1964. It will also mark the first time in 12 years that an Asian city will host the Summer Games, following Beijing in 2008.

Tokyo won the bid emphasizing its solid fiscal foundation, urban infrastructure and capability of hosting a successful Games.

Tokyo officials had feared that the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, and particularly the recent disclosure that radioactive water had leaked into the sea, would influence the IOC's decision.

In an effort to address the concerns, Abe flew to Buenos Aires to lead the Japanese delegation, cutting short his attendance at the Group of 20 summit in St. Petersburg, Russia.

In the final presentation before the vote, Abe assured the IOC that the Fukushima leak was not a threat to Tokyo and took personal responsibility for keeping the Games safe.

"Let me assure you the situation is under control," Abe said. "It has never done and will never do any damage to Tokyo."

Abe gave further assurances when pressed on the issue by Norwegian IOC member Gerhard Heiberg.

"It poses no problem whatsoever," Abe said in Japanese, adding that the contamination was limited to a small area and had been "completely blocked."

"There are no health-related problems until now, nor will there be in the future," he said. "I make the statement to you in the most emphatic and unequivocal way."

IOC members said Abe's answers were crucial and helped dispel any doubts.

"People wanted to hear it and needed to hear it," Canadian member Dick Pound said. "And he delivered on that. I think that was a real knockout answer."

Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, has acknowledged that tons of radioactive water has been seeping into the Pacific from the plant for more than two years after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami led to meltdowns at three of its reactors. Recent leaks from tanks storing radioactive water used to cool the reactors have added to fears that the amount of contaminated water is getting out of hand.

Tokyo's bid benefited from Japan's large economy and link to Olympic sponsors. Asia offers a huge market for the IOC.

"There are a lot of commercial advantages for the IOC going to a country with the third-biggest GDP," Australian member John Coates said. "And then compare that to the economic uncertainty facing Spain and the political unrest that Istanbul experienced a few months ago and more particularly the unrest at the Middle East at the moment."

"The IOC, we've taken the safe bet."

Tokyo delegates in the hall screamed with joy, jumped in the air, hugged and waved small flags after IOC President Jacques Rogge opened a sealed envelope and read the words: "The International Olympic Committee has the honor of announcing that the games of the 32nd Olympiad in 2020 are awarded to the city of Tokyo."

The three candidate cities bidding to host the 2020 Olympic Games made their final presentations to the session before the vote, which was conducted via a secret ballot through electronic voting.

The site receiving the lowest number of votes was eliminated in the voting, continuing until a city garnered a majority of votes.

OLYMPICS/ ANALYSIS: IOC chooses Tokyo for 2020 Games for its solid hand

- Previous Article PHOTO: Tokyoites erupt with joy on successful bid to host 2020 Olympics

September 08, 2013

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201309080039

By ATSUSHI AKUTSU/ Staff Writer

BUENOS AIRES--Tokyo earned the blessing of the International Olympic Committee to hold the 2020 Games in the capital with its promise to offer "peace of mind, safety and stability" amid concerns about the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

All three finalists bidding for the Summer Games had their weaknesses.

Madrid has been embroiled in an economic crisis, while Istanbul has been rocked by anti-government demonstrations as well as civil war in Syria, Turkey's neighbor.

Tokyo's candidacy was overshadowed by a series of leaks of radioactive water at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in recent months.

Four years ago, Tokyo lost out in a bid to host the 2016 Games, which went to Rio de Janeiro. While Tokyo decided to compete in the race for the 2020 Games, the city failed to present a clear rationale for wanting to organize them.

When the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami devastated northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011, former Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara and other officials began arguing that the Olympics held in the Japanese capital would contribute to post-quake reconstruction.

After all, the IOC was seeking "solidity" for the 2020 Games.

In a speech immediately before a vote at an IOC general meeting on Sept. 7, Princess Hisako thanked the IOC for its support in post-quake reconstruction.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe also said, "There is not a problem (with leaks of radioactive water)."

That is the assurance that IOC members wanted to hear.

In the first round of voting, Tokyo led with 42 votes, followed by Istanbul and Madrid with 26 each. After Istanbul edged out Madrid in a tie-breaking vote, Tokyo defeated Istanbul 60-36 in the final round.

Tokyo will be hosting the Summer Olympics for the second time following the 1964 Games.

September 8, 2013

Factors behind Tokyo's selection

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130908_12.html

Observers say IOC members likely selected Tokyo to host the 2020 Summer Olympics for its ability to operate the world sporting event safely and soundly.

Tokyo emphasized its stable fiscal base and well-known safety. Financial uncertainty still looms over Madrid and Istanbul has been hit with anti-government rallies and athlete doping issues.

IOC members had voiced concern over radioactive waste water leaks at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in Japan, which attracted attention in the past few months.

But Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's speech during the final presentation helped to ease that concern. He gave assurances that the situation at the plant is under control.

He explained that the radioactive water affects only 0.3 square kilometers inside the plant's port and the government will take responsibility for countermeasures.

Brisk lobbying activities headed by Japanese Olympic Committee President Tsunekazu Takeda also helped win support of members. Takeda was elected as an IOC member last year.

The country picked up support from IOC members from Asia and Africa. And Japan was very successful in gaining support from Europe, which has the most IOC members of all the continents. Japan won more votes from European IOC members than its two rivals.

Japan promotes sports as part of the national strategy with a law in place since two years ago. The second Olympic Games in Tokyo are now strongly supported by the government and private business.

The IOC survey showed a surge in support among the people of Tokyo to 70 percent for the 2020 bid, compared to 56 percent in the 2016 bid which Japan lost.

Sep. 8, 2013 - Updated 02:09 UTC

Experts proposal on Gov't role ignored... in December 2011

September 7, 2013

Former DPJ-led gov't neglected expert proposal on contaminated water

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130907p2a00m0na014000c.html>

An expert panel's proposal that the government adopt a major role in dealing with radioactively contaminated water at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant was left unaddressed by the former Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ)-led government, it has been learned.

An expert panel to the Cabinet Office's Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) made the proposal in December 2011, advising that the government take the initiative in preventing water leaks and safe storage and treating of contaminated water at the plant. However, it was revealed Sept. 6 that the government at the time left the proposal virtually untouched. The panel also recommended setting up a third-party body to monitor measures taken by plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and to seek dialogue with local bodies, but this suggestion has yet to be implemented.

"We were severely criticized for having promoted nuclear power, and we compiled the proposal thinking that we, too, had a responsibility to ensure safe decommissioning of the Fukushima reactors," said a senior JAEC official.

A former official in the DPJ-led administration commented, "TEPCO was playing a major role in addressing the nuclear disaster. ... There was no reason the government had to act in accordance with the proposal." The comment serves as an admission that the government at the time was not placing much emphasis on the JAEC proposal, which was filed on Dec. 13, 2011, about nine months after the onset of the nuclear crisis.

If the previous administration had paid more attention to the recommendation, problems relating to contaminated water might not have been as severe. Even after the current administration led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe spelled out on Sept. 3 this year basic government policies such as injecting public funds to deal with contaminated water and stepping up the monitoring of TEPCO's work, some in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) still point out that the government's involvement in the issue remains ambiguous.

The JAEC proposal analyzed the U.S. government's response to the Three Mile Island (TMI) nuclear accident in March 1979 and estimated that the amount of contaminated water generated at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant -- where multiple reactors were damaged -- was likely to climb to around 20 times that at Three Mile Island. The proposal noted that Washington didn't leave the handling of the TMI accident solely to the power company but established a system to share the responsibilities among the Department of Energy and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. It praised such measures as leading to longtime and safe management and disposal of radioactive waste including contaminated water.

On the financial front, the JAEC proposal pointed out that the U.S. government injected public funds into the development of technology and equipment to decommission the TMI reactor at the center of the accident -- including measures against contaminated water -- on the grounds of protecting "national interests," while having the power company perform a key role. The JAEC proposal emphasized the importance of the Japanese government becoming aware of its responsibility and getting involved in the issues at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

With regard to measures to be taken to deal with contaminated water, the JAEC paper expressed concern that it might not be possible to detect the locations of water leaks using cameras or dosage measurements alone. It also urged the construction of impermeable walls and the utilization of both domestic and foreign expertise in the development of technology and equipment as part of measures to safely store and process contaminated water over a long period of time.

More meetins related to nukes (Reconstruction Agency) kept secret

September 6, 2013

Gov't agency kept meetings on nuke disaster support off-record, withheld documents

<http://www.mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130906p2a00m0na026000c.html>

Inter-agency meetings on the extent of government support for people affected by the Fukushima nuclear disaster were never recorded, and their proceedings were kept effectively secret from the public, the Mainichi has learned through a freedom of information request.

The Reconstruction Agency held a number of high-level meetings with other agencies and ministries concerned with the nuclear disaster support law, but chose not to release any information about the meetings so as not to "invite public misunderstanding or unwarranted speculation," an agency official stated. In fact, details suggest that the agency chose not to reveal that the meetings were even happening.

The Reconstruction Agency released its basic support plan on Aug. 30, which covered 33 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture. The agency was originally going to determine eligibility for government support based on a set standard for local radiation. The agency chose to select municipalities eligible for government support without drawing up such a standard, however -- which has drawn criticism that the area covered by the plan is "unfairly narrow."

Reconstruction Minister Takumi Nemoto has stated that this support plan "was arrived at in consultation with related ministries and agencies," hinting at pivotal meetings that took place among division directors and policy counselors as the plan took shape.

The Mainichi filed a freedom of information request for the minutes of these meetings in early July, more than a month before the basic support plan was released by the Reconstruction Agency.

The agency responded on Sept. 4 with eight pages of documents detailing the times, places and attendees at four meetings in April through June. The Mainichi was told, however, that minutes of these conferences "do not exist." Furthermore, the agency refused to release some 120 pages of documents presented by related government offices for consideration during the meetings, stating that the material was "of a preliminary nature and would invite public misunderstanding and unwarranted speculation."

According to the agendas and other sources, the meetings were convened at the behest of the Reconstruction Agency, and included division directors and policy counselors from the Environment Ministry, the Cabinet Office's disaster victim support team, and the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA). The director-general for the Reconstruction Agency and the NRA's vice-chief were also on hand during at least one occasion.

The nuclear disaster victim support law guarantees that victims' opinions will be taken into account, and that all discussions will be made transparent. Furthermore, the government has been in hot water before for keeping meetings related to the nuclear crisis secret, after it was found at the beginning of last year that proceedings of the Cabinet Office's nuclear disaster response headquarters had also gone unrecorded. The government's public document management committee, meanwhile, demanded in April 2012 that minutes be kept of all meetings related to the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

The Reconstruction Agency has failed to heed this call, however -- at least in the case of its inter-agency meetings over the nuclear disaster support law. On its failure to record minutes of the meetings and its refusal to release related documents, the agency told the Mainichi, "the law on public document management does not require meeting minutes and other documents to all be recorded in the same way. The meetings in question were not held to make final decisions, but were simply information exchanges."

The Cabinet is set to formally adopt the basic nuclear disaster victim support plan after the public comment period ends on Sept. 13. The Reconstruction Agency is scheduled to hold public information sessions on the plan in the city of Fukushima on Sept. 11.

More Fukushima people supposed to have died of stress than from direct effects of disaster

September 9, 2013

Stress-induced deaths in Fukushima top those from 2011 natural disasters

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130909p2a00m0na009000c.html>

The number of deaths in Fukushima Prefecture caused mainly by stress from the nuclear disaster reached 1,539 at the end of August, almost equaling the 1,599 fatalities due directly to the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, the Mainichi Shimbun has learned.

In addition, bereaved families have filed condolence money applications for at least 109 victims who they say died due to fatigue, stress and aggravated health conditions while living in evacuation shelters and temporary housing. If this number is added, deaths attributable to post-disaster conditions surpass the number of those killed directly by the March 11, 2011 quake and tsunami.

There have been cases of Fukushima residents whose health conditions worsened due to extended periods living as evacuees, as well as those who were driven to suicide.

The Reconstruction Agency had put the total number of these deaths at 1,383 at the end of March this year. According to a Mainichi survey of 25 cities, towns and villages in Fukushima that have certified disaster aftermath-related fatalities, a further 156 people passed away from such causes from April through August.

The city of Minamisoma led the tally at 431, followed by the town of Namie at 291, and the town of Tomioka at 190.

But many municipalities declined to specify the causes of those disaster aftermath-related deaths, saying they would affect future screenings of applications for condolence money.

The Reconstruction Agency's investigations into the causes of 734 deaths in Fukushima Prefecture based on data at the end of March last year show that 33.7 percent died from fatigue due to life in evacuation centers, 29.5 percent died from exhaustion due to relocation to evacuation centers or other locations, and 14.5 percent died of worsening illnesses after hospitals treating them stopped functioning. Nine people took their own lives.

As of the end of August this year, such aftermath-related deaths totaled 869 in Miyagi Prefecture and 413 in Iwate Prefecture.

Get on with the task force

September 9, 20123

Govt., TEPCO meet to discuss Fukushima leaks

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130909_41.html

Officials from the government and the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant have met for the first time as part of a task force to discuss radioactive waste water leaks at the plant.

They agreed to boost measures to stop the waste water from flowing into the Pacific Ocean.

About 20 officials, including senior vice industry minister Kazuyoshi Akaba, attended the task force meeting in Naraha town near the plant on Monday.

The government-led task force was established on September 3rd as the problem of contaminated water at the plant was getting more serious.

They talked about radioactive waste water leakage from storage tanks. Tokyo Electric Power Company workers last month discovered that about 300 tons of the water had leaked from one of tanks. Some of water may have flowed into the ocean.

They decided to build higher barriers around the tanks and seal a ditch leading to the ocean so that waste water will not enter it.

They also asked the plant operator to draw up a plan to change the storage tanks for more reliable welded types by the next meeting in October.

The hundreds of tanks being used, including the one that leaked waste water, are made of steel plates fastened together with bolts.

The task force will also address groundwater contamination in the plant.

Nobody held responsible

September 9, 2013

Prosecutors decide not to indict anyone related to Fukushima nuclear accident

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309090099>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Prosecutors on Sept. 9 decided not to indict any of the 40 or so individuals who had been targeted in criminal complaints and accusations for their role in the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011.

Residents of Fukushima Prefecture and citizens groups had filed the accusations in Tokyo and Fukushima district public prosecutors offices. Among those targeted were Tsunehisa Katsumata, who was chairman of Tokyo Electric Power Co. when the accident occurred at the utility's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, and Naoto Kan, who was the prime minister at the time.

The assertions suggested the individuals bore responsibility for hospitalized patients dying as they were evacuated in the immediate aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster as well as causing residents to become exposed to radiation.

Prosecutors concluded it would be difficult to prove criminal responsibility in relation to the lack of adequate measures to deal with the tsunami on the part of TEPCO because experts had not predicted an earthquake and tsunami on the scale that struck on March 11, 2011.

Prosecutors also concluded that individuals could not be held criminally responsible for the manner in which they dealt with the crisis.

Those who submitted the criminal complaints and accusations plan to submit their cases to prosecution inquest panels made up of ordinary citizens in an effort to override the decision by prosecutors not to indict anyone.

Kan, Tepco execs avoid charges over nuclear disaster

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/09/national/kan-tepco-execs-avoid-charges-over-nuclear-disaster/#.Ui7C8n9Sb9k>

Prosecutors on Monday decided not to indict former Prime Minister Naoto Kan or any officials from Tokyo Electric Power Co. over the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 plant because of the lack of criminal responsibility.

"It was difficult to foresee the scale of the earthquake and tsunami," the Tokyo District Public Prosecutor's Office said of the government's response to the natural disasters in Tohoku that triggered the man-made meltdowns in Fukushima Prefecture in March 2011.

About 14,700 people from groups across Japan, but mainly in Fukushima Prefecture, filed complaints against Kan and 41 other individuals for alleged professional negligence resulting in death and injury in connection with the nuclear disaster, which was triggered when the poorly protected power station lost all power after being hit by the quake and subsequent tsunami.

Kan, who was prime minister from June 2010 to September 2011, called the prosecutors' decision "a natural outcome."

But residents dissatisfied with the ruling will request that an 11-member independent inquest panel review the case. The groups said they are now planning to take their case to the Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution in Tokyo, where the investigation was handled.

In addition to Kan, the accused included Tsunehisa Katsumata and Masataka Shimizu, who were chairman and president of Tepco at the time, and Haruki Madarame, then chairman of the now-defunct Nuclear Safety Commission.

The focus was on whether prosecutors could find enough evidence to prove that the government and Tepco failed to take sufficient measures at the 40-year-old power plant after being notified of the risk of earthquakes and tsunami.

The government and Tepco were also accused of delaying the evacuation of residents around the plant, causing many to be exposed to radiation and leading to the deaths of many bedridden hospital patients. Asked about the prosecutors' decision, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said at a news conference that he would not comment on the conclusions of investigations conducted in individual cases.

September 8, 2013

TEPCO executives spared from indictment

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130909_39.html

Japanese prosecutors have decided not to indict former TEPCO executives for insufficient precautions against a massive tsunami, and their handling of the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Fukushima residents and others filed criminal complaints against Tokyo Electric Power Company and more than 40 people.

They include former TEPCO chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and other top management, former Nuclear Safety Commission head Haruki Madarame and former Prime Minister Naoto Kan.

Prosecutors said on Monday that TEPCO, its former executives and others cannot be held criminally responsible.

They say the accused could not predict the real dangers of such a massive earthquake and tsunami.

They say TEPCO's failure to carry out countermeasure construction after it projected in 2008 a scenario of a huge tsunami of more than 15 meters, cannot be considered socially irresponsible behavior.

The plaintiffs say they do not accept the conclusions of the ruling. They plan to take the issue to a prosecution inquest panel made up of randomly selected citizens.

Sep. 9, 2013 - Updated 11:37 UTC

Kan, Tepco execs avoid charges over nuclear disaster

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/09/national/kan-tepco-exec-avoid-charges-over-nuclear-disaster/#.Ui4HeX9Sb9k>

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Asked about the prosecutors’ decision, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said at a news conference that he would not comment on the conclusions of investigations conducted in individual cases.

Case against TEPCO, Kan likely to be dropped

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130909_02.html

Prosecutors are not likely to press criminal charges against former TEPCO executives and others, including a former prime minister, for their handling of the 2011 nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Fukushima residents had filed criminal complaints against more than 40 people from Tokyo Electric Power Company and the government.

Those included former TEPCO chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and former Prime Minister Naoto Kan.

Over the past year, prosecutors have been investigating whether these officials and executives were able to predict such a massive earthquake and tsunami in advance.

The prosecutors also sought out the opinions of earthquake and tsunami experts.

They concluded that these people cannot be held responsible because they were not able to predict the real dangers of such a massive quake and tsunami.

The prosecutors have also concluded that they will not press criminal charges for the actions of the utility and the government in the aftermath of the nuclear crisis.

Fukushima residents say they will immediately take the matter to a prosecution inquest panel. The decision on whether or not these people should be indicted will be decided by randomly-selected citizens.

Sounds familiar

September 9, 2013

Quake reconstruction budget still used for unrelated projects

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201309090083>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Money from a post-quake reconstruction budget is still being used on unrelated projects handled by the industry ministry for promoting power meters and storage batteries despite a government order to return the funds.

In July, the Abe administration decided to have funds operated by public-interest corporations and local governments return unused money from a budget to help reconstruction from the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

The decision came after it was found that 1.2 trillion yen (\$12 billion) from the reconstruction budget had been allocated to about 20 funds for projects unrelated to the disaster. About 100 billion yen was still unused as of July.

However, Sustainable Open Innovation Initiative, a Tokyo-based organization that operates a fund for the industry ministry's two energy-related projects, is accepting new applications for subsidies through January.

The projects promote power-saving meters, which show the amount of electricity used, and storage batteries by paying subsidies to households and companies that install them.

It is said they would lower the nation's electricity usage and prevent a possible power shortage from disrupting reconstruction of disaster areas.

A combined 51 billion yen was allocated for the projects from the reconstruction budget in November 2011, and 3.4 billion of that money was used by the end of March.

However, when the Abe administration demanded money in the funds be returned, excluding the amount that had been "effectively used," the industry ministry only returned 10.6 billion yen to state coffers. Officials said how the remaining 37 billion yen would be used had already been decided.

According to Sustainable Open Innovation Initiative and companies that sell the equipment, however, the amount also included the value of equipment in inventory that they ordered, relying on subsidies, and plan to sell in the future.

The companies are telling prospective customers that subsidies are still available.

"We do not know about equipment in inventory," said an official at the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, part of the industry ministry. "We heard (from companies) figures for equipment already ordered and equipment in a stage immediately before contracts are signed."

Hiroshi Arikawa, a professor at Nihon University, said the industry ministry cannot gain the understanding of taxpayers who think the budget will be spent on post-quake reconstruction.

"The ministry has continued the projects apparently to prevent disruption of industry," said Arikawa, a former official of the Board of Audit of Japan. "But the budget should be routed to disaster areas as much as possible, even down to a single yen."

(This article was written by Hirotaka Kojo and Eiji Zakoda.)

We promise

September 10, 2013

Japanese govt. vows to IAEA to solve nuclear issue

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130910_17.html

The Japanese government has vowed to take the initiative in dealing with the massive buildup of radioactive water at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Ambassador Toshiro Ozawa of Japan's diplomatic mission made that pledge on Monday at a regular board meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. He outlined the government's plan to solve the problem of contaminated water leaking from the plant.

Ozawa said the buildup of radioactive water is the most urgent problem caused by the 2011 nuclear accident. He stressed the government's determination to solve it as soon as possible.

Ozawa told reporters after the meeting that other countries, especially Japan's neighbors, hope Japan will be able to successfully cope with the situation.

The ambassador said those countries want Japan to provide more information.

At the IAEA board meeting, the Japanese mission provided English translations of the government's basic plan to deal with the buildup of radioactive water. The government approved the plan last week.

The mission also plans to hold a briefing at the general meeting of the IAEA next week about the current situation at the Fukushima plant.

Pursuing legal responsibility for Fukushima disaster

September 9, 2013

Accusers denounce prosecutors decision

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130909_44.html

A group of Fukushima residents has denounced the prosecutors' decision to not indict former TEPCO executives for the nuclear crisis.

The group's representative, lawyer Hiroyuki Kawai, told reporters that **the prosecutors had failed to respond to the voice of local residents.** He said it is a matter of course that they did not indict anyone as the investigation was based on data provided on a voluntary basis and on experts' opinions.

Kawai said he intends to take the issue to an inquest panel and file a criminal complaint with the Fukushima prefectural police.

He said he wants people and police officers in Fukushima who are struggling and are still angry following the nuclear disaster to make their judgment.

September 10, 2013

POINT OF VIEW/ Keiji Takeuchi: Pursuing responsibility for Fukushima disaster of utmost importance

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/opinion/AJ201309100038>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The Sept. 9 decision by prosecutors to not indict anyone connected to the Fukushima nuclear accident only concluded that **it is technically difficult to pursue legal responsibility of individuals for the disaster.** The Diet's Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission pointed out that the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant was "a man-made disaster."

More than two years have passed since the reactor meltdowns at the site, but no progress has been made to determine who played what role in that disaster. That, in turn, led to ambiguities about who was responsible.

In his pitch in Buenos Aires for Tokyo to host the 2020 Summer Olympics, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said that the situation at the Fukushima plant is under control and there are no health concerns.

The reality, however, is that no work can begin on decommissioning the reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. There is also the problem of the continuing leak of water contaminated with radiation from the plant.

Given the gap between the confused situation at the Fukushima plant and the decision by prosecutors to not indict anyone, it is difficult to be convinced by the decision.

Primary responsibility for the accident must lie with Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the plant. But since the central government worked closely with the electric power industry to promote nuclear energy as a "national policy managed by the private sector," it also bears major responsibility.

None of the high-ranking government officials or executives of TEPCO who were deeply involved in promoting nuclear energy or who were in important posts at the time of the nuclear accident have truly apologized for their role and taken responsibility.

In the absence of apologies or even reflection, there are now growing calls to resume operations at other nuclear plants and to export nuclear energy technology.

If criminal cases had proceeded in court rooms, the roles played by individuals would have come under the spotlight.

Even though that has not happened, something must be done so society can make clear where the responsibility resides.

The only way to take responsibility on behalf of future generations is for people in various positions to hold discussions in order to question who was responsible for the accident and to change policy.

Keiji Takeuchi is a senior staff writer of The Asahi Shimbun.

Abe's assurance questioned

September 10, 2013

Doubt cast on Abe's assurance to IOC about Fukushima leaks

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309100071>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, as well as local fishermen barred from going to sea since the accident, questioned Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's assurance to the International Olympic Committee that the problem of radioactive water is "under control."

In a speech before the IOC picked Tokyo as host of the 2020 Games, Abe said the situation is under control, referring to the contaminated water issue, and that Japan will never allow it to cause damage to Tokyo.

In response to a question, Abe also told the IOC general meeting in Buenos Aires on Sept. 7 that radioactive water has been "completely blocked" within a 0.3-square-kilometer area in the harbor of the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Abe's remarks are credited with helping dispel concerns about radioactive water at the plant and securing the Games for Tokyo. Denis Oswald, an IOC member from Switzerland, said Abe's speech on Fukushima was convincing.

However, sources at plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. acknowledged that it has not been able to keep radioactive materials from flowing into the ocean completely.

No radioactive cesium has been detected in many places outside the harbor, but the government estimates that 300 tons of radioactive water are flowing into the harbor daily.

Radioactive materials have been contained by silt fences, or curtain-like undersea partitions, set up near seawater intakes for nuclear reactors and within the harbor.

However, 68 becquerels of tritium were detected per liter of seawater sampled at the entrance of the harbor on Aug. 19, suggesting that radioactive materials may have been spreading outside the harbor.

An estimated 300 tons of highly radioactive water that escaped a storage tank may also have directly flowed into the ocean through a ditch.

Meanwhile, a survey of fish samples taken in waters within a 20-kilometer radius of the plant has shown that amounts of radioactive cesium in marine products have fallen.

However, amounts exceeding safety standards for consumption were detected from slime flounder and other samples taken in July.

The Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant was crippled by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011. Water containing extremely high concentrations of radioactivity leaked into the ocean the following April and May, prompting TEPCO to install silt fences.

The concentrations are believed to have been diluted as the contaminated water spread, but radioactive materials have accumulated at the bottom of the sea.

Radioactive cesium detected in fish samples apparently derive from such accumulations.

Toshimitsu Konno, a fisherman in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, is angry at Abe's remarks at the IOC general meeting.

"He must be kidding," the 54-year-old said. "We have been tormented by radioactive water precisely because the nuclear plant has not been brought under control."

The Soma-Futaba fishing cooperative association, to which he belongs, decided to postpone the resumption of test fishing operations scheduled this month following a series of leaks of contaminated water.

"He (Abe) can say, '(Radioactive water has been) completely blocked,' because he does not know what is going on at the site," Konno said.

“He said it is safe when he was abroad, but he will not tell us the same thing. Can Abe take responsibility for his own words? If he can, I urge him to act on what he said.”

Chinese and South Korean media also called Abe’s sweeping statements into question.

A China Central Television program said, “Although Japan emphasized that the situation is under control, people’s concerns have not been completely dispelled.”

South Korea’s Munhwa Ilbo newspaper took issue with Abe’s remark that there is no problem about the radioactive water issue, citing the view of a Japanese expert that the vow is groundless.

Abe told the IOC gathering, “I will take responsibility for deciding on a program to resolve the (radioactive water) issue once and for all.”

Fukushima Governor Yuhei Sato said the prime minister must make good on his words.

“Abe made an international promise that the government will be responsible for ensuring safety,” Sato said Sept. 9. “I want him to stand by that promise.”

Abe’s assurance to IOC on nuclear plant called into question

by Reiji Yoshida

Staff Writer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/10/national/abes-nuke-assurance-to-ioc-questioned/#.Ui9jkX9Sb9k>

One question that emerged among the public immediately after Tokyo won the right to host the 2020 Olympics was whether Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made an incorrect statement, or told an outright lie, about the contaminated water issue at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

During the Tokyo bid delegation’s final presentation before the International Olympic Committee in Buenos Aires on Saturday, Abe stressed that the “effects from the contaminated water have been perfectly blocked within the (artificial) bay” of the wrecked nuclear complex, and said “the situation is under control.”

Experts have long pointed out that irradiated water from the plant has kept gushing into the Pacific far beyond the man-made bay, although the government continues to claim that most radioactive materials have been contained within a silt fence that forms a barrier directly in front of reactor units 1 through 4. Reactors 1, 2 and 3 suffered core meltdowns in March 2011.

The silt fence was deliberately set up with many openings so it can withstand waves and tidal movements.

When disclosing the results of a simulation last month, Tokyo Electric Power Co. admitted that a lot of water — and probably radioactive materials — was penetrating the fence and pouring into the wider ocean. The simulation assumed that 50 percent of the water inside the fence becomes mixed with seawater daily due to tides and other factors.

Tepco, based on the findings, concluded that a maximum of 10 trillion becquerels of radioactive strontium-90 and a further 20 trillion becquerels of cesium-137 may have reached the ocean.

At a news conference Tuesday, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga admitted that contaminated water has escaped through the silt fence. But at the same time, he stressed that surveys have shown that the levels of radioactive materials in coastal waters around the nation, including off Fukushima Prefecture, are far lower than international safety thresholds.

“Even at the maximum, the density of (radioactive) cesium is less than one-five hundredth of the World Health Organization standards for drinking water, which poses no (health) problems at all,” Suga said.

“So (based on this, Abe) said (in Buenos Aires that) the effect has been totally blocked” within the bay of Fukushima No. 1, Suga said.

However, Suga did not answer repeated questions on the possibility that the density readings might be lower simply because tainted water is being diluted with massive amounts of seawater, and not because Tepco or the government has the situation “under control” as Abe claimed.

Jota Kanda, a professor at Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology, pointed out that densities of radioactive materials within the artificial bay have stopped falling recently, despite the huge amounts of seawater that flow in and out every day.

This indicates a certain amount of new radioactive materials are flowing nonstop from the plant's wrecked reactor buildings into the sea, he said.

Kanda, however, also noted that the total amount of radioactive materials detected in contaminated water samples has been so low that it is unlikely to pose any danger to human health.

Surveys of fish caught around Japan's shores have shown no alarming concentrations of radioactive materials in recent months.

What now?

September 10, 2013

Now Japan must deliver

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/09/10/editorials/now-japan-must-deliver/#.Ui9khn9Sb9k>

The International Olympic Committee has chosen Tokyo as the host of the 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympics. It is hoped that Tokyo's hosting of the once-in-four-year global games will help dispel the "locked in" feeling prevalent in Japanese society — which has been primarily attributed to difficult economic conditions — and help to enhance the level of sports in Japan. But government leaders must realize that their promise to end the leaks of radioactive water from Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has now become an international pledge.

The government must mobilize all available resources to quickly solve the leak problem so that not only people in and around Fukushima Prefecture but also participants in the Olympic and Paralympic Games will not have to worry about radiation problems. It will be especially important for the government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. to tackle the problem in a transparent manner so that people both in Japan and abroad can have ready access to accurate information on the situation.

Madrid, Istanbul and Tokyo, the candidate cities to host the 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympics, all had strong and weak points. Madrid, which sought to hold the games in a less extravagant way, is suffering from Spain's serious economic problems. Istanbul, which could have become the first city in the Islamic world to host the games, had its image tarnished by clashes between government forces and demonstrators earlier this year. Tokyo, whose marketing campaign stressed, "You're in safe hands with Tokyo," had the festering radiation problem.

It appears that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's speech in Buenos Aires, the venue of the IOC's convention — in which he stated that the situation at Fukushima No. 1 is under control and that the "effect" of contaminated water is fully contained within the 0.3 sq. meter harbor adjacent to the nuclear power plant — helped to convince the IOC to award the games to Tokyo.

But Tepco estimates that some 50 percent of the water inside the harbor flows into the outer ocean every day. It is suspected that 300 tons of contaminated water leaked into the ocean in August. Because groundwater is flowing into the basements of the damaged reactor buildings every day and becoming contaminated, 400 more tons of radioactive water are being added to the on-site storage tanks on a daily basis. But it is impossible to increase the number of tanks ad infinitum. The government and Tepco must solve the water leakage problem as quickly as possible.

Japan's campaign to win the right to host the games had a very regrettable aspect to it. Princess Takamado gave a speech at the outset of Tokyo's presentation in Buenos Aires, in which she thanked the international community for the help it extended to Japan in the aftermath of the 3/11 disasters. This smacks of the use of an Imperial Family member for a political purpose, and even the Imperial Household Agency expressed its discomfort. The Diet should question the government on this point and ask it to refrain from similar actions in the future.

Ms. Mami Sato, a Paralympian from Kesenuma, Miyagi Prefecture, gave a powerful speech stressing the power of sports to restore people's confidence based on her experience in the 3/11 disasters. Japan needs to make serious efforts to nurture more athletes who embody the ideals stated by Ms. Sato.

Invitation of US expert Lake H. Barrett

September 10, 2013

Press Releases 2013

Press Release (Sep 10,2013) Invitation of an External Professional, to the Contaminated Water and Tank Countermeasures Headquarters

http://www.tepco.co.jp/en/press/corp-com/release/2013/1230443_5130.html

On August 26 this year, we set up the "Contaminated Water and Tank Countermeasures Headquarters." Today, we have determined to invite Mr. Lake H. Barrett (former US Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and former US Department of Energy), an overseas expert familiar with clean-up and decontamination technology, as an outside expert to the "Contaminated Water and Tank Countermeasures Headquarters."

Based on his international knowledge and **experience, acquired by engaging in control of the Three Mile Island accident** at the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission, he will participate in the meetings of the Contaminated Water and Tank

Countermeasures Headquarters and each project team, and will provide advice regarding decontamination issues such as contaminated water countermeasures at the request of TEPCO.

We recognize that bringing the contaminated water under control is the most urgent and serious issue that we must address. Supported by the Japanese government, and **utilizing the immense amount of expertise provided by professionals around the world**, all of us at TEPCO will strive relentlessly to rectify this issue.

What happened to the levees?

September 11, 2013

Work not begun at 57% of levees in disaster zone

NHK has learned that only 17 percent of levees planned along the Pacific coast of eastern Japan have been completed, and that work hasn't begun on 57 percent of them.

The central and local governments plan to build levees totaling about 410 kilometers along the Pacific coast from Aomori to Chiba prefectures, which suffered tsunami damage in March 2011.

Of the 574 planned levees, 99 were completed as of the end of August, but 330 were still in the planning stage.

In the hardest-hit prefectures of Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima, only 4 percent of the planned levees were completed and 67 percent had yet to be started.

Most of the planned new levees are higher than previous ones in anticipation of massive tsunami that strike once every several decades or centuries.

The central and local governments are having trouble winning the approval of local residents, many of whom are opposed to such high levees, saying they are unsightly and would hamper coastal jobs.

TEPCO feels "relieved" - Tritium contamination on the increase

September 11, 2013

No. 1 chief pleased with Olympics bid; tritium reading doubles

by Kazuaki Nagata

Staff Writer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/11/national/no-1-chief-pleased-with-olympics-bid-tritium-reading-doubles/#.UjDI3H9Sb9k>

The head of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant said Wednesday night that it was a relief to see Tokyo win the bid for the 2020 Summer Olympics as yet another leap in groundwater radiation was disclosed at the site.

"Honestly, **I felt relieved,**" said Akira Ono, current chief of the crippled power plant run by Tokyo Electric Power Co. "**I never imagined that the contaminated water issue would actually affect the bid,**" he said at the news conference in Fukushima.

Officials from Tepco, as the company is known, said tritium in a groundwater sample from a monitoring well near the suspect tank that lost 300 tons of tainted water last month in a level 3 incident was exhibiting 64,000 becquerels per liter of radioactivity.

The energy of the tritium in Tuesday's sample is more than double Monday's sample, which was giving off 29,000 becquerels per liter, and dwarfs the 4,200-becquerel sample from Sunday.

The disclosure is **yet another signal backing suspicions that the tons of water that vanished from the tank has sunk into the ground and may be spreading, turning the storage area into a radioactive swamp.**

The legal limit for dumping tritium into the sea is 60,000 becquerels per liter. Tepco, again, said it was "investigating."

The tainted water problem heated up over the summer after Tepco belatedly admitted — the day after the Liberal Democratic Party won the Upper House election and after months of denials — that radioactive water from the plant was pouring into the Pacific.

Attention grew last month when the highly radioactive 300-ton water leak prompted the Nuclear Regulation Authority to classify it as level 3, or “serious incident,” on the International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale, which tops out at 7.
And several more leaks preceded that one.

Ahead of the International Olympic Committee’s announcement early Sunday, foreign media outlets repeatedly asked the Tokyo 2020 Bid Committee whether the Fukushima plant was really safe. **The question was artfully dodged with empty guarantees and statistics on where some of the radioactive material in the ocean had settled, rather than what kind of sea life may have consumed it before migrating along the coast.**

“There was no doubt we were under pressure,” said Ono, adding that the first thing many plant workers said Monday was that they were glad Tokyo’s bid prevailed.

TEPCO too big for bankruptcy?

September 11, 2013

INSIGHT: Japan ponders Fukushima options, but TEPCO too big to fail**

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309110090>

REUTERS

Fukushima nuclear plant operator TEPCO Electric’s response to the world’s worst atomic disaster in a quarter century has been called ad hoc and more concerned with cost than safety, but 30 months later, the utility is still in charge.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in the centerpiece of Tokyo’s successful bid to host the 2020 Olympics, said he would be personally responsible for a plan to cope with the legacy of the March 2011 disaster in which a massive earthquake and tsunami caused triple meltdowns, spewing radiation and forcing some 160,000 residents to flee their homes.

A crisis over radiation-contaminated water at the plant has revived calls to put Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) into bankruptcy as a prelude to nationalizing the clean-up and shut-down of the reactors, but there is little political support for the idea given its potential fallout for financial markets, TEPCO’s creditors and other nuclear utilities.

With concerns over TEPCO’s ability to cope, policymakers are pondering ways to take the Fukushima shut-down off the utility’s hands, perhaps through an agency along the lines of Britain’s Nuclear

Decommissioning Authority. Even that, though, faces hurdles, including the likely need for new legislation, clarity on the size of the bill for taxpayers and government liability, and working out the implications for Japan's other utilities.

That means, at least for now, the government may just end up pouring in more money, leaving TEPCO in charge while stepping up official oversight.

"They haven't come up with any good idea yet," said one former government official, although he said various options were being discussed. "Abe is not shy about providing government support, but I don't think he's thinking about any radical change of the structure of this company," he said, referring to calls to put TEPCO through bankruptcy procedures.

ON LIFE SUPPORT

Abe's government last week said it would spend nearly half a billion dollars to contain the leaks and decontaminate water at the facility. That's on top of a 1 trillion yen (\$10 billion) injection of public funds last year and a 5 trillion yen government credit line for compensating disaster victims.

"Clearly the government is using state funds to extend TEPCO's life, so the only way forward is to legally bankrupt the firm and make clear who is responsible, including past directors, financial institutions and shareholders," said Kazuyoshi Sato, an assembly member in Iwaki City just outside the 30 km (18.5 mile) exclusion zone around the Fukushima plant.

Few in Tokyo support that view.

"I don't think it's right to put in taxpayers' money without TEPCO going down," said ruling Liberal Democratic Party lawmaker Taro Kono, who has long been at odds with his party over nuclear energy. But he added: "It seems I'm the only one, or one of just a few, being noisy about liquidation."

TEPCO's admission in July that contaminated water had flowed into the Pacific Ocean and news that highly contaminated water was leaking from a tank storing water used to cool the melted reactor cores prompted Abe's pledge to take the lead and bolster government oversight.

Several ruling party politicians, however, said TEPCO's bankruptcy--considered but rejected in the months after the disaster because authorities decided the utility was too big to fail--was not on the table now.

"TEPCO is, in reality, bankrupt," said LDP lawmaker Taku Yamamoto, head of the party's panel on natural resources and energy strategy. "But under the law ... it cannot be put through bankruptcy. It must fulfill its role."

FOOTING THE BILL

TEPCO, which has racked up net losses of \$27.4 billion since the disaster, has cut its costs and raised its prices, but its long-term sustainability remains in doubt. It has yet to win local support to restart its Kashiwazaki Kariwa nuclear plant on Japan's northwest coast, some 200 km from Fukushima--which could save it about \$1 billion a month in fuel costs.

Under the scheme crafted to keep TEPCO afloat after the 2011 disaster, the company is liable for compensation, decontamination of affected areas and decommissioning the reactors. It is supposed to use

electricity revenues to pay for decommissioning, while, for compensation and decontamination, it can borrow up to 5 trillion yen from the state-backed Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Corporation.

"Our company would like to fulfill our social responsibility by properly compensating those affected by the disaster and decommissioning the reactors," TEPCO said in response to Reuters queries for this article.

"If the option of corporate bankruptcy or other court-led restructuring were chosen, there is concern that those affected by the nuclear incident would not be properly compensated and there might be a large impact on financial markets," it said.

With cost estimates for compensation and decontamination at least double the 5 trillion yen credit line, and projections of the cost of decommissioning starting at 1 trillion yen, critics have long said Japanese citizens would end up paying the bill.

But putting TEPCO into bankruptcy would make that inconvenient truth all too clear.

"Who would take over the clean-up and paying the people of Fukushima?" said the LDP's Yamamoto. "It would be the government. It would be tax money. And we don't know how much that will cost."

'ECONOMIC INCENTIVE'

TEPCO's bankruptcy could also trigger potential chaos in the corporate bond market, a key source of funds for power firms, though the utility's short-dated bonds due this year trade near par for now, reflecting investor confidence they will be paid.

"At the end of the day ... the government has a social need to keep TEPCO running," said CV Ramachandran, head of Asian business for restructuring specialist AlixPartners. "If it wanted to wind-down and replace TEPCO with another entity, that would have a major impact on TEPCO bonds and potentially the Japanese bond markets. But this scenario is not likely."

Rating agencies, too, said the government was unlikely to risk market upheaval by pushing TEPCO to the wall.

"With over 4 trillion yen (\$40.2 billion) in (TEPCO) bonds outstanding, the Japanese bond market would suffer a negative impact if TEPCO were to default on its payments; we believe the government has an economic incentive to avoid such a scenario," said Standard & Poor's analyst Hiroki Shibata.

TEPCO shares have more than doubled this year to 512 yen each, but are still just a quarter of what they were worth before the 2011 disaster.

A TEPCO bankruptcy would also require clarifying the future shape of Japan's electricity sector, now controlled by 10 regional monopolies, but set to be liberalized under a law the government aims to pass this year. That would create a national power grid by 2015, and split the regional utilities into generation and transmission firms by 2020. Key details have yet to be worked out, making it hard to value TEPCO's good assets.

The government is also re-doing its basic energy plan, setting out the role of nuclear and other energy sources even as it tries to restart some of Japan's 50 reactors--which used to provide almost a third of the nation's electricity but are nearly all now off-line--in the face of public safety concerns.

"The government would immediately need to present an overall plan for Japan's energy future, which would be almost as difficult to do today as it was in 2011," said Martin Schulz, a senior research fellow at Fujitsu Research Institute.

Still, the growing criticism of TEPCO has bureaucrats and politicians searching for some solution. "We must avoid a situation in which TEPCO fails, so ultimately the government will have to step in and take on the burden," said Koichi Hagiuda, an LDP lawmaker close to Abe.

Splitting off the Fukushima project without forcing the Japanese mega-banks that hold its bonds and have extended loans to take a hit, however, would be politically touchy.

"No one will accept putting a huge chunk of money into TEPCO just so bondholders and pensioners get a soft-landing," said Jun Okumura, a former industry ministry official and now a senior adviser for Eurasia Group.

All of which suggests the government may shy away from drastic change, and continue to drip-feed in more funds.

"On the surface, the government says it will 'take responsibility', but this is just a temporary expedient of using tax money," said Shigeaki Koga, a former trade and industry ministry official who proposed putting TEPCO through bankruptcy in 2011. "They probably don't really intend to take responsibility."

Abe's promises to the world

September 10, 2013

EDITORIAL: Abe needs to deliver on his nuclear safety promises to the world**

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201309100026>

Cleaning up the consequences of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant is a challenge the government must tackle irrespective of the fact that Japan has won its bid to host the 2020 Summer Olympics.

In the selection process leading to the International Olympic Committee's decision to choose Tokyo as the host city for the Games, it became clear again that the world is taking a critical view of the way Japan is grappling with the challenge.

In the final presentation before the IOC vote, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe vowed to take responsibility for solving the problem of radioactive water accumulating at the crippled nuclear plant. In a news conference, he also pledged to reduce the share of nuclear power in Japan's overall energy mix and accelerate as much as possible the policy efforts to promote renewable energy sources and slash the nation's energy consumption in the next three years.

Abe made these promises to the international community. He needs to deliver on them if he doesn't want them to be seen both at home and abroad as a mere expedient for winning the right to host the Olympics. We are eager to see Abe get down to dealing with this serious problem as a top policy priority.

Speaking in Tokyo's final presentation to the IOC, Abe said, "Let me assure you the situation is under control." Responding to a question from an IOC member later, he said the effects of contaminated water are "completely blocked" within the harbor of the nuclear plant. Both his speech and answers to questions at the IOC session in Buenos Aires were clear and articulate.

Abe's remarks went down well with IOC members, who are not necessarily well versed in issues related to nuclear accidents, and helped win their votes for Tokyo.

But Abe's words probably sounded hollow to the ears of people who have witnessed the government's confused responses in the face of the grave damage caused by radiation.

To be sure, the Abe administration has established a system in which the government will take the initiative in dealing with the problem of polluted water. But it remains to be seen whether the system will work effectively and stem the spread of contamination.

Already, many tough technological challenges facing the government have been pointed out. Data has emerged to indicate the possibility that contaminated water has reached underground water. Some other unexpected problems may be in store for the government.

Even if the government manages to solve the polluted water crisis, it will then face an even more formidable challenge: decommissioning the reactors at the plant.

It would be totally unacceptable for the government to try to cover up the seriousness of the situation in its eagerness to stress safety and security. Nor must the government hesitate to take necessary measures out of fear of criticism.

The government must not forget that in order to win the trust of the international community, it needs to disclose all information about the situation and the actions it is taking. It must also humbly seek help and advice from other countries in taking measures to solve the situation.

As for the new energy policy, Abe, since he took office last December, has repeatedly made remarks that indicate his desire to revive nuclear power generation while offering no clear long-term policy vision.

Almost two and a half years have passed since the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima plant. How does the government intend to lower the nation's dependence on atomic energy? What kind of measures will it adopt to promote renewable energy and energy conservation? Abe has a duty to talk about his vision for the energy future of the nation and offer concrete plans to achieve policy goals.

We can truly celebrate Tokyo's successful bid to host the Olympics only if it gives a boost to the government's efforts to guide the nation in the right direction.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Sept. 10

DPJ challenges Abe's safety claims

September 13, 2013

Opposition DPJ takes aim at Abe's contaminated water comments at IOC meet

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130913p2a00m0na017000c.html>

The opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) is challenging Prime Minister Shinzo Abe over his Sept. 7 claim in front of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that the contaminated water leaks at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant are "under control."

DPJ Secretary General Akihiro Ohata, head of his party's contaminated water policy headquarters, stated at a Sept. 12 news conference that he will hold a meeting with his counterparts from the other opposition parties as early as next week. He added that he intends to demand that the ruling Liberal Democratic

Party (LDP) and New Komeito launch an inquiry into Abe's claims before the beginning of an upcoming extraordinary Diet session.

The DPJ's contaminated water headquarters members are scheduled to meet in Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, on Sept. 13.

"The prime minister must back up his claim that the (radioactive water) problem is under control," Ohata said on Sept. 12. "The government has a responsibility to explain this statement to the people of Fukushima Prefecture and indeed the entire country." If the ruling parties do not investigate during the current Diet recess, Ohata said that the DPJ would push to accelerate the opening of the extraordinary Diet session, currently scheduled for October.

The DPJ created its contaminated water policy headquarters in late August this year. Since then, over the course of three hearings, the HQ has questioned officials from Fukushima plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and government agencies related to the water issue. Ohata said that witnesses have broken with the official line on the problem on a number of occasions, including stating that the planned wall of frozen soil to prevent the inflow of groundwater onto the plant site is "technically very difficult."

One attendee apparently also told the HQ, "The prime minister suggested that the effects (of the radioactive water) were being stopped completely, but there are still significant risks."

Despite these doubts, however, Ohata said on Sept. 12, "Now that the government has decided on the ice wall plan, we'd like to see it implemented so we can get at least some results."

The DPJ was also involved with the contaminated water problem when the party was in power, making the party fearful of attacking the ruling coalition on the issue. After what party executives called Abe's "unfounded" statements before the IOC, however, sentiment within the DPJ shifted in favor of challenging the prime minister.

"Even if we take flak from the ruling parties because of our own involvement, we will put up a fight," one senior DPJ executive told the Mainichi."

Meanwhile, an ex-advisor to former Prime Minister Naoto Kan who organized plans for an underground water barrier in 2011 told an Aug. 30 meeting of the DPJ contaminated water HQ that the technique is not likely to succeed.

"If the contamination is widespread, then the (frozen soil) method cannot be used," said former prime ministerial advisor Sumio Mabuchi.

Mabuchi first included an underground barrier plan in a June 2011 nuclear disaster resolution work schedule under the heading, "mid-term issues for consideration." According to Mabuchi, by that point he had already worked with TEPCO staff to fine-tune clay barrier plans, including drawing up diagrams. Originally, there were four techniques considered for the subterranean barrier, including the ice wall, but Mabuchi and TEPCO staff eventually settled on a clay solution.

The plan was never actually announced because TEPCO was worried of its possible impact on the markets. However, when Mabuchi met with then TEPCO Vice President Sakae Muto on June 13, 2011, both men agreed the barrier should be given the go-ahead "without delay." According to Mabuchi, it was understood at the time that widespread radioactive contamination would make an ice barrier impossible to execute.

Diet finally meeting on leak (end of Sept)

September 13, 2013

Diet committee to hold radioactive water leak meeting by month's end

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

IWAKI, Fukushima Prefecture--The Diet's Lower House Economy, Trade and Industry Committee has decided to call a special meeting by the end of this month over the radioactive water leaks at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The committee, which discusses budget issues over the cleanup effort, decided to hold the special session as early as Sept. 27 after conducting an on-site inspection of the Fukushima No. 1 plant on Sept. 12, and after it met with local fishermen and their representatives.

"We have already started working to hold the meeting by the end of this month ... at all costs," said Shigeyuki Tomita, the Diet committee's chairman and a lawmaker for New Komeito. He also indicated he will call on industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi as well as Naomi Hirose, president of Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the damaged plant, to attend the planned session.

Tomita also told reporters on Sept. 12, "I am satisfied with the schedule and timing on conducting the inspection."

The Diet committee plans to set an exact date for the meeting after Tomita returns from an overseas trip. Although the Diet is currently not in session, there are mechanisms in place that allow for the holding of committee sessions on matters of urgency.

The committee on Aug. 30 first started considering holding a special session on the radioactive leak issue. But it decided to push back the meeting in an apparent bid to avoid negative publicity ahead of the Sept. 7 vote by the International Olympic Committee on which city would host the 2020 Summer Games.

The same day as the on-site inspection, members of the Lower House Committee also attended a meeting with officials from the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations.

Tetsu Nozaki, head of the federation, demanded the Diet committee make the radiation leak issue top priority.

"We are aware that you have a lot to discuss, such as securing energy sources for the nation, but we call on you to find countermeasures against the Fukushima nuclear accident," Nozaki said at the meeting.

Another federation official said, "We understand the 2020 Tokyo Olympics is one of the most important projects for Japan, but if the Diet delays dealing with these issues afflicting Fukushima Prefecture, the prefecture will suffer." He then added, "Whether we will be able to survive or not depends on how you, our lawmakers, deal with the problem."

Fisheries cooperatives in Fukushima Prefecture earlier postponed their initial plans to start in early September test fishing operations due to the radioactive water that continues to leak into the ocean from the stricken nuclear facility. The Soma-Futaba fisheries cooperative association decided on Sept. 12 to resume test fishing operations off the prefecture by the end of this month.

"The radioactive water leak issue is reported in newspapers and TV day after day," a third fisheries federation official told the members of the Lower House Committee. "We hope you will discuss measures on how to convince consumers that our fisheries products are safe."

The committee chairman, Tomita, said he accepted their words with sincerity.

(This article was written by Yuki Nikaido and Shinya Sugizaki.)

Leakage is not under control

September 13, 2013

TEPCO official denies Abe's claim that nuclear crisis is 'under control'

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309130063>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A senior official of the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on Sept. 13 disputed Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's assertion to International Olympic Committee members that the Fukushima crisis is under control, which helped Tokyo land the 2020 Summer Games.

"We regard the current situation as not being under control," Kazuhiko Yamashita, an executive officer of Tokyo Electric Power Co., told a meeting in Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture. The meeting was held by the opposition Democratic Party of Japan's task force on radioactive water issues.

The comment contradicts the well-publicized assurance that Abe gave at an IOC general meeting in Buenos Aires on Sept. 7, before Tokyo was selected as the host city for the 2020 Games.

"Let me assure you the situation is under control," Abe told the IOC.

Hironori Nakanishi, director-general for Energy and Technological Policy at the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, attended the meeting in Koriyama on Sept. 13 and promised he will make his best efforts to resolve the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

"From now on, we will work hard to control the situation," Nakanishi said.

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

TEPCO official: Leakage 'not under control'

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130913_36.html

A senior official from the Tokyo Electric Power Company has acknowledged that the radioactive water leakage at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi plant is not under control.

The government's top spokesman later said the assessment does not contradict Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's statement, delivered internationally, that the situation in Fukushima is under control.

TEPCO official Kazuhiko Yamashita was speaking at a hearing on Friday in Koriyama City, Fukushima Prefecture. The session was organized by the opposition Democratic Party, with officials from the government and TEPCO taking part.

Yamashita apologized for the radioactive water leaks, saying that what's happening now goes beyond TEPCO's assumptions.

A lawmaker asked if Yamashita agrees with Abe's statement made last Saturday at a general meeting of the International Olympic Committee in Buenos Aires.

Yamashita replied that he believes the current situation is not under control.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga later told a news conference that he heard Yamashita made the comment after being pressed several times for an answer.

Suga said government officials have confirmed with TEPCO that Yamashita was speaking in reference to independent incidents, including a leak of radioactive wastewater from a storage tank at the plant.

Suga said that even if such independent incidents take place, multi-layered steps will be taken to prevent the radioactive water from contaminating the ocean.

Suga said it is true that tainted water has leaked from a tank. But he said workers' patrols of storage tanks have been increased from once to 4 times per day, as part of all-out efforts to urgently deal with the problem.

TEPCO: Leaks not under control

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/newsline/201309132205.html>

TEPCO: Leaks not under control

NHK video aired on Sept.13, 2013

G0v't tries downplaying Abe's assurance

September 14, 2013

Government denies TEPCO adviser contradicted Abe's radioactive water remark

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309140065>

The government downplayed a potentially damaging remark that contradicted Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's assurance to an international audience that the radioactive water problem at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant is under control.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga on Sept. 13 denied there were discrepancies between the words of Abe and Kazuhiko Yamashita, a technology adviser to Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the stricken Fukushima plant.

“The effects of radioactive materials are confined within the plant’s harbor,” Suga told a news conference. “Abe said the situation is under control, meaning that steps will be taken to prevent the radioactive water from affecting the ocean.”

Suga was responding to the remarks that Yamashita made at a meeting of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan in Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, earlier in the day.

“Predictable risks are under control, but what cannot be predicted is happening,” Yamashita said. “We believe that the current conditions show that (the radioactive water problem) is not under control.”

In a speech at an International Olympic Committee meeting in Buenos Aires on Sept. 7 before members picked Tokyo to host the 2020 Games, Abe said, “The situation is under control,” referring to the problem of radioactive water at the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

The prime minister also said the effects of radioactive water have been “completely blocked” within a 0.3-square-kilometer area in the plant’s harbor.

Suga said Yamashita was speaking about individual incidents, such as a recent leak from a storage tank, not the overall issue of radioactive water.

In August, TEPCO workers discovered a leak of an estimated 300 tons of radioactive water from a storage tank. Part of the water is believed to have flowed into the ocean through a ditch, while the remainder appears to have seeped into the ground and contaminated soil and groundwater.

The government also estimates that 300 tons of radioactive water flow into the ocean daily. TEPCO says few radioactive materials have been detected outside the harbor, but that is apparently because they have been diluted.

TEPCO followed the line of the prime minister’s office.

“The prime minister spoke to the effect that contamination is confined within the harbor and that no rise in (radioactive) concentrations has been detected in the sea near the plant,” Masayuki Ono, acting general manager of the utility’s Nuclear Power and Plant Siting Division, told a news conference Sept. 13. “We have the same perception as the prime minister.”

TEPCO carried a statement on its website, saying that the company shares Abe's view.

The company said Yamashita meant that the leak from the storage tank and other issues are not under control.

But confidence in Abe's assurance could be undermined because Yamashita effectively refuted it by using the same words. Yamashita's remarks also showed that the government and TEPCO are not necessarily united in their assessment of the situation at the plant.

Concerns about the radioactive water leaks at the Fukushima No. 1 plant were overshadowing Tokyo's bid to host the 2020 Games, prompting Abe to give his speech at the IOC meeting to dispel such fears.

But according to sources, even Abe wondered whether saying "under control" could backfire on him until shortly before the speech. He decided to use the phrase because he believed that strong language was necessary to emphasize safety.

Only a few aides decided on the expression, leaving no time to consult with TEPCO in advance, the sources said.

The DPJ plans to go on the offensive in the Diet against Abe, who also told the IOC meeting, "I will take responsibility for deciding on a program to resolve the (radioactive water) issue once and for all."

"This calls the prime minister's responsibility into question," DPJ Secretary-General Akihiro Ohata told reporters Sept. 13. "We will demand clear explanations."

A senior DPJ official also said, "We want to turn the extraordinary Diet session into one focusing on the problem of radioactive water."

Lower House member Sumio Mabuchi, who has worked on the issue, is expected to spearhead the party's efforts to pursue the government's responsibility.

Abe has started preparations to visit the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on Sept. 19.

Japan criticised at IAEA meeting

September 17, 2013

Experts at IAEA meet criticize Japan for ongoing problems at Fukushima

Kyodo, JJI

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/17/national/experts-at-iaea-meet-criticize-japan-for-ongoing-problems-at-fukushima/#.UjhfYj95ivM>

VIENNA – The government Monday came under criticism from some nuclear experts at a briefing held on the sidelines of the U.N. nuclear watchdog's annual assembly over its attempt to stem the leak of radioactive water at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

At the meeting called by the government, a Slovenian expert said all Japan has been doing for a long period of time was storing contaminated water in tanks, questioning whether it has found a solution to the problem.

A French expert highlighted that the government sometimes did not immediately disclose information about leakage cases. The expert said Japan could have publicized information promptly and accurately through avenues such as Twitter.

Japanese officials said it takes time to identify locations of leaks and to block them. They also said that the government has considered releasing groundwater from mountains to the sea in order to reduce water flowing into reactor buildings, but has faced oppositions from fishermen concerned about radioactive contamination.

Japan has sought to enhance transparency in order to win the trust of the international community, the officials said.

The briefing was held on the fringe of the annual general conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency that opened Monday in Vienna.

At the power plant crippled by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster in Fukushima Prefecture, about 400 tons of groundwater has been flowing into reactor buildings every day, creating a new source of pollution.

At the conference Ichita Yamamoto, Japan's science and technology policy minister, tried to ease international concerns about continued leaks of radioactive water, assuring Tokyo's full commitment to contain the tainted water crisis.

Yamamoto also pledged to redouble efforts to provide the international community with accurate information on the problem at the plant.

In his speech on the first day of the five-day annual gathering, Yamamoto said the Japanese government regards tackling the water crisis as its "most urgent task" and intends to spend ¥47 billion on necessary measures.

He also stressed Japanese water and food are safe to eat and drink thanks to stringent safety standards adopted after the nuclear accident. Effects of the water leaks are limited to a 0.3-sq. km area inside the Fukushima plant's port, Yamamoto said in line with the government's official view, pointing out radiation levels in seawater outside the port are lower than safety limits for drinking water set by the World Health Organization.

The minister called for the international community's cooperation with Japan in sorting out the water problem and decommissioning tsunami-ravaged nuclear power reactors.

It is necessary to establish a global cooperation system that brings together technology and expertise from all over the world because the work to end the water crisis and the reactor decommissioning project needs to overcome unprecedented challenges, he said.

At the meeting, IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano expressed the organization's readiness to extend assistance to Japan, saying the water leak problem is "a matter of high priority that needs to be addressed urgently."

Japanese too have doubts

September 16, 2013

66% of Japanese doubtful about PM's 'under control' comment on Fukushima plant: Mainichi survey**

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130916p2a00m0na006000c.html>

Sixty-six percent of people surveyed by the Mainichi Shimbun say they don't believe Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Sept. 7 claim before the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that the situation of radioactive water accumulating at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant is under control.

The poll conducted Sept. 14-15 showed ongoing public concern over the radioactively contaminated water leaking from the Fukushima No. 1 plant, despite the government's insistence on the legitimacy of Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga's claim that the toxic water and its impacts are being held "inside the plant's port."

Only 8 percent of respondents said they believe Abe's Sept. 7 comments that radioactive water is "completely blocked," while 24 percent answered they're not sure.

Even among those who support the Abe Cabinet, only 11 percent believe prime minister's remarks, while 58 percent said they don't think the situation at the Fukushima plant is under control.

On Sept. 13, a senior official of plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) admitted during a meeting with opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) lawmakers that the massive radioactive water buildup at the plant is "not under control." The DPJ's Acting Secretary-General Akira Nagatsuma criticized the prime minister in an NHK program on Sept. 15 for sending a false message to the world by saying the situation is under control.

Meanwhile, 86 percent of pollees said the government should take all actions necessary to contain the contaminated water, regardless of the cost.

Asked about the consumption tax hike from the current 5 percent to 8 percent scheduled for April 2014, 30 percent of respondents believe it should be raised as planned, while 25 percent want the hike phased in a point at a time, followed by 19 percent who believe the sales tax "should be raised, but the timing should be delayed." Some 22 percent were opposed to the sales tax hike, saying it should "remain at the current 5 percent."

Meanwhile, 72 percent favored a reduced tax rate on everyday necessities, up 3 percentage points from last month -- as against 23 percent who oppose such a move.

Responsibility

September 16, 2013



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Fukushima and the right to responsible government

Colin P. A. Jones argues that everyone must act to fix the ongoing nuclear crisis

by Colin P.A. Jones

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2013/09/16/issues/fukushima-and-the-right-to-responsible-government/#.Ujf-0z95ivM>

Reprinted dozens of times since it was first published in 1967, “The Legal Consciousness of the Japanese People” by the late Takeyoshi Kawashima is arguably the most influential book on Japanese law ever written.

One of Kawashima’s theories is that traditional Japanese society lacked a strong consciousness of rights. After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, when the government started translating Western legal codes to use for Japanese laws, there wasn’t even a Japanese term that could be used to express the concept of a “right,” so a new one had to be invented. With this cultural foundation, notwithstanding the introduction of Western-style courts and legal codes, the notion of using the former to assert rights under the latter never really took root.

Non-litigiousness remains an integral part of the “Japan is different” canon that Japanese people recount to foreigners and each other. While Kawashima’s explanation has been influential and merits attention, it is due some skepticism as well. I consider it noteworthy that just a few years after the Meiji Restoration, the new government created a statute of limitations. This suggests that whether or not the average Japanese person thought about asserting their rights, from a very early stage the nation’s leaders saw a need to restrict their ability to do so.

Interestingly, a subject that Kawashima barely mentions is that of responsibility. This is odd, since to recognize a right also implies a responsibility — on the part of a court or other government actor — to define and enforce that right. Kawashima posited that because of a culture of “wa” (harmony), Japanese people avoid “black and white” resolutions to disputes, preferring mediated compromises. From the standpoint of the court or other government authorities charged with resolving a dispute, mediated results have the benefit of leaving them free of responsibility for the substantive outcome. Cultural notions of wa can thus be recast as a mechanism by which government officials can exercise authority while minimizing the responsibility associated with doing so.

This is perfectly rational behavior: Most people, given the choice, would probably maximize their authority while minimizing their responsibility for its exercise, particularly if the rewards for taking more responsibility than necessary and succeeding were nil while the punishments for failure were significant.

Japanese bureaucratic organizations are said to base their personnel evaluations on a system of “gentenshugi,” meaning that advancement in the civil service is generally done in lock-step, with officials losing points for failures rather than gaining them for successes. Full marks are given for doing nothing wrong, or perhaps doing nothing at all.

In the Japan of yore, responsibility could hurt — seppuku is the traditional archetype of atonement for official failure. The first national penal code enacted by the Meiji government was based on models taken

from Imperial China and derived from Confucian legal principles (the current penal code is based on German models but was not adopted until 1907). Under these early laws a judge who sentenced someone improperly was subject to the same punishment as they had wrongly meted out, including execution! There quickly developed a practice of judges pre-clearing their judgments with the central government so that somebody else could share responsibility.

Avoiding and obfuscating responsibility seems to have become a very basic feature of Japanese governance. Given that bureaucrats actually draft most of the laws that they end up administering, it is unsurprising that the resulting rules often make it hard to pin down who is actually responsible for anything. And while the Constitution vests in the Japanese people the power to remove public servants, the laws governing the public service make it almost impossible to do so in practice.

This fuzziness extends to the top of government. Even when the locus of responsibility seems clear, practices have developed that either obfuscate it or render it symbolic. We could start with the Emperor, who promulgates laws and performs other official acts but only in a symbolic capacity, and always in accordance with the advice and consent of the Cabinet, which in turn theoretically always acts based on unanimous decisions. Even laws empowering the prime minister to act alone have been interpreted as requiring Cabinet approval. Elected politicians circulate through Cabinet posts like plates of cheap sushi, rarely staying long enough to accomplish let alone be responsible for anything. Most legislation is drafted by bureaucrats, submitted by the Cabinet and passed by the Diet. Who is responsible for the end product? Good question!

In any event, it is almost impossible to challenge the laws or hold the people who make and administer them to account since the courts are exceptionally deferential to the legislative and executive branches. Judges are kept safely anonymous through frequent transfers in the lower courts and frequent turnover at the Supreme Court. Most elite bureaucrats are also transferred among posts so often that they are almost impossible to link to any particular policy or project.

Yet it would be wrong to just brand Japanese government institutions as completely irresponsible. Rather, the means of holding a member responsible for bad judgments are internalized as part of the rules and discipline governing the hierarchy to which they belong, with mechanisms for outsiders to assert responsibility — to assert rights — being minimized and neutralized whenever possible. For example, the constitution provides for the impeachment of judges, but most of the few impeachments that have occurred were cases in which a complaint was brought by ... the Supreme Court.

This brings us to Tokyo Electric Company (Tepco).

When reporting on events at the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the Japanese media dutifully refers to it as a Tepco facility, reinforcing the notion that only the troubled utility is to blame. But any

normal company in the same situation would have been rendered insolvent ages ago, leaving the whole mess for the government to fix. This would have been a perfectly logical result — Tepco was merely operating the plant in accordance with the government’s energy strategy and supposedly rigorous set of safety regulations.

Whether Tepco was ever a normal company, it certainly isn’t now that it is majority-owned by the **Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund**, a quasi-governmental entity created shortly after the Great East Japan Earthquake, ostensibly to help resolve damage claims arising from the Fukushima meltdown. It has done so by propping up Tepco financially, with critics suggesting that this Fund’s real agenda is to limit claims — the corporate form does, after all, exist for the specific purpose of limiting liability. And this is the Tepco whose lawyers famously argued in court that since it did not own the radioactive fallout strewn across people’s land, it was not responsible for the resulting damages. Although the Fund is supposed to act as an additional source of compensation funding, the arrangement still puts a buffer between the disaster and the public purse.

Compensation is “just” a matter of money. However, considering that it is also the Fund’s statutory mandate, its controlling interest in Tepco does not bode well for the prospects of Tepco being managed in a way that prioritizes actually fixing the stricken Fukushima plant — as opposed to being kept alive in a zombie-like state as an entity whose ability to compensate anyone will necessarily be limited by its cash flow. Perhaps that is convenient, too — kept alive, Tepco provides a useful, non-governmental blame nexus for everything bad that has happened to date and may happen in the all-too-near future.

If anything called for a nation’s government to quickly intervene actively on a massive scale and assume direct responsibility for a situation, it would be the crisis that continues to unfold 200 km from Tokyo. That a financially crippled, demoralized company bleeding talented employees is clearly not up to the task of remediating what could still prove to be the worst nuclear disaster in history should by now be obvious. Could anyone in a position of authority ever have responsibly expected otherwise?

Yet here we are 2½ years later, learning highly radioactive water has been leaking into the groundwater and the ocean and that storage tanks full of even more radioactive water are starting to fail. Surely it is a basic fact of life in nuclear power that fuel rods need to be kept cool whether sitting in a containment pool or melted through the reactor floor? The accumulation of radioactive water at the Fukushima plant was an utterly predictable problem almost from the day things first started to explode.

Tepco gets a failing grade here for sure, but what about the people expecting a single company to deal with a problem of such unprecedented magnitude in the first place? If there is still money for things such as bullet trains, and now — Olympic swimming pools. Surely fixing Fukushima would be an infrastructure project of similar magnitude worthy of pursuing as a matter of national urgency.

Recently the government finally announced that it will intervene directly in resolving the water problem, supposedly by turning the earth near the plant into a giant popsicle (and where will the power needed to keep the ground frozen come from again?). Such assertiveness on Fukushima by the government is long overdue, yet the amounts involved seem small given the scope and potential impact of the disaster — the yen equivalent of just a few hundred-million dollars. Furthermore, the government probably had to act because the leakage had clearly become a crisis, one ranked a 3 by the International Atomic Energy Agency on its 1-7 scale — just as the International Olympic Committee was making its decision on the 2020 Games.

While almost nobody looks forward to crises, they do have the merits of both requiring action and restricting options in a way that naturally limits responsibility for the results, because “what else could we do? It was an emergency.” Of course, few likely think this way in advance, but a crisis like water leakage at Fukushima certainly smacks of being a byproduct of the prolonged avoidance of responsible decision-making.

Don't be surprised if Tepco continues to remain the primary scapegoat for most of what happens at Fukushima and if the further crises develop, despite seeming predictable in hindsight.

For example, does Japan have an endless supply of workers willing to toil in dangerous conditions, and who have not already received the maximum dosage of radiation permitted by law? Chernobyl was contained by a Soviet leadership that drafted vast numbers of people — pilots, soldiers, engineers, miners — as part of a concentrated national response. Is it realistic to expect Tepco to fix Fukushima armed only with employment contracts and a powerful incentive to sacrifice compliance with those agreements and worker safety?

A great irony of the current political situation may be that fixing Fukushima is a concrete example of a crisis where many Japanese people might actually agree that the government should be able to exercise broad emergency powers of the type the Liberal Democratic Party wants to enshrine in a new constitution. Indeed, the absence of such powers may be one reason why the government seems so frustratingly passive.

However, to recognize Fukushima as a greater threat would entail admitting responsibility for the failed nuclear policies of the past, and make it that much harder to bring other plants back online, not to mention sully Tokyo's winning Olympic bid. So while Tepco keeps trying to patch radioactive holes that render parts of the Japanese mainland uninhabitable, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe seeks support for his authoritarian new constitution by emphasizing territorial disputes involving islands that were never inhabited in the first place.

It will probably take an imminent crisis for the government to resolve any of the serious problems facing the nation today — not just Fukushima, but the national debt, declining global competitiveness, the shrinking population and growing demographic imbalance.

Unfortunately, the historical precedents are not great. It took a double atom-bombing and (by some accounts) two separate admonitions by Emperor Hirohito for Japan's "leaders" to finally accept the Potsdam Declaration and end World War II. Of course, being constitutionally "sacred and inviolable," the Emperor could not be held responsible for anything.

We can't expect similar Deus ex Machina resolutions to Fukushima or anything else. Japan is supposedly a democracy, so in theory a responsibility-shirking government is ultimately the people's problem — and responsibility — just as much as the nuclear disaster and all the nation's other problems. Fortunately the people have a plentiful supply of other targets to blame until enough of them come to that realization.

Colin P. A. Jones is a professor at Doshisha Law School in Kyoto. Send comments and ideas to community@japantimes.co.jp.

Information on nukes as national secret or not ?

September 19, 2013

Anti-leak bill to exclude nuclear plants

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130919_13.html

A senior Japanese official says the government will not designate information on the country's nuclear power plants as national secrets that require strict confidentiality.

An advisor to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Yosuke Isozaki, appeared on a TV program on Wednesday. He explained a government plan for a legislation to protect classified information.

The bill says information that could gravely compromise national security will be designated as special secrets.

Public officials who leak them will face prison terms of up to 10 years.

The government aims to enact the bill at the extraordinary session of the Diet later this year.

Isozaki pledged that the government will never designate information related to nuclear plants as special secrets, even if there is concern that the information may fall into the hands of terrorists.

Some members of Japan's junior coalition partner, the New Komeito party, are requesting that the bill stipulate the guarantee of the freedom of the press and the people's right to know.

Civic groups are voicing concern that information the government considers inconvenient will not be made public.

Sep. 19, 2013 - Updated 02:08 UTC

Abe visits Fukushima Daiichi

Abe visits Fukushima nuclear plant amid toxic water problem

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130919p2g00m0dm080000c.html>

OKUMA, Japan (Kyodo) -- Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited the severely damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant Thursday in northeastern Japan to inspect efforts to contain the leaks of radioactive water accumulating on the premises amid global concerns about the problem.

It was Abe's first visit to the plant in Fukushima Prefecture since a trip last December shortly after he took office. The inspection is designed to demonstrate his desire to take the lead in handling the crisis, officials said.

Clad in protective gear, the premier is expected to view the area where leaks of toxic water have been confirmed. He will also hear explanations from plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co., which has been struggling to deal with the problem.

The contaminated water has been increasing daily as a result of continuing water injections into the three reactors that suffered meltdowns in the wake of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Abe has said the government will play a major role in tackling the problem, including budgetary spending on necessary measures, and will not leave the issue to Tokyo Electric alone.

He is apparently hoping to show the government is actively involved in handling the crisis especially after Tokyo recently won the right to host the 2020 Summer Olympics. The capital is some 250 kilometers southwest of the plant.

In a presentation as part of the capital's bid before the International Olympic Committee earlier this month, Abe said of the toxic water problem that "the situation is under control" and offered assurances that there "will never be health problems."

But the remark raised the eyebrows of critics, who consider the government has been slow in handling the problem.

Water shielding plan dates June 2011

September 18, 2013

Made in Japan: Workers prepare to take apart a flange-type water tank at the Fukushima No. 1 plant Friday. Several of the tanks, which are prone to leaks, will be disassembled as part of the beleaguered utility's probe into the mysterious disappearance of 300 tons of radioactive water from one of its more than 1,000 storage tanks this summer. | TEPCO/AFP-JIJI



National

Tepco ditched soil-freezing solution in '11

Fears of stirring up stock market killed water plan early in crisis

Jiji, Kyodo

Tokyo Electric Power Co. initially put off a plan to create frozen-soil groundwater shields at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant after being cowed by the cost, a former senior government official revealed Wednesday.

Earlier this month, the government vowed to spend ¥32 billion on building underground walls by freezing soil around the reactor buildings to prevent groundwater from seeping into the basement levels.

Tepco was initially scheduled to announce the water shielding plan on June 14, 2011, about three months after the nuclear crisis started, Sumio Mabuchi, a senior member of the Democratic Party of Japan, said at a party meeting.

As an aide to Naoto Kan, prime minister during the early stages of the unprecedented emergency, Mabuchi was put in charge of the water shielding plan at the time.

Tepco asked then industry minister Banri Kaieda, currently leader of the DPJ, to postpone the announcement as the utility was concerned about how the stocks market would react to the ¥100 billion or so in funds it would require, Mabuchi said.

The government agreed to put off the announcement to avoid disrupting the market, Mabuchi explained. Mabuchi said he obtained then-Tepco Executive Vice President Sakae Muto's confirmation that the utility would proceed with the water shielding plan without delay.

At the DPJ meeting Wednesday, however, Junichi Matsumoto, a senior Tepco official, denied there was confirmation by Muto.

At the end of May, a government panel adopted the project as the best way to reduce radioactive groundwater at the plant. Industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi told Tepco to go ahead with the project, which involves building a 1.4-km barrier of frozen soil by sinking cooling pipes around reactor buildings 1 to 4.

It will be the first state funds injection aimed at helping Tepco prevent the groundwater from mixing with radioactive water leaking from the reactor buildings.

Water problem could have been tackled two years ago

September 18, 2013

TEPCO failed to meet promise on water barriers

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130918_28.html

A onetime advisor to former Prime Minister Naoto Kan has revealed that the operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant promised 2 years ago to build fences to block radioactive water leaks at the plant, but failed to deliver on the promise.

Democratic Party of Japan executive member Sumio Mabuchi told a party meeting on Wednesday that Tokyo Electric Power Company agreed with the DPJ-led government in June 2011 to build shields around the reactor buildings.

Soon after the crisis at the plant began in March 2011, Mabuchi was helping the government respond to the situation as an advisor to the prime minister.

Mabuchi says TEPCO asked the government not to announce the agreement about building the fences, saying that the company was worried the 1 billion dollar construction cost would add to its debt and lead to market confusion.

He says the government agreed not to publicize the deal.

Mabuchi says TEPCO then promised it would honor the agreement by building the fences immediately, but it did not carry out the work.

Sep. 18, 2013 - Updated 08:21 UTC

September 18, 2013

TEPCO delayed tackling radioactive water in 2011 due to bankruptcy fears

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309180063>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tokyo Electric Power Co. put off dealing with radiation-contaminated water at its crippled nuclear power plant more than two years ago because it feared the cost of fixing the problem could bankrupt the utility.

While TEPCO has grudgingly admitted it was concerned about facing bankruptcy, two lawmakers have told The Asahi Shimbun that the utility feared it would go under if it went ahead with the project.

The decision taken at the time apparently led to a delay in dealing with the radioactive water issue that has now reached crisis proportions.

The two Democratic Party of Japan lawmakers were closely involved in dealing with the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant triggered by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

One of them is Banri Kaieda, who became DPJ president in 2012. At the time he served as minister of economy, trade and industry and was in charge of nuclear energy policy. The other lawmaker was Sumio Mabuchi who served as special adviser to Naoto Kan, who was then prime minister. Mabuchi was in charge of dealing with the nuclear accident

.
He said he became aware early on that steps had to be taken to deal with radiation-contaminated water.

In May 2011, just two months after the nuclear disaster unfolded, TEPCO realized that groundwater was becoming contaminated after flowing into reactor buildings. To prevent the contaminated water from leaking outside of the buildings, Mabuchi put together a report that called for constructing an impermeable steel wall sunk into the ground surrounding the structures.

However, TEPCO the following month came up with an estimate that 100 billion yen (\$1 billion) would be needed to do that.

According to the lawmakers, a top TEPCO executive around that time said, "If we included the 100 billion yen construction cost as a liability, the market would consider us a company in danger of bankruptcy."

He also noted that the company was to hold a shareholders' meeting at the end of the month.

The executive asked Kaieda to be vague at a news conference about when construction on the impermeable wall would start or how much it would cost.

The DPJ government was taking the position that TEPCO bore full responsibility for the nuclear accident and it did not make a decision to inject public funds for the project.

However, Kaieda eventually concluded that if TEPCO went bankrupt it would delay payment of compensation to evacuees. He was also concerned about the payment of salaries to workers at the nuclear plant site.

He told TEPCO he would announce at a news conference that construction of the wall would be a medium- to long-term objective that would be seriously considered only from the following year.

Mabuchi said he accepted Kaieda's decision because of a verbal pledge made by Sakae Muto, then a TEPCO executive vice president, that work on the wall would proceed without delay.

A group of plaintiffs who had been seeking criminal responsibility on the part of former TEPCO executives publicized an internal company document that said: "There is a big possibility that the market would hand down the appraisal that we were heading in the direction of excess liabilities. That is something that we must definitely avoid."

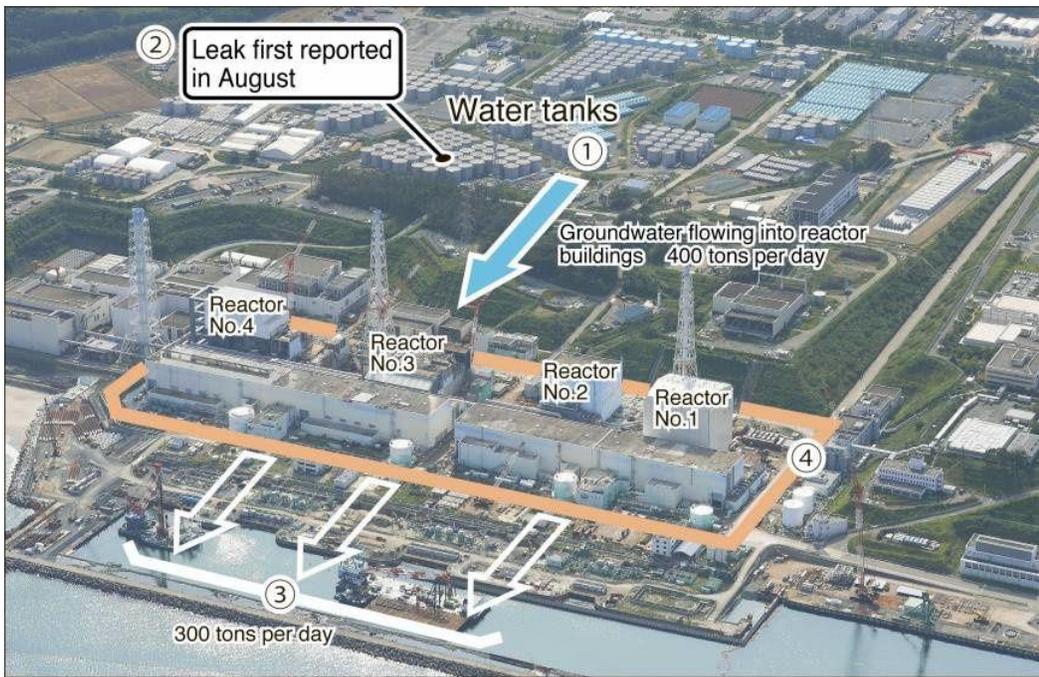
TEPCO officials have also admitted to the compilation of that document.

In response to a question from The Asahi Shimbun, a TEPCO official said on Sept. 17: "The reason construction was not started did not pertain to costs, but because it was unclear whether it was feasible due to the many technical issues that arose related to the impermeable wall. There were concerns about including costs for such a project as a liability."

What is Gov't going to do about the water crisis?

September 19, 2013

1) Tepco estimates 1,000 tons of groundwater enters the area around reactors 1 to 4 at Fukushima No. 1 each day; 400 tons is believed to reach the reactor building basement levels. 2) On Aug. 19, Tepco found 300 tons had leaked from a tank in this area. Of about 1,060 water tanks there, 350 are similar flange-type tanks, which are less durable than welded ones. 3) Tepco believes a maximum of 300 tons of tainted water is seeping into the sea every day. 4) Tepco plans to create a wall of frozen soil around the reactors by March 2015 to keep the groundwater out. | KYODO



National / Politics

Abe mum on plan for contaminated water crisis

Tepco president sets fiscal 2014 deadline for filtering stored coolant

by Reiji Yoshida

Staff Writer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/19/national/abe-mum-on-plan-for-water-crisis/#.Ujs6QVNSb9k>

OKUMA, FUKUSHIMA PREF. – Wearing a protective suit to guard against radioactive contamination, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe entered the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant Thursday to inspect the desperate effort to stop tainted water from entering the soil and the Pacific.

Abe visited the site in an apparent publicity stunt to demonstrate his determination to get the water crisis under control. An estimated 300 tons of contaminated groundwater is believed to be flowing into the ocean every day, and experts say the more than 1,000 storage tanks overlooking the site pose an even greater hazard.

During his two-hour visit to the facility, Abe viewed a storage tank that recently lost a sizable amount of highly contaminated water. At least five of the plant's 350 flange-type water tanks have sprung leaks.

In the plant's reinforced headquarters, Abe thanked about 200 plant workers for "working under severe conditions" to address the water crisis.

"I have renewed my determination that the government should stand on the front line to carry out our responsibilities," he said.

Abe's visit followed controversial remarks he made on the water situation at Fukushima No. 1 during Tokyo's bid to win the 2020 Summer Olympic Games in Buenos Aires. During Tokyo's final pitch to the International Olympic Committee on Sept. 7, Abe declared that "the situation (at the Fukushima plant) is under control" and "effects from the contaminated water have been perfectly blocked within the (artificial) bay" next to the wrecked nuclear complex.

On Thursday, as he faced reporters after addressing the workers, Abe repeated the controversial remarks almost word for word, saying the "effects from the contaminated water have been perfectly blocked within the bay."

"By stating this clearly, I want to bring an end to harmful rumors about Fukushima," he asserted.

Despite Abe's assurances, Tepco has not been able to control the contaminated groundwater seeping into the sea nor the storage tank leaks that have cropped up in the past two months since the election.

"During the presentation for the Olympic Games, Prime Minister Abe told a lie," Teruhiko Mashiko, an Upper House member and vice president of the Democratic Party of Japan, said during a recent interview in Tokyo.

"This is a big problem. The government should invest more people, money and technologies to turn their lies into truths," Mashiko, who represents Fukushima Prefecture, said in an interview with The Japan Times.

Other government officials have parroted Abe's claims, citing tests showing that levels of radioactive materials in the artificial bay have stayed well within safety margins. But experts say the levels are probably low because the contaminants are being diluted and carried away by new seawater entering the bay, not because of measures being taken by Tepco or the government.

On Thursday, Abe said he asked Tepco President Naomi Hirose to set a deadline for finishing filtering all the tainted water stored in tanks. He also urged Tepco to formally decide to decommission reactors 5 and

6 to free up their resources for the decommissioning of the entire plant. He did not elaborate on the request.

In response, Hirose promised to finish the filtering by the end of fiscal 2014 and make a decision on the two undamaged reactors by the end of the year, according to Abe. Unlike three of the older reactors, units 5 and 6 did not suffer core meltdowns but have been suspended since March 2011.

DPJ's Mashiko was long been concerned with the reliability of the holding tanks. Of the approximately 1,060 water tanks, around 350 are of the less durable flange type, rather than the sturdier welded type, including all five that sprung leaks.

Mashiko claimed that last spring that a local tank manufacturer warned that the tanks were of very bad quality and could suffer leaks within two years of construction.

According to Mashiko, the manufacturer was asked to build six low-cost tanks and take no more than a month to do it.

"The company turned down the offer because they only would have ended up constructing low-quality tanks under (bad) contract conditions," Mashiko said.

At recent news conferences in Tokyo, Tepco executive and spokesman Masayuki Ono has repeatedly refused to comment on Mashiko's account or reveal details of the contracts with construction companies to build the Fukushima water tanks. Ono would only say that Tepco won't disclose information on "contracts between private companies."

But many industry sources suspect that Tepco, short on money, may have bought low-quality tanks to reduce the ballooning costs of trying to clean up the shattered facility.

Mashiko said residents of Fukushima, in particular those in the fishery industry, have developed a deep distrust of Tepco, which has made it even harder for the utility to handle the crisis.

To reduce the tainted water, Tepco plans to drain groundwater from the hillside above before it mixes with the tainted water in the basement floors of the damaged reactor buildings. It then plans to discharge the water into the sea after confirming the density of radioactive materials is lower than safety standards.

However, the local fishing industry is staunchly opposed to the idea, fearing it would further damage perception of its seafood. Others say they can't even trust Tepco to release accurate information, Mashiko said.

For his part, Mashiko believes Tepco will eventually have to discharge the water into the sea to save the plant from the water crisis, as other experts say. But before that, the utility must first regain public trust, he said.

Abe's team has also drawn fire for not fully committing to solving the water problem. Earlier this month, his team decided to throw ¥47 billion at the water crisis to create an experimental wall of frozen soil around the reactor buildings within about two years to isolate them from the groundwater. What is not clear is how the giant refrigerator would be powered, or for how long.

But Abe's team has yet to provide money for other urgent tasks, such as bolstering or replacing the water tanks, perhaps out of fear of a voter backlash. People are already frustrated over hikes in electricity prices brought on by the nuclear shutdown, and Tepco is widely regarded as the main culprit behind the triple meltdown crisis and ensuing water problems.

A high-ranking official said the Abe Cabinet will maintain a certain distance from Tepco, saying the public has not yet developed a consensus on helping Tepco with taxpayer money.

What "frontline efforts"?

September 16, 2013

Be careful, or payback for nuclear disaster will be twice as grim

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130916p2a00m0na002000c.html>

Radiation-contaminated water from the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant is not "under control," as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has declared. No matter how you look at it, that phrase does not accurately represent the current state of affairs.

Because of the prime minister's distorted characterization of the situation, however, the Olympics are coming to Tokyo. This bitter truth is something that Tokyo, the country's biggest consumer of energy, must recognize.

There's no hope for success in the 2020 Olympic Games if we remain impervious to the injustice of relegating the handling of radioactive water to the disaster areas, while the Tokyo metropolitan area counts its Olympic business chickens before they've even hatched.

Injecting a mere 47 billion yen from the national budget toward tackling toxic water in Fukushima does not constitute the "front-line efforts" promised by the government. According to some estimates, Fukushima plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)'s underlying debt is expected to come out to some 15 trillion to 20 trillion yen -- levels exceeding what a private company can handle.

Despite this knowledge, the government has failed to take over because it continues to adhere to its unreasonable public position that power companies are liable for damages stemming from a disaster.

The result has been a massive moral hazard. The situation surrounding radiation decontamination is a prime example.

Under law, decontamination is technically a responsibility of the national government. However, that same law stipulates that the utility will "make efforts to pay for any costs" from bills or claims for compensation that it receives. This has effectively given administrative bodies free reign to commission decontamination work excessively, while sending the bills to TEPCO.

Decontamination workers are eligible for extra danger pay, which makes the job popular among subcontractors. Organized crime groups have gotten in on the action, too, seeking kickbacks.

The quagmire of compensation, decontamination, decommissioning and radioactive water appears interminable. There are no prospects for payments to be completed. Workers are exhausted and demoralized. "It is eternal hell," says a TEPCO executive, likening the situation to the eighth and most painful circle of Buddhist hells.

Critics say that TEPCO should follow in the footsteps of Japan Airlines Co. (JAL) and file for bankruptcy protection. They say that determining the responsibility of TEPCO's management, megabanks' lender liability, and the responsibility of government are a priority. And they are right.

However, the public funds necessary in the case of TEPCO are an order of magnitude greater than those for JAL. While JAL required 350 billion yen, TEPCO will need at least 5 trillion yen. The utility is in a bottomless pit of debt. Moreover, it is difficult to find the manpower, know-how and systems necessary to bring the disaster under control from sources outside of TEPCO.

Two and a half years have passed since the outbreak of the nuclear crisis, with the government neither shutting down nor buoying TEPCO, pumping a lot of but still not enough money into the utility. It has all been a stopgap measure that is now coming apart at the seams.

When Japan began developing nuclear technology half a century ago, it already knew that a nuclear disaster was not something a private corporation could handle on its own. In the U.S. and other industrialized countries, it is a given that the national government will provide compensation in the event of a crisis.

Japan, too, had planned on following this rule, until the then Ministry of Finance objected. As a result, the power companies were made liable.

What does it mean for the national government to make "front-line" efforts? First, it means that the government must acknowledge that the nuclear power plant is not under control. It must then let the public know point-blank that bringing the plant under control will take massive amounts of money.

If the government takes over responsibility for compensation, there will inevitably be an increased financial burden on the public. Distribution of financial burdens that will rectify the unfair burdens already shouldered by the disaster areas compared to areas of major power consumption will also have to

be considered. And more than anything, we must refrain from feeding into the simplistic notion that all will turn out fine if the Olympics stimulates the economy.

In the hit television series "Hanzawa Naoki," the protagonist, Naoki Hanzawa, a maverick banker during Japan's economic bubble, fights against his boss's corruption, scapegoating, and a culture of choosing peace at any cost. Under his policy of "doubling the payback if your enemies hurt you," he goes on to change the unjust realities of life.

If Japan lets its successful 2020 Olympics bid go to its head and continues to shrug off its responsibilities for the Fukushima plant, payback will be a truth twice as grim. (By Takao Yamada, Expert Senior Writer)

Has Abe dispelled speculation and concern?

September 20, 2013

Inose: Tainted water not necessarily under control

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130920_35.html

Tokyo Governor Naoki Inose says that the problem of radioactive water leaking from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant isn't necessarily under control.

Earlier this month, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared at the general assembly of the International Olympic Committee in Buenos Aires that the situation at Fukushima is under control.

The IOC chose Tokyo as the host city for the 2020 summer Olympics and Paralympics.

At a news conference on Friday, **Inose said the most important thing is that Abe expressed his determination to bring the situation under control.**

The governor praised Abe for dispelling widely spread speculation and concern about the leakage problem.

Inose added that he expects the central government to do all it can to solve the problem.

What will Gov't involvement mean?

September 20, 2013

INSIGHT: Abe takes political risk by stressing government in charge of Fukushima plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309200051>

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has raised the stakes in his gamble concerning the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

His visit to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on Sept. 19 was designed to reinforce the impression that the central government was taking charge of the situation. But by bringing greater attention to the accident, Abe has opened himself up to potential criticism if problems and setbacks continue to emerge in a cleanup process that has so far been anything but smooth.

Abe told workers at the plant site, "While the work you are doing is difficult, the future of Japan rests on your shoulders."

The fate of the Abe administration could also depend on the work there.

The prime minister made headlines by telling an International Olympic Committee meeting earlier in September that the problem of radiation-contaminated water at the Fukushima nuclear plant was under control.

After his reassuring words helped Tokyo win its bid to host the 2020 Summer Olympics, a technological adviser to the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., contradicted Abe's claim.

During his visit to the plant, Abe focused on efforts to prevent the contaminated water from leaking into the ocean. He was shown tanks that have been leaking radioactive water as well as the Alps multi-nuclide removal equipment, which can eliminate 62 radioactive substances from contaminated water.

He also observed the silt fences that were installed to stem the flow of water inside the harbor at the Fukushima plant site.

TEPCO officials explained that radioactive materials were often below detectable levels in waters outside of the harbor.

Abe asked the officials what constituted a range of 0.3 square kilometers in the harbor. He had cited that figure when he told IOC members that Tokyo would not be affected by the contaminated water problem.

After his visit to the nuclear plant, Abe again used that figure to emphasize that his understanding of the problem had not changed.

"The effects of contaminated water have been completely blocked within a range of 0.3 square kilometers within the harbor," he told reporters.

Although Abe used the term "blocked," the silt fences in the harbor cannot prevent all water from flowing out into the ocean. Radioactive materials pass through the silt fences and mix with the ocean, becoming so diluted that they are difficult to detect.

Even Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, the top government spokesman, said the measures at the Fukushima site are not stopping all of the water within the harbor.

Abe explained that his visit to Fukushima had been in the works for some time and was not added to his schedule because of the increased international attention to the situation.

During the visit, Abe instructed TEPCO President Naomi Hirose to decommission the No. 5 and 6 reactors of the plant and purify the contaminated water being stored in tanks at the site.

"We will secure an additional 1 trillion yen (\$10 billion) for decommissioning and complete purifying the contaminated water by the end of fiscal 2014," Hirose told Abe.

Some officials say the central government will inevitably have to pump in more public funds to deal with the Fukushima crisis now that it has put itself in charge of ending the contaminated water problem.

"The situation will likely arise in which the central government will also have to deal with decontaminating areas in Fukushima polluted by radioactive materials as well as constructing the interim storage facility for the removed soil," a source close to Abe said.

A former Cabinet minister said measures to address the various problems related to the Fukushima nuclear accident will have a major effect on the nation's fiscal condition.

Opposition parties plan to question how the government is handling the Fukushima situation.

"One thing we will have to think about in the future is what to do should the problem become drawn out," a high-ranking government official said.

(This article was written by Norihisa Hoshino and Tomoyoshi Otsu.)

Officials protest against Abe's "under control" comment

September 21, 2013

Namie town assembly protests PM Abe's 'under control' comment

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130921p2a00m0na008000c.html>

The town assembly of nuclear disaster-hit Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, passed a protest resolution against Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Sept. 20 for declaring the situation surrounding the radioactively contaminated water leaks at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant "under control."

The prime minister made the controversial comments during Tokyo's final presentation at the International Olympic Committee (IOC)'s general meeting in Buenos Aires on Sept. 7, saying, "Some may have concerns about Fukushima. Let me assure you, the situation is under control." He also said the effect of the water leak has been "completely blocked" within the 0.3 square kilometers of the plant's harbor.

The Namie Town Assembly unanimously passed the Sept. 20 protest resolution stating that there is a "serious problem" with Abe's remarks as they "contradict reality." The protest also calls the situation at the plant, where some 300 metric tons of radioactively contaminated water is leaking into the ocean every day, "serious."

"The situation has never been 'under control,' nor is the contaminated water 'completely blocked,'" the protest read.

Regarding Abe's claim that "there are no health-related problems until now, nor will there be in the future," the Namie resolution pointed out that there had been 1,459 deaths related to the triple disasters in Fukushima Prefecture thus far.

"We can't help but feel resentment against the government and plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co., both of which are disregarding Fukushima Prefecture," the protest stated.

The entire town of Namie has been designated as an evacuation zone since the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Local leaders criticize Abe for saying radioactive water leaks 'under control'

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309210057>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The governor of Tokyo and a local town assembly severely affected by the Fukushima disaster took issue with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's assurance to International Olympic Committee members earlier this month that the Fukushima nuclear crisis is "under control."

"We strongly protest (Abe's) irresponsible comment," the town assembly of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, said in an unanimously adopted opinion on Sept. 20 protesting Abe's assertion.

Before Tokyo was awarded the 2020 Olympics, and with growing international concern over the leakage of tons of radioactive contaminated water from the plant into the sea, Abe told the International Olympic Committee in Buenos Aires on Sept. 7, "Let me assure you, the situation is under control."

Although the IOC appears to have bought it, Abe's statement has raised criticism back home.

Abe's statement has "grave problems that fly in the face of the fact," added the opinion adopted by the Namie town assembly.

Two and a half years after the onset of the nuclear accident caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, all residents of Namie are still evacuees.

The opinion said the daily flow of 300 tons of polluted groundwater from the plant into the Pacific Ocean constitutes an "emergency."

It called on the central government to resolve the situation by retracting the government's declaration in December 2011 that the crisis is under control.

Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda had cited the state of cold shutdown of the reactors.

The opinion also stated that more than 290 people from the town have died as a result of the evacuations. "If Abe does not have an idea how stifling it is for people to be forced to evacuate, he should sincerely listen to what evacuees have to say," the opinion said.

In Tokyo, Governor Naoki Inose also countered Abe's claim that things are under control.

"(The leakage of contaminated water is) not under control necessarily at this stage," Inose told reporters Sept. 20 at a regular news conference. "It was very important for the central government to demonstrate its resolve to get things done right by providing funds for it (at the IOC committee). Officials should strive toward resolving it."

Split TEPCO?

September 21, 2013

LDP bigwig pushes Tepco split to speed up Fukushima No. 1 decommissioning

Kyodo

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/21/national/ldp-bigwig-pushes-tepco-split-to-speed-up-fukushima-no-1-decommissioning/#.Uj3os1M0_9k

A senior official of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party has proposed to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe that **Tepco be split up and a new company created to take charge of decommissioning the Fukushima No. 1 plant**, a party official said Saturday.

The plan, floated Wednesday by **Tadamori Oshima, head of the LDP committee on Tohoku's recovery from the 2011 disasters**, could speed up decommissioning work while allowing Tokyo Electric Power Co. to focus on compensating those affected by the nuclear crisis and on its primary business, the official said.

Of the six reactors at Fukushima No. 1, Tepco is moving to dismantle No. 1 through 4, which were crippled by core meltdowns or hydrogen explosions in March 2011. Abe on Thursday urged Tepco to also scrap the No. 5 and 6 units, which didn't suffer any major structural damage.

Under the plan proposed by Oshima, a former vice president of the LDP, Tepco employees engaged in cleanup efforts and decommissioning work at Fukushima No. 1 would be transferred to the new entity, which would be primarily funded by the government.

Observers, however, say the idea may face resistance from some quarters for its potential to confuse the responsibilities of Tepco and the government over the plant's decommissioning.

The LDP committee is expected to compile a formal proposal based on Oshima's plan in the near future. But it may also include other options, such as setting up a new government agency or an independent administrative body for the dismantling of Fukushima No. 1, the official said.

Abe - and most media - ignore the seriousness of the problem

September 20, 2013

EDITORIAL: Abe should confront the reality of Fukushima radiation leaks

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309200051>

In the wee hours of Sept. 20, a strong earthquake measuring a 5-plus on the Japanese seismic scale struck Fukushima Prefecture. Its epicenter was in the Hamadori area in the eastern part of the prefecture, where the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant is located.

Even though it caused no damage to the some 1,000 storage tanks within the plant that are filled with radioactive water, the quake must have given many people a chill.

On the previous day, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited the crippled plant and reiterated his view about the effects of contaminated water, saying they had been "completely blocked" within a certain range.

But he is overoptimistic if he really believes what he said about the problem.

He needs to appreciate the seriousness of the situation and make an all-out effort to prevent unforeseen disasters like massive leaks of contaminated water.

Symbolical of Abe's unwarranted optimism about what is going on at the plant is his claim that the situation is "under control."

He made the remark earlier this month in his presentation at a session of the International Olympics Committee, which helped Tokyo to be chosen as the host city for the 2020 Summer Games. After his statement was reported around the world, however, a senior executive of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the Fukushima plant, rebutted his argument, saying the situation was not under control.

During the International Atomic Energy Agency's annual general conference meeting held on Sept. 16-20 in Vienna, representatives of many countries raised questions about Abe's statement. China, for instance, voiced strong concerns about how things stand at the Fukushima complex.

Mindful of the international perceptions, Ichita Yamamoto, minister of science and technology policy, didn't use the phrase "under control" in his official speech at the IAEA meeting.

We are not demanding that the prime minister describe the situation with complete accuracy.

We are concerned that he may be confusing the goal with the reality. Efforts are certainly under way to put the radiation crisis "under control" and "completely block" the effects of polluted water. But that doesn't mean the situation is actually "under control" or that the effects are "completely blocked."

At the moment, how much radioactive water is flowing into the sea and what underground route it is taking to reach the sea can only be guessed. That means the situation is far from being "under control."

The prime minister's words carry great weight. If he voices an overoptimistic view about the current situation concerning leaks of contaminated water, the efforts to deal with the problem could be prematurely relaxed.

One big mistake concerning the problem was made by the previous administration of Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda. In December 2011, the Noda administration declared that the Fukushima nuclear crisis had been resolved.

But, in fact, only a stopgap system to pour water continuously onto melted reactor cores had been established.

As a result, the problem of polluted water accumulating at the plant dropped from the list of important topics of political debate and lost the attention of the general public.

News media should also do soul-searching over their failure to communicate the seriousness of the problem sufficiently to the public.

At the IAEA meeting, one inevitable question was raised. The problem of radioactive water accumulating at the Fukushima plant has been recognized from the beginning. Why is it that no serious effort has been made to find a solution for as long as two years?

British science magazine Nature takes a dim view of how the Japanese government, which has announced a plan to take over the cleanup, will cope with the crisis. "Given the government's past actions and information policies, one might doubt whether it would be any more competent than TEPCO at managing the situation and communicating it to the public," it commented in a recent issue.

The current situation of the crisis warrants no optimism. The Abe administration needs to honestly acknowledge the enormity of the challenge, and communicate its view and related information to audiences both at home and abroad. Then it should start taking steps to gain necessary knowledge and support from all over the world to tackle the challenge effectively.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Sept. 21

Nature magazine : Nuclear error

Nuclear error

Japan should bring in international help to study and mitigate the Fukushima crisis.

03 September 2013

<http://www.nature.com/news/nuclear-error-1.13667>

The radioactive water leaking from the site of the wrecked Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan is a stern reminder that we have not seen the end of the world's largest nuclear crisis since the Chernobyl meltdown in Ukraine in 1986. After an earthquake and tsunami crippled the Fukushima plant in March 2011, it became clear that efforts to decontaminate the area would be long-lasting, technically challenging and vastly expensive. Now it turns out that the task has been too big for the owner of the plant, the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO). The Japanese government on 3 September announced a plan to take over the clean-up, but its intervention is overdue.

In the two and a half years since the accident, TEPCO has repeatedly failed to acknowledge the nature and seriousness of problems with safeguarding nuclear fuels in the three destroyed reactors at Fukushima. Each day, some 400,000 litres of water are being funnelled into the reactor cores to prevent the rods from overheating. Only in recent months has TEPCO admitted that some contaminated water is leaking into the reactor basement and, through cracks in the concrete, into the groundwater and the adjacent sea. Few independent measurements of radiation exposure are available, and it is worryingly unclear how these leaks might affect human health, the environment and food safety. But the problems do not stop there. There are now almost 1,000 storage tanks holding the used cooling water, which, despite treatment at a purification system, contains tritium and other harmful radionuclides. The leaks make clear that this system is a laxly guarded time bomb.

It is no secret that pipes and storage tanks sealed with rubber seams have a habit of leaking. TEPCO's reliance on routine patrols to detect any leaks has been careless, if not irresponsible. That the company, in response to the latest incidents, intends to refit the tanks with sensors and extra safety controls just underlines the makeshift way in which the storage facilities were set up in the first place. Meanwhile, the fate of the constantly amassing polluted water is undecided. Proposals earlier this year to dump it into the sea understandably met with fierce opposition from local fisheries.

“An international alliance on research and clean-up would help to restore shattered public trust.”

Given the government's past actions and information policies, one might doubt whether it would be any more competent than TEPCO at managing the situation and communicating it to the public. Over the weekend, it turned out that radiation doses near the leaking tanks are 18 times larger than first reported: leakage that started as a mere 'anomaly' has turned into a genuine crisis. Japan should start consulting

international experts for help. The United States, Russia, France and the United Kingdom — to name but a few — all have know-how in nuclear engineering, clean-up and radiation health that would serve Japan well. An international alliance on research and clean-up would help to restore shattered public trust in the usefulness and effectiveness of monitoring and crisis-mitigation.

The most important impacts of the leaks will be those on the sea off Fukushima and the larger Pacific Ocean, which must be closely monitored. After assessments by US and Japanese scientists in 2011 and 2012, two major questions remain unanswered. How much radioactivity is still entering the sea? And, given the high levels of radioactivity that have been measured in some species long after the accident, when will fish and seafood from the region be safe to consume? The leaks make it more urgent to find answers to these questions.

To make reliable assessments of any environmental effects, scientists need to be able to collect data on contamination of marine food webs with all long-lived radionuclides, and particularly with caesium-137, strontium-90 and plutonium-239. They also need to know the sources of contamination, and to study the transport of radionuclides in groundwater, sediments and ocean currents. Current Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his government have promised to boost science; they should encourage and support researchers from around the world in collecting and sharing information. Chernobyl was a missed opportunity for post-accident research — in that sense at least, Fukushima could do much better.

Nature special: Fukushima

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Japan and world help

September 23, 2013

Let the world help at Fukushima No. 1

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2013/09/23/voices/let-the-world-help-at-fukushima-no-1/#.UkB-BVM0_9k

Re: "Fukushima and the right to responsible government" by Colin P.A. Jones (The Foreign Element, Sept. 17):

It would be useful if the government of Japan would avail themselves of the assistance and technology that could be provided by foreign corporations with experience in the decommissioning of nuclear plants.

The United States successfully cleaned and decommissioned nuclear facilities at Hanford, Washington, Rocky Flats, Colorado, and Portsmouth, Ohio. Other projects are currently under way in both the U.S. and U.K.

Yet, American firms who have offered to help with issues at Fukushima have been repeatedly turned down by Tepco and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

Recently, a METI official told me that Japan could not use American technology that was used to decommission Hanford because these were military reactors used in weapons programs. Fukushima is a civilian power reactor and, hence, the technology would not be appropriate.

Fuel rods inside the core of a nuclear reactor do not know if they will be reprocessed or put into a spent fuel pool.

This type of thinking harkens back to the fallacious argument that Japanese cannot eat American beef because their intestines are different.

The cleanup of any nuclear reactor will use the same technology, regardless of what the reactor has been used for.

The consequences of the continued delay in addressing the real challenges at Fukushima have international consequences.

So, why not allow the international nuclear community the opportunity to help?

THOMAS SNITCH
Senior Professor of Science
Institute for Advanced Studies
United Nations University
Tokyo

'Jailhouse Blues' for Tepco?

Elvis has left the building. Tepco is talking about water leaks. Three reactor cores have melted.

The hits just keep on coming. "Jailhouse Blues" can't be far behind for the Tepco officials that have allowed this to happen.

I can feel the rock 'n' roll rhythms starting to get louder. How about you?

CHRISTOPHER NEIL O'LOUGHLIN

Los Angeles

Mary will be dearly missed

Re: "A friend to kanji learners worldwide" by Louise George Kittaka (Sept. 10):

Sadly, I learned today of the death of Mary Sisk Noguchi (Kanji Clinic columnist) last December.

For many of who have spent years climbing the mountain of learning and remembering kanji, she was a soft and understanding beacon who delighted in helping to light the way to becoming more proficient.

Like many others, I wrote to her asking advice and she answered personally, as she did with all such requests.

She will be dearly missed.

AMADIO ARBOLEDA

Adjunct Professor

Josai International University

Togane, Chiba

Send your comments on these issues to community@japantimes.co.jp.

Diet committee to meet on water crisis on Friday

September 24, 2013

Lower House panel to discuss wastewater on Friday

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130924_35.html

Japan's ruling and opposition parties have agreed to examine the problem of radioactive wastewater at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in a Lower House committee meeting on Friday.

Directors of the Lower House Committee on Economy, Trade and Industry on Tuesday discussed when to meet on the matter, **as the Diet is currently not in session.**

They agreed to summon President Naomi Hirose of the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, as an unsworn witness on Friday to ask how the utility has been coping with the wastewater problem.

Members of the committee inspected wastewater tanks and leakage sites at the plant this month.

The directors also decided to summon Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and Nuclear Regulation Authority Chairman Shunichi Tanaka next Monday.

Committees of the Diet rarely hold sessions when it is closed. Opposition parties demanded that the committee open a session on the radioactive water, but the members of the group failed to agree on the matter until Tuesday.

Why doesn't TEPCO accept Rusatom's help?

September 25, 2013

Rusatom hopes to help TEPCO resolve Fukushima nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130925p2g00m0dm036000c.html>

VLADIVOSTOK (Kyodo) -- Russian state-run nuclear power company Rusatom hopes to cooperate with Japan's Tokyo Electric Power Co. in resolving the March 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant disaster, the head of a Rusatom unit said Tuesday.

Rusatom could take advantage of its experiences with the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear plant accident to help TEPCO resolve the problems at its crippled plant, Rosatom Overseas General Director Djomart Aliyev said in an interview with Kyodo News.

Noting TEPCO has been negative about cooperating with the Russian company, Aliyev urged the Japanese utility to accept Russian help.

"As TEPCO has not made all the information open, we cannot find solutions immediately," Aliyev said. "If we cooperate, however, we may produce good results."

Rusatom has formed a special team to analyze the Fukushima situation and proposed lists of support tools including radiation-resistant cameras and agents for clumping radioactive materials, but the Japanese side has failed to accept any of its proposals, he said.

He also said Russia and Japan may cooperate in training nuclear plant operators in Vietnam and Turkey where they are competing for nuclear plant contracts.

Questioned on reported doubts about the safety of the Bushehr nuclear plant that Rusatom helped Iran construct, Aliyev said Rusatom has taken much time to test the plant and sees no safety problems.

Iran's reported plan to use domestically developed nuclear fuel at the plant would be effectively impossible, he said.

Interview with Industry minister Motegi about TEPCO's liquidation

September 25, 2013

FUKUSHIMA WATER CRISIS: Liquidating TEPCO not the answer, says industry minister

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309250053>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi expressed opposition to suggestions that Tokyo Electric Power Co. should be liquidated if taxpayers money is used to deal with the radioactive water problem at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Doing so could jeopardize compensation payments to victims of the nuclear accident and also adversely affect the electricity supply, he told The Asahi Shimbun in a recent interview.

Motegi pledged that the government will actively tackle the contaminated water problem. He added that the government would spare no effort to promote technological innovations in areas where current expertise is insufficient.

Motegi, 57, heads the government's task force set up this month to take charge of the problem concerning contaminated water as well as decommission the plant's crippled reactors.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry estimates that 300 tons of water contaminated with radioactive materials are leaking from the site into the sea each day.

In an effort to plug the leakage, the government is taking or plans to take several measures, including freezing the soil around reactor and turbine buildings to prevent groundwater from flowing into the structures. Excerpts from the interview follow.

Question: There is growing confusion about the leakage of contaminated water. What are your thoughts on the issue?

Motegi: Until the Liberal Democratic Party regained power last December, we did not have detailed information. From the immediate aftermath of the nuclear accident, the government (led by the Democratic Party of Japan) was always slow in taking measures to deal with the disaster. In particular, the government left it to TEPCO to solve the problem of contaminated water at the plant. TEPCO continued to take stopgap measures like a whack-a-mole game.

Q: Earlier this month, the government announced measures to deal with the problem of contaminated water. Will those measures be sufficient to solve the problem?

A: We had many discussions with experts. As a result, we worked out preventive and multilayered measures. We don't think that those measures are insufficient.

We will also gather ideas from Japan and abroad to deal with potential risks. In two months, we will work out measures to cope with the risks. If those measures are insufficient, we will take additional measures at the earliest moment.

Q: Do you mean that the government has no intention of leaving it entirely to TEPCO to solve the problem of contaminated water?

A: We will shift from the policy of leaving it entirely to TEPCO to come up with a solution. There is no hesitation on the part of this government in doing what it has to do.

Q: But the costs for the government's measures will be covered by taxpayers' money. To what extent will the government be responsible for those measures?

A: Decommissioning of the reactors will be done by TEPCO. But technologies developed for that purpose could be used throughout the world in the future. The government will be in charge of the development of those technologies. As for contaminated water, the government will be involved in the fields where solutions are technically difficult and could be delayed.

Q: Do you think that the measures taken by the DPJ-led government were insufficient?

A: Recalling those days, I must say “Yes.” But the top priority now is not to place blame, but for the ruling and opposition parties to cooperate to solve the problem of contaminated water.

Q: Some lawmakers are demanding in the Diet that legislation must be drawn up to clarify the roles of the government and those of TEPCO (in order to prevent the government, which means taxpayers, from shouldering a huge financial burden in efforts to solve the problem of contaminated water and other issues).

A: Various considerations must be taken into account. But it is not simply an issue of costs. It is an issue that should be considered in comprehensive discussions, including those on the payment of compensation, decontamination work and the position of nuclear power in overall energy policy.

Q: Some people say that if the government uses taxpayers’ money, TEPCO should be liquidated.

A: If TEPCO is liquidated, there is a possibility that the right of victims of the nuclear accident to receive compensation will not be met and that companies engaged in the solution of the various problems resulting from the disaster will not be able to receive payment for their work. There would be big adverse effects. Besides, the supply of electricity could become unstable.

Q: In the presentation held before the International Olympic Committee’s vote to choose the host country of the 2020 Summer Olympics, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said, “Let me assure you the situation (of contaminated water at the plant) is under control.” But a senior TEPCO official took issue with the remark.

A: The TEPCO official’s remark pointed to individual events, such as the leakage of contaminated water from a storage tank. We should not confuse it with the entire situation. As the prime minister said, the effects of contaminated water are limited to nearly 0.3 square kilometer (of sea water) within the port (at the plant), and is under control as a whole.

(This article was written by Mari Fujisaki and Daisuke Fukuma.)

New levees below height standards

September 26, 2013

Rebuilt coastal levees in disaster-hit prefectures below recommended height

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130926p2a00m0na012000c.html>

Some coastal levees in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures that were destroyed by tsunami triggered by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake are being rebuilt below designated height standards, the Mainichi Shimbun has discovered.

In many cases, local residents have requested that the levees be lowered due to interference with their ability to enjoy scenic views, as well as concern that the levees could negatively impact the fishing industry. Such requests have been complied with in a total of 14 districts in Iwate Prefecture. No local government in Miyagi Prefecture has accepted such requests, and discussions remain underway between residents and officials in several localities.

According to prefectural and municipal government officials, the levees are slated to be rebuilt in a total of 101 districts in Iwate Prefecture, 254 districts in Miyagi Prefecture, and 65 districts in Fukushima Prefecture. While these figures include levees used to prevent cliff erosion, they do not take into account offshore levees used to protect beaches.

The three prefectures decided the height of the levees for each existing bay during the autumn of 2011, in response to advice from the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism that they take into account previously existing data indicating that tsunamis occur "once every few dozen or few hundred years."

In Iwate Prefecture, the proposed height of the levees was lowered in a total of 20 districts. Among these, the adjustments in 14 districts took place after residents specified that the higher levees "were unnecessary, as they would be building their houses on higher ground." In the other cases, the lowered heights were presented by local officials, and consented to by local residents.

While the height of the levees is due to be lowered in a total of 99 districts within Miyagi Prefecture, prefectural officials indicated that they would be rebuilding the levees at their original height in areas where houses and roads were destroyed. In some areas, including districts within the cities of Kesenuma and Ishinomaki, residents have asked that the height of the levees be lowered. Discussions are presently ongoing in at least 30 separate districts in this regard.

In Fukushima Prefecture, officials have adjusted the height of the levee in one district.

September 26, 2013(Mainichi Japan)

And the Band Played On...

And the Band Played On...

September 25, 2013 Japan, Nuclear

<http://akiomatsumura.com/>

Scott Jones, Ph.D.

There is historical evidence that the Titanic's orchestra heroically continued to play until the ship made its final plunge to the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. There is some temptation to compare that snippet of history to what is playing out in Japan following the decision of the Olympic Committee to award the 2020 Summer Olympic Games to Tokyo. The theatrical command that, "The show must go on," may be an appropriate observation, but there are monumental differences in the situations.



The human loss of life on the Titanic was indeed shocking, partially so because the Titanic was professionally declared to be unsinkable. The music from Fukushima is decidedly unnerving. It is the sounds from the seriously damaged reactor building number four as its tilt increases in its agonizing slow

collapse. That collapse will trigger a one-hundred foot fall of the spent fuel rod cooling tank, exposing the fuel rod assemblies and creating a nuclear disaster more than a thousand times greater than Hiroshima.

Japan will be well remembered by those who survive the global consequences of the resulting radiation hell. The memories will be starkly mixed. Sympathy will soften the memories of the thousands of innocent civilians killed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki as the result of wartime attack of nuclear weapons. There will be no sympathy for the refusal of Japan to immediately request international assistance to determine what could be done to stem the cascade of increasing risks following the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Hopefully, there will be international memories of lessons learned from the tragedy of Fukushima. Profit controlled critical decisions. Regulatory capture assured that warnings of unsafe practices and conditions could be ignored or action deferred.

We will never know if the inevitable outcome could have been avoided if the world's most experienced nuclear crises engineers and scientists had been involved at Fukushima.

The 2020 Summer Olympic Games will not take place in Tokyo. Nature has others plans for Tokyo and the world.

Sadly, the issue is no longer, "what can be done?" The terminal issue is a brutally honest international assessment that must be made about Fukushima and the nuclear power industry. This is owed to future generations who will pay dearly for our incautious dance with technology we could not handle.

Dr. Scott Jones was a career naval officer with extensive nuclear weapon experience. He was a qualified nuclear weapons delivery pilot, and in intelligence assignments, a Nuclear Weapons Deployment Officer, and created Nuclear Weapon Target Annexes for U.S. European Command War Plans. Following this he became special assistant to Senator Claiborne Pell.

Behind TEPCO's (and Gov't) decisions and judgments

September 25, 2013

FUKUSHIMA WATER CRISIS: TEPCO should face bankruptcy if taxpayer money used, says DPJ lawmaker

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309250060>

By AKINORI ONO/ Staff Writer

If taxpayer money is used to deal with the contaminated water problem at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the government should consider having Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant's operator, go bankrupt or nationalizing it, Sumio Mabuchi, who served as an aide to the prime minister on the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2011, told The Asahi Shimbun in a recent interview.

Mabuchi, 53, is a lawmaker of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan, which was in power when the nuclear accident unfolded in March 2011 following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The leakage of water contaminated with radioactive materials at the crippled Fukushima plant is becoming serious. To solve the problem, the government, now led by the Liberal Democratic Party, is considering measures with TEPCO, including a costly project of constructing a frozen soil wall around reactor and turbine buildings to prevent groundwater from flowing into them. Excerpts from the interview follow:

* * *

Question: About two weeks after the nuclear disaster occurred at the Fukushima plant, you assumed the post of special adviser in charge of the accident to then Prime Minister Naoto Kan. Immediately after that, you said contaminated water would become a serious problem.

Mabuchi: In the compound of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, TEPCO constructed buildings on sites lower than the groundwater table by lopping off a cliff. Therefore, it was natural to consider the possibility that groundwater could flow into the buildings and be contaminated by radioactive materials. But TEPCO denied the possibility, saying, "There are no effects (of groundwater) at all."

Then, I checked the data for the years starting in 1971 when the nuclear plant started operations. As a result, I found the fact that groundwater repeatedly flowed into the buildings of the No. 1 to No. 4 reactors, and TEPCO conducted work to stop the inflow. I felt that the buildings were standing in the path of the groundwater flow. I studied four kinds of impermeable walls, and adopted one in which four sides of the area of the buildings are dug to the clay layer at a depth of 30 meters, and walls made of clay-like materials will be constructed to that depth, like a (huge) square bathtub.

Q: But the idea never materialized?

A: As the project will cost about 100 million yen (\$1 million), Kan and then Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Banri Kaieda agreed to make it a governmental project. But a day before the project was to be announced on June 14, 2011, TEPCO “overturned” the planned announcement.

Q: Why did TEPCO do so?

A: At that time, TEPCO was in a period of being audited on its financial statements ahead of its June 28 shareholders’ meeting. The reason for overturning the plan was that if people felt that TEPCO had a new debt of 100 million yen (for the construction of the wall) and, as a result, the utility’s liabilities could exceed its assets, the market would be plunged into turmoil.

Sakae Muto, then TEPCO executive vice president, told Kaieda, “Please allow us to announce that we will implement (only) research on the impermeable wall.” I accepted Muto’s proposal because he promised that TEPCO would implement (construction of the impermeable wall) without delay.

Q: Did the DPJ-led government make a mistake in its judgment?

A: No, it didn’t. It is one view that if TEPCO’s liabilities exceed its assets, the market will be plunged into turmoil. The problem is that though we decided to implement the construction of the wall, the decision was later overturned. I don’t know the reason as I was dismissed as a special adviser on June 27. But I deeply regret (that the decision was overturned).

Q: How should the government deal with the contaminated water problem?

A: Prime Minister Abe says that he will deal with the problem under the government’s responsibility. But if the government will use taxpayers’ money, it should consider having TEPCO go bankrupt or nationalizing it. As for the frozen soil wall now being considered by the government, I doubt whether the wall can be constructed uniformly in the ground and can prevent inflows of groundwater. I think that an impermeable wall made of clay-like materials is best.

Q: In the presentation held before the International Olympic Committee’s vote to choose the host country of the 2020 Summer Olympics, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said, “Let me assure you the situation (of the contaminated water at the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant) is under control.”

A: Even if he wanted to win the vote to choose the host country of the 2020 Summer Olympics, he made a mistake in stating the actual condition of the plant. The international community will ask Japan, “Is it

really under control?" I think that people around Abe advised him to say so. What judgments politicians should make responsibly when facing such a big issue is a permanent challenge.

IAEA says TEPCO can't do it alone

September 27, 2013

IAEA: Japan's radioactive water survey inadequate

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130927_10.html

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency has suggested Japan should not monitor radioactivity unilaterally in the seawater around the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. He pushed for international efforts in regard to the testing.

IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano spoke to the Japanese media in Vienna on Thursday about the leakage of radioactive water at the plant. The interview was held ahead of his scheduled visit to Japan next month.

Amano said that it is not sufficient for Japan to monitor levels of seawater radioactivity around the crippled nuclear plant alone as there are a variety of ways to conduct the testing.

He stressed cooperation with international bodies is crucial for Japan from the planning stage in order to gain trust from the international community.

The IAEA plans to send inspectors to Japan this autumn. The agency is considering including seawater analysis specialists on the mission.

TEPCO aware of possible leakage at an early stage

September 27, 2013

TEPCO admits to putting shield walls on hold

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130927_42.html

The operator of the Fukushima Daiichi plant says it has had to delay constructing underground walls to block the leakage of contaminated water because other work was more urgent.

Tokyo Electric Power Company President Naomi Hirose testified on Friday at a Lower House committee meeting.

The committee was convened to discuss the massive groundwater contamination at the plant.

Hirose admitted that TEPCO was aware of the possible leakage of radioactive water into the sea at an early stage.

Three months after the nuclear accident, the utility decided to build underground walls around the reactor buildings.

Asked why TEPCO did not pursue the plan, Hirose said it had to deal with many "hot spots" of radiation, as well as contaminated debris.

He said it was first decided by the government and TEPCO to build underground walls near the sea, instead of around the reactor buildings.

The seaside walls were built by solidifying an embankment with chemicals. The current plan calls for walls surrounding the reactors to be built by freezing the soil, which is unprecedented in scale and cost.

The president was also asked about Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's remark at the general assembly of the International Olympic Committee earlier this month. Abe claimed situation is under control.

Hirose says Abe seemed to have meant that the impact of the contaminated water has been contained within the plant's port and that in that sense he agrees with the prime minister.

TEPCO: Ten more billion dollars for cleanup

September 27, 2013

World Briefing | Asia

Japan: \$10 Billion More for Cleanup of Fukushima Nuclear Plant

By REUTERS

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/28/world/asia/japan-10-billion-more-for-cleanup-of-fukushima-nuclear-plant.html?_r=0

Published: September 27, 2013

The Tokyo Electric Power Company, the operator of the wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant, said Friday that it would revise its business turnaround plan to allocate an additional \$10 billion for the plant's cleanup. Tokyo Electric, also known as Tepco, is trying to contain radioactive water at the Fukushima plant, which was hit by meltdowns and hydrogen explosions after a massive earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

TEPCO obtains 80 billion yens of refinancing loans

September 29, 2013

Improvement of TEPCO's financing in sight: Motegi

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130929p2a00m0na009000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The financing situation of Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crisis-hit Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, is stabilizing, industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi said Sunday. "Financial institutions will continue extending loans to the utility," Motegi said on an NHK program. "Improvement of its balance of payments is now in sight."

TEPCO is negotiating with Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp. and others over loan refinancing after filing for state safety assessments of two reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata Prefecture in a bid to reactivate them and improve its business position.

Motegi also said the utility will scrap the Nos. 5 and 6 reactors of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi plant in Fukushima Prefecture as urged by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

"Tokyo Electric is likely to accept Prime Minister Abe's request and decide (on decommissioning) at an early stage," Motegi said.

Of the plant's six reactors, TEPCO is already moving ahead with decommissioning the Nos. 1 to 4 units, all of which suffered meltdowns or hydrogen explosions in the early days of the crisis triggered by a huge earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

Abe urged TEPCO in September to scrap the remaining Nos. 5 and 6 reactors as well, even though they suffered no major structural damage.

September 28, 2013

Banks agree to give ¥80 billion in refinancing loans to TEPCO

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309280044>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A group of banks agreed Sept. 27 to extend 80 billion yen (\$800 million) in loans to Tokyo Electric Power Co. for refinancing after the struggling utility moved toward restarting two nuclear reactors, bank executives said.

The money will go to repayments due at the end of October on loans of the same amount that were extended to TEPCO before the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the accident at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

In the coming days, about 30 banks of the group will decide how much of the 80 billion yen each will contribute. They will convey their decision to TEPCO and the government's Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund by mid-October.

Some of the 30 financial institutions, especially local banks based in areas affected by the March 2011 disaster, remain cautious about lending to TEPCO. If those local banks balk during the discussions, some major banks said they will make up the difference, several bank executives told The Asahi Shimbun.

The decision to grant the new loans came the same day TEPCO applied to the Nuclear Regulation Authority for safety screenings of the No. 6 and No. 7 reactors at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture. The screening process is required before the reactors can be restarted.

The financial institutions extending the loans, including three megabanks, viewed TEPCO's screening application as a step toward generating nuclear energy and improving its financial and business operations.

TEPCO desperately needs to lift its business performance to receive loans from the banks. The utility posted pretax losses for two straight years after the nuclear accident, due largely to increased fuel costs for thermal power generation to make up for lost capacity at its idle nuclear plants.

On Sept. 27, TEPCO President Naomi Hirose said his company is also preparing to apply to the NRA for safety screenings at other reactors to bring them back online.

But even after TEPCO receives the 80 billion yen in loans, the utility still faces hurdles; loans worth 200 billion yen come due in December, and the company is seeking to borrow 300 billion yen in additional loans.

Hirose on Sept. 27 asked for further government support in a Diet hearing called to discuss the problem of contaminated water leaking at the Fukushima plant.

"If the government embarks on a full-fledged effort to solve the problems that resulted from the nuclear accident, it would be a blessing for us," said an executive of a major bank.

However, many insist that TEPCO's creditors and shareholders should shoulder more of the responsibilities.

"It is illogical that taxpayers' money is used to solve problems resulting from the nuclear accident," Tetsuya Shiokawa, a lawmaker from the Japanese Communist Party, said in the Diet hearing. "There are other things that should be done before taxpayers' money is spent."

Tepco to keep receiving ¥77 billion in bank loans after repayment deadline

Kyodo, JJI

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/28/national/tepco-to-keep-receiving-%C2%A577-billion-in-bank-loans-after-repayment-deadline/#.UkgSu1M0_9k

Twenty-eight financial institutions will continue to extend ¥77 billion in loans to struggling Tokyo Electric Power Co. beyond the October repayment deadline, sources said Saturday.

The refinancing is expected to stabilize Tepco's management and advance its cleanup efforts at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 facility.

It follows Tepco's application Friday for state safety inspections of two reactors at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture, joining four other utilities seeking to reactivate atomic power stations idled because of the Fukushima crisis. Power companies have been bleeding money to cover the costs of thermal power generation since the March 2011 meltdowns at Fukushima No. 1.

The 28 institutions include Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp. and regional lenders. In August, Tepco presented its creditor banks with an income and expenditure plan that stated its aim of moving into the black in fiscal 2013 by reactivating idled reactors or hiking electricity rates.

Although the refinancing means Tepco in October will be able to clear the most pressing financial hurdle, the utility still needs to secure ¥300 billion in fresh loans and to refinance ¥200 billion worth of existing loans in December.

Tepco intends to seek further support from its creditor banks for those moves after revising its special management plan approved by the government in May 2012, the sources said.

Hirose supports Abe's "blocked" statement

September 28, 2013

TEPCO president agrees with Abe that radioactive water is 'blocked'

<http://mainichi.jp/graph/2013/09/28/20130928p2a00m0na002000c/001.html>

The president of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), Naomi Hirose, told a Diet panel on Sept. 27 that he shared Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's view that the leaking radioactive water at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant is contained within the bay there.

During Tokyo's final presentation in its bid for the 2020 summer Olympics, Abe said at the International Olympic Committee general assembly meeting in Buenos Aires that the radioactive water situation is under control, with the water completely "blocked" from exiting a 0.3 square kilometer area in the bay.

Hirose said at a session of the House of Representatives Economy, Trade and Industry Committee that he "completely agreed," and that "from the view of preventing leaking into the outside ocean, I think the situation is firmly under control." Hirose also apologized for causing concerns due to the leak.

However, on Sept. 13, TEPCO executive-level fellow Kazuhiko Yamashita said, "I don't believe (the radioactive water situation) is under control," showing a conflict in opinions coming from the company.

TEPCO should get its priorities right

September 28, 2013

Editorial: TEPCO should prioritize bringing Fukushima nuclear crisis under control

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130928p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) has applied with the nuclear power regulator for a safety inspection of two reactors at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant in Niigata Prefecture in preparation to reactivate them. The move is in response to Niigata Gov. Hirohiko Izumida's agreement to such an application.

However, TEPCO is the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. It therefore must establish a method for dealing with radioactive water accumulating on the power station's premises and take other measures to bring the nuclear crisis under control in order to restore the public's confidence in it as a precondition for restarting the idled No. 6 and 7 reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant.

Gov. Izumida attached some conditions to his agreement to TEPCO's application for a safety inspection. Specifically, he demanded that TEPCO not use a vent equipped with a filter -- a device that exhausts air out

of a nuclear reactor after removing as much radioactive material as possible in order to prevent damage to the reactor -- without consent from the local governments of areas hosting the power plant. Moreover, he required the power company to change the content of the application if such a measure becomes necessary as a result of its consultations with the prefectural government.

The governor's demands reflect the local communities' sense of deep distrust in TEPCO. The company decided in July this year to go ahead with the application without consulting the concerned local bodies. TEPCO's disrespect for local communities' opinions only served to deepen the distrust in the firm. It took the utility three months to finally file the application. However, even if the power plant passes the safety inspection, TEPCO must gain the prefectural government's consent to actually resume operations at the No. 6 and 7 reactors. As such, TEPCO should hold thorough consultations with the concerned local bodies over a disaster prevention plan to prevent local residents from being exposed to radiation in the event of a nuclear accident at the power station.

At the same time, it is difficult to understand why Gov. Izumida agreed to TEPCO's application for a safety inspection of the reactors after he bitterly criticized such a move. He should provide a detailed explanation on his about-face since it is a matter closely related to the safety of prefectural residents.

TEPCO must overcome a high hurdle before restarting any of its nuclear reactors. The Fukushima nuclear disaster has negated the so-called myth of nuclear plants' infallible safety. TEPCO must regain the public's trust in itself by convincing local residents that the utility will protect the safety of local residents by taking appropriate measures in the event of a nuclear accident in order to gain consent from the local communities for reactivation of nuclear plants.

However, it is still fresh in people's memory that TEPCO was too slow to respond to the Fukushima nuclear disaster and led to the crippled power station releasing a massive amount of radioactive substances. It then continued to deal with the accident in an inappropriate manner, causing underground water that flowed onto the premises of the plant to get contaminated with radioactive substances before leaking into the sea. Moreover, the highly radioactive water also leaked from storage tanks holding such contaminated water. TEPCO has still failed to block underground water from flowing onto the power station's premises. As a result, a massive amount of contaminated water is piling up at the plant day by day.

TEPCO must try its utmost to bring the Fukushima crisis under control before reactivating the No. 6 and 7 reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant. It cannot win understanding for its reactivation unless it restores the public's trust in itself which has been badly damaged by the disaster.

TEPCO is desperate to restart idled nuclear plants because it is being forced to review its business plan, which is a prerequisite for obtaining bank loans indispensable for its business activities. To avoid a deficit

for a third consecutive year, the utility must either resume operations at idled nuclear power stations or raise its electricity charges.

However, even if the Nuclear Regulation Authority gives the green light to reactivation of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, the utility will likely continue to manage itself on a tightrope. Even so, the company should not simply weigh up the safety of its nuclear plants and its profitability. The national government, which has placed TEPCO under its control, also needs to seriously consider a future vision for the troubled power company.

September 28, 2013

TEPCO & cost-cutting

September 29, 2013

TEPCO head expects return to the black through cost cutting

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201309290115>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The president of Tokyo Electric Power Co. predicted that the embattled utility can return to profitability for the current fiscal year by cutting costs even without restarting a third nuclear power plant or raising electricity rates.

Naomi Hirose told The Asahi Shimbun in Tokyo's Chiyoda Ward on Sept. 28 that expenses for fiscal 2013 can be reduced by delaying part of planned repairs of its power generation and transmission equipment to fiscal 2014.

The prospect for posting a profit for the fiscal year ending in March means that TEPCO will be eligible to secure new loans from financial institutions, including three megabanks.

Securing a pre-tax profit is a condition for TEPCO to be extended new financing.

The utility's business outlook improved with the possibility of bringing two reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture online in fiscal 2014.

TEPCO on Sept. 27 applied for checks of reactors No. 6 and No. 7 by the Nuclear Regulation Authority, which assesses if a nuclear facility meets the new safety standards before its reactors can be restarted. The move came after Niigata Governor Hirohiko Izumida finally gave consent to the company's plan to proceed with the application after months of refusal.

"There is the possibility that we can resume operations during the next fiscal year," Hirose said, referring to the two reactors at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant.

TEPCO owns three nuclear power plants--the Fukushima No. 1 and No. 2 nuclear power plants in Fukushima Prefecture, both of which were damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, and the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant on the Japan Sea coast. The latter has seven reactors.

Although the company sought to log a profit for the current fiscal year by delaying part of repairs of equipment to the next fiscal year, financial institutions were not sold on the plan.

They were concerned that the move to push back capital expenditures could imperil the financial standing of TEPCO in fiscal 2014.

However, with the possibility of the two reactors going back online in the next fiscal year, Hirose said the financial institutions' concerns over the utility's financial troubles eased.

TEPCO trimmed costs by 500 billion yen (\$5.09 billion) for fiscal 2012 through reducing repair and personnel expenses.

"Additional cost cutting will help the company to return to profitability for the current fiscal year," Hirose said.

After logging pre-tax losses in fiscal 2011 and 2012, the company also posted 29.4 billion yen in pre-tax losses for the first half of fiscal 2013.

The utility estimated that restarting a single reactor at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant will result in an increase of more than 100 billion yen in profits.

Hirose also said that the company will not consider a hike in electricity rates for the time being to increase earnings for the current fiscal year.

The rate hike was regarded as a key step to improving the company's financial standing, along with bringing an idled reactor online. But the TEPCO president did not completely rule out the possibility of raising electricity rates.

He cited fluctuations in currency markets and crude oil prices as well as the safety checks, which could take longer than the expected six months or so.

(This article was written by Takashi Ebuchi and Mari Fujisaki.)

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Excerpts of the interview follow:

Question: Why did it take TEPCO nearly three months after its board decided to actually apply to make a request for safety checks of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant (by the Nuclear Regulation Authority)?

Answer: The board made the decision on July 2, and three days later we visited the Niigata prefectural government to gain understanding for our decision. But our move was described as “abrupt” or “disregard for local governments.” After experiencing the Fukushima nuclear disaster, we made a fresh start as a new TEPCO. But due to the accident, we had to get involved with people in Fukushima Prefecture more than the residents of Niigata Prefecture. To the eyes of the people in Niigata Prefecture, it was like TEPCO came out of nowhere just to push ahead with our application for a safety clearance. We should reflect on our actions.

But applying for a safety screening led to more communications with local governments (in Niigata Prefecture). We began briefings in Kashiwazaki and Kariwa (the two municipalities that host the plant). The three months we had to wait until actually filing the application, I believe, was time needed to gain understanding to our position.

Q: Many people are critical of TEPCO for taking steps toward restarting the nuclear power plant despite the fact the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has not been resolved yet, as was manifested by continuing leaks of contaminated water.

A: I truly believe that we should apply for safety checks. We should put in place safeguard measures such as the construction of a breakwater to prepare for possible quake and tsunami. Safety checks are meant to determine that our precautions are appropriate and we are not being self-complacent, by an expert third party. We will need to overhaul safeguard measures in line with the conclusion (of the NRA).

Q: Still, applying for safety inspections is a process based on the premise of restarting a nuclear reactor.

A: Restarting a reactor is not something for the immediate future. I am not going to deny that it is a step leading to restarts, but we don't know if the reactors can clear safety checks. Even if they can, it is not as if they will go online the next day. We cannot leave idled reactors as they are now. We want them to be examined for safety.

Q: TEPCO pledged to secure funding of 1 trillion yen over 10 years to deal with the contaminated water problem at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. How are you going to make that happen amid your company's financial difficulties?

A: We have yet to come up with specific steps to achieve it in 10 years' time. Admittedly, it will be difficult to secure that amount of money through regular cost-cutting efforts alone. **We should whittle away investments as well.** We will consider cutting back piecemeal the proportion of our investments in such projects as natural gas ventures overseas as well as rebuilding thermal power plants.

Q: The government decided to inject 47 billion yen in public funds to cope with the problem of radioactive water. But some critics pointed out that a line has not been drawn to clarify the responsibility between the government and TEPCO. What is your view?

A: There is room for discussion on such issues as the establishment of an entity to make it easier for public funds to be injected. But TEPCO is the one that actually carries out the task of dealing with contaminated water. Even if the responsibility now comes under the banner of the government and TEPCO, it does not instantly stop the flow of contaminated water and make everyone happy. We also face challenges such as the cleanup and compensation for people who were affected by the nuclear disaster. We are continuing to cope with such difficult tasks because of our determination to take responsibility for the accident we caused.

Q: In addition to compensation for victims, costs for cleanup and decommissioning the reactors are ballooning. Are you going to seek assistance from the government in this regard?

A: It is utterly impossible for us to pay those costs. Considering the liberalization of the electricity market, we will not be able to compete with huge debts on our shoulders. The issue will be the focus of our discussion to review the restructuring plan.

Is TEPCO actually aware of its situation?

September 30, 2013

EDITORIAL: Cash-hungry TEPCO mixes up its priorities

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201309300056>

The public is probably wondering if Tokyo Electric Power Co. is actually aware of the situation it is in.

TEPCO on Sept. 27 asked the Nuclear Regulation Authority to conduct safety screenings of the No. 6 and No. 7 reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture to confirm they meet the NRA's new safety standards.

The screenings are a hurdle the utility must clear to bring its idled reactors back online.

Naomi Hirose, president of TEPCO, expressed his intention to prepare for the restart of other reactors at the plant as well.

TEPCO's move toward resuming reactor operations is totally unacceptable.

The utility runs the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which has been crippled by an accident that is far from over. TEPCO should be focusing all of its efforts on the Fukushima disaster, including the new challenge of dealing with contaminated water leaks.

Under the current circumstances, the company certainly cannot afford to send its staff members to another nuclear power plant.

TEPCO's push to restart its reactors is driven purely by financial reasons. If reactor operations are not resumed soon, the company's turnaround plan will collapse.

If the reactors remain offline, the company will likely end up posting a loss for fiscal 2013 for the third straight year due mainly to ballooning costs for fossil fuel used at its thermal power plants.

Another dismal financial performance by TEPCO could prompt financial institutions to stop lending to the embattled utility.

Even if TEPCO receives approval, it will take time before the reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant are actually restarted. The company apparently believes that as long as it takes steps toward the restarts, it will be able to secure loans.

In fact, starting the process for a resumption of reactor operations was included in TEPCO's rebuilding plan, which was drawn up last year with the government.

However, it is already obvious that the turnaround plan is untenable. It was drawn up on the premise that TEPCO would foot the bill for everything resulting from the nuclear accident, including compensation for victims, decontamination work and the decommissioning of the Fukushima reactors.

It is clear that the rebuilding plan should be reviewed. The utility must not hastily pursue reactor restarts.

One problem is the attitude of the Abe administration.

The government, a major shareholder of TEPCO, decided to take charge of the contaminated water issue at the plant. But there has been little progress in the debate over the management of TEPCO.

Overhauling TEPCO's revival plan may raise criticism from the public. If the plan is reconsidered, taxpayer money and an electricity rate hike will likely be required to shoulder the sum needed to settle issues related to the Fukushima accident that TEPCO cannot cover by itself.

The government is also preparing to raise the consumption tax rate in April. It is not difficult to feel that Abe and his aides would rather put the TEPCO question on the back burner to prevent the situation from marring his popular economic policy.

If that is the case, the government's announcement that it is taking over the battle against contaminated water leaks at the Fukushima plant lacks luster.

The Fukushima accident resulted from short-sighted economic calculations and a fixation on past practices that hindered information sharing and necessary safeguard measures.

In the end, promoting nuclear power itself became the primary objective.

The situation will be exacerbated if TEPCO and the government make the same mistake and stick to the hollow revival plan.

The grave lesson from the Fukushima accident is that the traditional culture surrounding nuclear energy must be remedied.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Sept. 28

South Korea calls Japan "immoral"

September 30, 2013

S.Korea fisheries minister calls Japan immoral

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20130930_42.html

South Korea's fisheries minister has called Japan "immoral" because it allowed radioactive wastewater to leak into the sea from the Fukushima Daiichi plant without prior notification.

Yoon Jin-sook was speaking to reporters on Monday. She said Japan has the responsibility to inform her country and others, but let the contaminated water flow out freely. She called such behavior absurd.

The South Korean government has placed an import ban on all fishery products from Fukushima and 7 other Japanese prefectures.

Yoon said she doubted whether the South Korean government had to care about such immoral people under diplomatic protocols, so she promptly ordered the import ban.

Yoon's remark comes as South Korean fishermen are in a tight spot. **Consumers are becoming increasingly concerned about the safety of fishery products as a whole, not just those from Japan.**

The Diet will need explanations

September 30, 2013

Editorial: Abe must elaborate on Fukushima's water contamination

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20130930p2a00m0na008000c.html>

The House of Representatives Committee on Economy, Trade and Industry has finally begun to examine Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and the government's response to radioactively contaminated water accumulating at the utility's tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Yet the Diet is not in session now, and the move comes too late.

The Diet has neglected to deal with the problem since the House of Councillors election in July, and the ruling and opposition parties are still battling a sterile tug-of-war over the timing of an extraordinary session of the Diet.

Lawmakers need to supply an avenue for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to provide an explanation on the issue as soon as possible.

On Sept. 27, legislators including Sumio Mabuchi of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), who dealt with the contaminated water issue as an adviser to the prime minister when the DPJ was in power, posed questions to TEPCO President Naomi Hirose.

Mabuchi explained that the DPJ-led government had planned to announce in June 2011 that it would create underground walls made of clay around the crippled reactors to prevent water from leaking outside. But he admitted that the DPJ-led government abandoned the plan after TEPCO expressed concerns that such a measure would raise speculation in markets that the utility faced a capital deficit. Hirose officially admitted that the company had worked out the basic specifications for such walls.

Mabuchi told legislators in a panel that a DPJ probe on the construction of water-shielding underground walls was shelved after he stepped down from his post. He also provided details on the DPJ-led administration's response to the problem. The DPJ needs to go beyond grilling the government to clarify its own responsibility in dealing with the matter during its time in power.

The panel is scheduled to convene for a total of 30 days. However, the prime minister has not been given the opportunity to provide any explanations since it surfaced that problems involving radioactive water were far more serious than generally believed.

In his 2020 Olympic bid speech at a general meeting of the International Olympic Committee in Buenos Aires, Abe stressed that the situation regarding radioactive water at the Fukushima plant was "under control." However, a senior TEPCO official later said he did not think the situation was under control. On Sept. 27, Hirose told the Diet that he completely agreed with the prime minister over the matter. The prime minister must explain his understanding of the situation to the Diet and elaborate on how to deal with the problem from a long-term perspective.

Prime Minister Abe's remark that contaminated water was completely blocked from exiting a 0.3 square kilometer area in the bay near the nuclear power station has also sparked wide controversy. The government has explained it hasn't seen any increases in levels of radioactive cesium during its monitoring of seawater around the power plant, yet one cannot help but wonder what the prime minister meant by saying the effects of radioactively tainted water were "completely blocked."

Opposition parties have gathered signatures from 92 legislators to demand that the Diet be convened at an early date. The Constitution stipulates that the Cabinet must convene a Diet session if requested by at least a quarter of all of legislators in either chamber. However, the supreme law stops short of providing for the timing of convening a session, and the ruling coalition appears to have no intention of bringing forward the start of a planned extraordinary session from Oct. 15.

There is no guarantee that current measures to block radioactive water from leaking from the crippled power plant will always work properly -- as highlighted by the temporary halt of an advanced liquid processing system (ALPS) due to technical problems. The possibility that an unforeseen accident will occur cannot be ruled out. The government has drawn up additional countermeasures against contaminated water while taking potential risks into account, but no one knows whether these measures are feasible.

Since the government is now playing a leading role in countermeasures against radioactive water accumulating at the nuclear plant, the prime minister should provide a specific explanation at the Diet of how to deal with the matter.

Is the NRA up to the job?

October 1, 2013

Nuclear regulator criticized for 'red tape' job

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131001_12.html

Japan's nuclear regulator is coming under fire from intellectuals. They're being criticized for bureaucratic behavior.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority fielded comments on Monday from 6 experts who are studying the crisis in Fukushima. The discussion was a review of the NRA's first year of operation.

Shuya Nomura is a lawyer who served on a Diet panel that investigated the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Nomura criticized the NRA for its handling of the radioactive water leaks. He said NRA members should go to the plant, instead of demanding explanations from its operator's executives.

Journalist Yoichi Funabashi said **drafting rules and standards isn't enough to win public trust**. He described the plant as a battleground and urged regulators to take a more proactive stance in dealing with the crisis.

Others pressed for reforms at the NRA Secretariat. It's staffed mostly by personnel from the previous regulator which was under a government umbrella that promoted nuclear power.

NRA chief Shunichi Tanaka said he feels the organization has been given a mandate that's bigger than its capacity, but that members will try to improve.

Oct. 1, 2013 - Updated 01:39 UTC

Japan should work with the international community, says IAEA

October 1, 2013

FUKUSHIMA WATER CRISIS: Japan should request international collaboration, IAEA chief says

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310010075>

By TAKASHI KIDA/ Correspondent

VIENNA--Japan should stop working alone and seek international collaboration in dealing with the problem of radiation-contaminated water at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, Yukiya Amano, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said.

In an interview with The Asahi Shimbun, Amano said his agency was prepared to include an expert on marine pollution in the review team that is scheduled to be sent to Japan in autumn.

He also said **other experts around the world can help alleviate the crisis at the Fukushima site; they're just waiting for a request from Japan.**

A former Foreign Ministry official, Amano, 66, was reappointed to his post at the September IAEA general conference.

Excerpts of the interview follow.

Question: The problem of radiation-contaminated water at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant arose despite a warning by the IAEA review team dispatched in April about the importance of implementing measures. How do you view the situation?

Amano: While the objective of that review team was decommissioning the reactors in general, it also touched upon the importance of dealing with the contaminated water problem and recommended that Tokyo Electric Power Co. compile an overall plan.

I believe the (water) accident occurred while consideration was being given toward such a plan after the Japanese side accepted the recommendation.

Q: What would be the purpose of sending a second review team in autumn?

A: In addition to technical matters in dealing with the contaminated water, other important issues include strengthening monitoring, making efforts to minimize the effects should a leak occur and communicating with local residents.

We want to provide advice (to Japan) from an overall perspective so it can put together comprehensive measures.

During the September general conference, I spoke about the importance of maritime monitoring with (Ichita) Yamamoto, state minister in charge of science and technology, and (Shunichi) Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, who attended the conference.

Q: But isn't Japan already conducting marine monitoring?

A: There are different ways to conduct monitoring, including the selection of test locations and depths. However, if the methods are inconsistent, it will be impossible to compare data. There is a need to conduct monitoring in line with international standards.

Because there is also the problem of negative publicity, it is insufficient for Japan to only say we conducted monitoring and will inform the world about the results.

I believe **it is important to work together with international agencies from the planning stage and in accordance with international standards, and to also involve the international community in the transmission of information.**

The style of the review team is to exchange views with IAEA specialists, international specialists and Japanese specialists in order to learn from each other. The IAEA's Environment Laboratories in Monaco has long experience working on the marine environment as well as an extensive network with various nations. If Japan should make a request, we could include researchers from that lab (to the next research team).

Q: During the general conference, you made the evaluation that the Japanese government's response had made an important step forward. Why was such an appraisal made?

A: It was an important first step for the government to announce its policy that the contaminated water problem was a very important one. But, I also believe there are still many details that must be worked out in the specific measures to be implemented.

Q: How do you view the criticism among experts of various nations who believe that measures were not implemented even though the importance of the contaminated water problem was known immediately after the nuclear accident two and a half years ago?

A: Other nations have two general attitudes toward the Fukushima nuclear accident. One is of wanting to cooperate while the other is dissatisfaction at the insufficient response to proposals for cooperation.

Rather than simply have Japan inform the world about what it is doing, it should take the position of wanting to work together with the international community and transmitting information along with the international community.

Japan's "irresponsible" attitude

October 1, 2013

S. Korean minister accuses 'irresponsible' Japan of hiding radioactive water leaks

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/korean_peninsula/AJ201310010059

By AKIHIKO KAISE/ Correspondent

SEOUL--South Korea's fisheries minister Sept. 30 hurled criticism and insults at Japan, saying its secrecy behind the radioactive water leaks from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant is "irresponsible."

"Although Japan has the responsibility to immediately make all information available (to neighboring countries when such accidents occur), it chose to discharge (radioactive materials) into the sea without informing us," Yoon Jin-sook, minister of oceans and fisheries, said at a gathering of South Korean reporters.

Special Diet session to discuss water crisis

October 1

October 1, 2013

Responsibilities in tackling tainted water at Fukushima plant under scrutiny

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131001p2a00m0na016000c.html>

A special Diet session was convened on Sept. 30 to discuss how to deal with contaminated water accumulating at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, but it remains unclear which party -- the government or Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) -- should take the lead in tackling the difficult problem.

The special session, convened while the Diet was out of session, focused on the roles to be played by the government and TEPCO in handling radioactively tainted water at the Fukushima nuclear complex, as the government earlier said it would "come to the fore" to deal with the problem. However, Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Toshimitsu Motegi, who attended the special session for the first time, reiterated the government's conventional stance, saying, among other things, that TEPCO should bear "primary responsibility" for the problem.

The level of technical difficulty serving as the basis for the government's coverage of a project to deal with the contaminated water remained unclear, obscuring where the overall responsibility for the Fukushima nuclear crisis lies.

The government decided last month to use about 47 billion yen to tackle the radioactive water, vowing to finance measures involving technical challenges such as a plan to freeze the soil around reactor buildings to stop groundwater from seeping in and becoming contaminated. Motegi commented during the special Diet session, "We want TEPCO as the key entity which built the reactors itself to fulfill the primary

responsibility in executing (the project)," while adding that the government would take responsibility in the removal of radioactive substances in areas requiring high levels of technical ability.

On the various levels of technical difficulty serving as criteria for government action, Motegi said, "If we were to classify one thing or other as difficult, we could say everything is difficult. The current handling of the accident, decommissioning of reactors and taking measures against contaminated water -- these are unprecedented tasks, and TEPCO, the installer of the reactors, is carrying them out." On measures to deal with potential risks involved in the operation, Motegi only said, "We would like to sort out what should be done by TEPCO and the government."

On a plan to install an impermeable wall to prevent groundwater from seeping into the reactor buildings, Sumio Mabuchi, former assistant to the prime minister from the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan, proposed to take an emergency step to install steel sheet piles. In his response, Motegi said, "We want to unwaveringly consider measures including what you proposed."

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told an International Olympic Committee general meeting in September that the situation at the Fukushima nuclear power plant was "under control" and that the "influence of the contaminated water is completely blocked within the 0.3-square-kilometer area of the plant's bay." On Abe's remarks, Motegi said, "The prime minister commented responsibly on the current situation. It is precisely under control." However, Nuclear Regulation Authority Chairman Shunichi Tanaka stated, "It is difficult to scientifically define whether it is under control or not. We will do our best to prevent it from affecting the environment."

Motegi ruled out the possibility of liquidating TEPCO, saying, "If the Corporate Reorganization Act is applied, its utility bonds will be prioritized for redemption. There is a possibility that damages as well as receivables held by subcontractors operating on the spot (at the crippled nuclear power plant) will not be paid."

What is behind Koizumi's stand on nuclear power?

October 2, 2013

Koizumi's call for nuclear-free Japan raises speculation about his intent

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201310020073

By TSUYOSHI SUZUKI/ ASAHI SHIMBUN WEEKLY AERA

Junichiro Koizumi's huge popularity as prime minister stemmed from views that he was a straight talker unafraid to carry out his policies, even if they created potentially dangerous political enemies.

Despite defections from the Liberal Democratic Party and the rise of "rebels" against him, Koizumi pushed through postal privatization and led the LDP to a sweeping victory in the 2005 Lower House election.

Now, the retired politician has returned to the spotlight by railing against nuclear power and urging Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to move Japan away from its reliance on atomic energy.

Some political sources say Koizumi is simply expressing his true feelings about nuclear power. But others point to a political motive behind this anti-nuclear stance. They say Koizumi may be trying to protect, albeit indirectly, the Abe administration and even the party he once famously vowed to "destroy."

Abe, who was groomed to be prime minister during the days of the Koizumi administration, appears to be listening.

Koizumi, who was prime minister from 2001 to 2006, stunned an audience on Sept. 24 during a forum in Tokyo's Roppongi Hills commercial complex commemorating the 50th anniversary of the publication of the business magazine *President*.

"Since retiring (from politics), I have had more opportunities recently to speak with business leaders rather than Diet members. During such discussions, I often hear comments that Japan cannot grow without any nuclear power plants or that calling for zero nuclear power plants is irresponsible," Koizumi, 71, said in a speech. "However, I studied what experts have said until now about nuclear energy being safe, clean and inexpensive, and I harbored doubts.

"I wonder if human beings can really control nuclear energy. I have now become an advocate calling for zero nuclear plants and urge politicians to make that decision as quickly as possible."

A major catalyst for Koizumi's no-nuclear power stance was a visit to Finland in August, a trip he decided to make after watching a TV documentary immediately after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The TV program featured various issues related to the final repository in Finland for spent nuclear fuel that would be durable for 100,000 years, the first such facility in the world.

Koizumi began doubting the argument that nuclear energy was safe and inexpensive after learning about the very long time period.

The main objective of his Finland trip was to inspect the Onkalo spent fuel repository, a facility designed to completely seal off highly radioactive waste by digging 400 meters deep into the foundation.

The radioactive materials would become harmless over 100,000 years.

However, it is unclear if the facility can actually withstand such a long passage of time. There is also the question of how to inform people in the distant future about the dangers that lie within the facility.

After listening to the explanation given by experts at the facility site, Koizumi said he became more convinced that Japan should move away from nuclear power generation.

“One cannot fathom a time 100,000 years in the future. Can such a facility ever be built in Japan? I thought it would be impossible,” Koizumi said in his Sept. 24 forum speech. “The first reason why I thought it would be better to have zero nuclear plants is because there is no final repository in Japan. Some people may say it is irresponsible to call for zero nuclear plants, but I think it is even more irresponsible not to have a disposal site for the waste or even any prospect of constructing such a facility.”

The former prime minister also said that Japan, unlike Finland, is frequently hit by earthquakes and tsunami. He said the dangers of natural disasters in Japan fueled his concerns about the nation’s dependence on nuclear energy.

“The Japanese have never knuckled under to natural disasters but have always overcome them to further develop the nation. We are now at a major turning point for creating a recyclable society through energy sources based on natural resources. Opportunity lies in a pinch. That is how we should be looking at the situation,” he said.

A source in the political world who is close to Koizumi said his anti-nuclear stance is not something new.

“During private conversations, Koizumi has for a long time called for a radical move toward no nuclear plants. The Onkalo visit strengthened that conviction,” the source said. “The engineers from nuclear plant manufacturers who accompanied him on the trip initially thought they could convince him with their views. However, after returning to Japan, Koizumi said, ‘I strongly argued for the need to move away from nuclear energy.’”

Although the Finland visit may have been important, Koizumi had indeed made comments about moving away from nuclear energy from shortly after the March 2011 disaster.

In a speech in May 2011, Koizumi called for reducing the nation's dependence on nuclear energy, saying, "It was wrong for Japan to have spoken up after placing its trust in the safety of nuclear plants."

Last December, Koizumi, speaking on behalf of an LDP candidate before the Lower House election, said, "Efforts should be made to reduce the number of nuclear plants to zero as much as possible."

But it was a column that appeared in the Aug. 26 edition of the Mainichi Shimbun that sent shock waves through the political world.

In responding to a senior staff writer, Koizumi said: "If I were to return to being an active politician, I would not have the confidence to convince undecided Diet members about the necessity of nuclear energy. After making various observations, I feel I would be able to convince lawmakers to move in the direction of zero nuclear plants."

Koizumi continued: "Unless the decision is made now to have zero nuclear plants, it will become more difficult to move toward zero nuclear plants in the future. All the opposition parties now favor zero nuclear plants. This could be done as long as the prime minister made the decision."

Although four years have passed since he retired from politics, Koizumi maintains high popularity and his comments still have influence.

The source close to Koizumi said: "His comments against nuclear energy are likely due to dissatisfaction at the Abe administration. I believe he wants to strongly lodge a protest against the sharp turn by the administration toward resuming operations at nuclear plants."

Those in the Abe administration are trying to determine Koizumi's motives.

"After the Mainichi Shimbun column appeared, we were paying attention to whether others would follow in his footsteps, including his son, Shinjiro, a Lower House member," a source close to the Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office said. "He does, after all, have an outstanding sense for how the political world operates."

There are signs that Abe was the one who responded most aggressively to the comments made by Koizumi.

The Abe administration has been pushing for the restarts of nuclear reactors that were shut down after the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The prime minister also declared the Fukushima nuclear accident was “under control” at a meeting of the International Olympic Committee in Buenos Aires last month.

But after the IOC awarded Tokyo the 2020 Summer Games, Abe told a news conference on Sept. 7: “We will lower the ratio of nuclear energy. Over the course of about three years, we will make every effort to accelerate the spread of renewable energy sources and promote energy conservation.”

Abe did refer to renewable energy and energy conservation as key issues in his policy address at the Diet in February. But his statements at the news conference about resuming operations at nuclear plants were substantially toned down from his earlier remarks.

An LDP source said: “Koizumi is making those comments while being very aware of their effects. However, rather than trip up Abe, I believe he is only trying to restrain the Abe administration that is moving in the direction (of resuming nuclear plant operations).

“The message Koizumi is sending is that moving too strongly in that direction could hurt the administration, even though it may have high support ratings now. The comments by Koizumi can also serve as a coastal levee of sorts for Abe who faces pressure from lawmakers with close ties to the electric power industry. I believe Abe understands what is happening.”

In any event, Koizumi is not backing away from his no-nukes stance.

“If the government and LDP now came out with a policy of zero nuclear plants, the nation could come together in the creation of a recyclable society unseen in the world,” he said in a speech in Nagoya on Oct. 1. “A large majority of the population now understands that nuclear energy is the most expensive form of power generation.”

TEPCO still paying pro-nuclear Rokkasho

October 4, 2013

As Fukushima compensation stalls, TEPCO continues to pay pro-nuclear village

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310040060>

By SATOSHI OTANI/ Staff Writer

Tokyo Electric Power Co. “donated” tens of millions of yen to a pro-nuclear village government in August despite promising to abolish such payouts to accelerate compensation for victims of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

TEPCO, operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, and Tohoku Electric Power Co. paid a combined 200 million yen (\$2 million) to Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, which hosts facilities related to spent nuclear fuel reprocessing, sources said.

The two regional utilities have raised electricity rates, citing financial difficulties due to the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 plant. The government has also decided to use taxpayer money to deal with the radioactive water problem that TEPCO seems unable to control at the plant.

TEPCO said the payment to Rokkasho was based on a promise made before the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 plant in March 2011.

“The payment is associated with construction of a nuclear plant, and we believe it is different from a donation,” a TEPCO official said. “But we will refrain from commenting on a specific case.”

The industry ministry, however, said the payment to Rokkasho is “close to a donation.”

Masaru Kaneko, a professor of public finance at Keio University, said the government should do something to end such actions by TEPCO, which has been effectively brought under state control.

“The provision of this sort of money is abnormal, given that compensation for nuclear disaster victims and containment of contaminated water have stalled and that further hikes in electricity rates have been mentioned,” Kaneko said.

The payment to the village has been made since fiscal 2010 in the name of promoting fisheries business around Higashidori, a village north of Rokkasho, where TEPCO is planning to build a nuclear plant and Tohoku Electric already operates another.

The two companies agreed to pay 200 million yen annually for five years. TEPCO and Tohoku Electric paid 133.4 million yen and 66.6 million yen, respectively, until fiscal 2012.

In May 2012, when the government decided to inject taxpayer money into TEPCO, the utility said it would stop making donations to local governments.

According to documents obtained by The Asahi Shimbun and sources in the Rokkasho village government, this year's payment was initially expected around May or June.

TEPCO, citing financial difficulties, proposed an installment plan. Eventually, TEPCO and Tohoku Electric completed payments on Aug. 30 and Aug. 26, respectively. The breakdown was the same as in past years.

When TEPCO applied to increase its electricity rates in 2012, the company included the payment to Rokkasho--as part of construction expenses for the Higashidori nuclear plant--into power generation and other costs used as a basis for calculating the rates.

However, the industry ministry refused to include the payment in such costs, saying "it is not essential to supply electricity and is, therefore, close to a donation."

The ministry noted that compensation was separately paid to fishermen over the construction of the Higashidori plant.

Rokkasho officials said they spend the money from the utilities on squid-fishing boats and farms for kelp and sea urchins.

A Rokkasho official in charge of agricultural, forestry and fisheries business said the village expects to receive the payment next year, too.

"We know that TEPCO and Tohoku Electric are in difficult times, but village programs are planned based on the assumption that the payment will be made," the official said.

Tohoku Electric began operating a reactor at its Higashidori nuclear power plant in 2005, and TEPCO began building one at its plant in January 2011. The two companies each plan to build an additional reactor.

Tohoku Electric said the company is shouldering its fair share of the expenses for fisheries industry promotion in line with a pre-quake promise, adding that it is necessary to continue to make the payment.

TEPCO, Tohoku Electric continue donations to village building nuke fuel processing plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131004p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and Tohoku Electric Power Co. have continued to extend donations to the Aomori Prefecture village of Rokkasho, where a nuclear fuel reprocessing plant is under construction, even after the Fukushima nuclear accident, it has been learned.

This is despite the fact that electricity charges have been raised because the utilities have to rely more on thermal power stations and that the national government has provided a massive amount of taxpayers' money to finance countermeasures against radioactive water accumulating at the Fukushima plant.

TEPCO and Tohoku Electric donated 133.4 million yen and 66.6 million yen, respectively, to Rokkasho in August this year as funds to help vitalize the local fishing industry, according to the municipal government.

The two companies contributed the same amount to the village in 2011 and 2012 following the outbreak of the nuclear disaster in March 2011. The municipal government is set to also demand donations from the two companies next fiscal year.

The donations are based on a 2009 agreement signed prior to the outbreak of the disaster, under which the two utilities would extend donations to the village over a five-year period from fiscal 2010. The village is supposed to use the money to provide subsidies to a local fisheries cooperative to help its members build and improve facilities to farm fish and maintain fishing boats.

The utilities are supposed to extend the donations to the village in May, but provided the funds in August this year after cash-strapped TEPCO asked for a delay.

TEPCO announced in May 2012 that it would discontinue any donations. The utility denies that the funds provided to the Rokkasho Municipal Government are donations, explaining that the money comes from funds set aside to build a nuclear power station in the neighboring village of Higashidori. The official denied that the cost is added to electricity charges.

Utilities still paying village for planned reactors

Kyodo

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/04/national/utilities-still-paying-village-for-planned-reactors/#.Uk7pFIM0_9k

Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Tohoku Electric Power Co. are continuing to make payments to the municipal government in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, over plans to build additional nuclear reactors in a nearby village, the municipal office said Friday.

Rokkasho, located south of the village of Higashidori on the Pacific coast, received ¥133.4 million from Tepco for fiscal 2013 on Aug. 30 and ¥66.6 million from Tohoku Electric on Aug. 26, the office said.

Tepco, which has received government funding to deal with the radioactive water leaks at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, says its payments to Rokkasho are not included in its costs for power generation, which form the basis for its electricity rates.

Tepco plans to build two reactors in Higashidori, while Tohoku Electric, which already has one reactor in the village, plans to build another. The two utilities began making payments to Rokkasho, itself home to nuclear fuel-recycling facilities, in fiscal 2010 to back the local fishing industry.

Rokkasho has used the funds to assist the purchase of squid-fishing vessels and gear, and improving fishing grounds. The village hopes the utilities will continue with the payments in line with a promise made before the 2011 Fukushima disaster, a municipal official said.

Tepco started to construct a 1.38 million kw reactor in Higashidori in January 2011, but work was suspended after the Fukushima crisis started. The utility plans to continue with construction and build an additional reactor there.

In 2005, Tohoku Electric began running its Higashidori plant with a 1.10 million kw reactor on land adjacent to Tepco's and plans to build another reactor, but the existing reactor remains shut down along with all other reactors in Japan.

NRA orders TEPCO to fix mess

October 4, 2013

NRA to Tepco: Fix water mess, even add workers

Kyodo

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/04/national/nra-to-tepco-fix-water-mess-even-add-workers/#.Uk7paFM0_9k

The Nuclear Regulation Authority on Friday ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. to bring under control the massive amount of radioactive water gushing from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear complex, including by boosting worker numbers on-site.

Summoning Tepco President Naomi Hirose after a series of recent spills at the crippled power plant, Katsuhiko Ikeda, head of the NRA secretariat, tore into the utility for “rudimentary mistakes” that caused the toxic water problem and said its management in the field was “significantly deteriorating.”

“I want you to implement on-site management appropriately even if it requires bringing workers from Tepco’s other nuclear power plants,” Ikeda warned Hirose.

With concerns growing over the toxic water problem at Fukushima No. 1, Ikeda also urged Tepco to report whether it can ensure the safety of its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa atomic plant in Niigata Prefecture, two of whose seven reactors the utility seeks to restart.

Hirose, in turn, said he will “devote all the company’s resources” to managing the toxic water problem. Tepco will also undertake all necessary procedures for restarting reactors 6 and 7 at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa, he told reporters afterward.

Later Friday, Ikeda said he expects Tepco to submit a report on how it plans to deal with the water fiasco in about a week.

Radioactive water continues to build daily at Fukushima No. 1 because groundwater is seeping into the reactor buildings and mixing with water being used to cool the three crippled reactors. Contaminated water is stored in around 1,000 tanks at the complex, and Tepco is struggling to plug leaks.

On Thursday, Tepco said some 430 liters of radioactive water had poured out of one tank the day before, and some of it flowed into the Pacific. The leak was caused when workers tried to inject water into the tank, which was nearly at full capacity. The tank was not equipped with a water-level indicator and had not been set up on level ground, issues Tepco was fully aware of.

ALPS halted again

FUKUSHIMA

Kyodo

Tokyo Electric Power Co. said Friday it had to again suspend the water treatment system at the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 power plant after an alarm was triggered at 6:40 a.m.

No leakage of contaminated water has been detected so far, the utility reported.

Following a previous suspension Sept. 27, Tepco resumed operation Monday of the advanced liquid processing system (ALPS) after determining that a rubber sheet left in a nearby water tank had obstructed a drain outlet.

TEPCO urged to prevent contaminated water leaks

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131004_27.html

The Secretariat of Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority has criticized the president of Tokyo Electric Power Company for repeated errors that caused radioactive water to leak from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

NRA Secretary-General Katsuhiko Ikeda summoned TEPCO President Naomi Hirose on Friday, and demanded that the utility immediately come up with plans to prevent such problems.

Ikeda said it is regrettable that the leakage was caused by human error. He said the company's on-site management is extremely poor.

Highly radioactive water was found to be overflowing from a storage tank at the plant on Wednesday. Workers had continued to pump water into the tank located on a slope.

Ikeda added that he wants TEPCO to send personnel from other power plants to help with the work at Fukushima Daiichi.

Ikeda also asked TEPCO to show whether safety measures are in place at the Kashiwazaki-Kariya nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture.

The utility applied to the Nuclear Regulation Authority last month for the safety screening needed to restart 2 of the idle reactors at the Niigata plant.

Hirose apologized for the problems at Fukushima Daiichi, saying the company had recently changed its system for processing contaminated wastewater, and workers are not used to the new procedures. He said TEPCO will use all possible resources to deal with the problem.

Regulators order TEPCO to improve radioactive water management

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131004p2g00m0dm071000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Nuclear regulators on Friday ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. to improve its management of a massive amount of radioactive water at its crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex without hesitating to deploy workers from other power plants.

Summoning TEPCO President Naomi Hirose following recent leaks at the Fukushima plant, Katsuhiko Ikeda, the head of the NRA secretariat, criticized the utility for "rudimentary mistakes" that resulted in the trouble and said its field management ability was "significantly deteriorating."

"I want you to implement on-site management appropriately even if it requires bringing a workforce from TEPCO's other power generation plants," Ikeda told Hirose.

With concerns growing over the situation at the Fukushima plant, Ikeda also urged the utility to report whether it can ensure the safety of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power station in Niigata Prefecture, which the company is seeking to restart.

Hirose said he will "devote all the company's resources" to managing the toxic water problem. The company will also undergo necessary procedures toward resuming two idled reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, he told reporters.

Ikeda told reporters later that he expects TEPCO to submit a report on how it will deal with the issue in about a week.

Radioactive water is increasing daily at the Fukushima plant, hit by a huge earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, because groundwater is seeping into reactor buildings and mixing with water that is used to cool the three crippled reactors.

Such contaminated water is kept in about 1,000 tanks set up at the site, and TEPCO is struggling to prevent leaks from the storage tanks. The current typhoon season is adding to the difficulty because the utility also has to deal with rainwater that accumulates inside leak-protection barriers around the tanks.

On Thursday, the utility said about 430 liters of radioactive water leaked from one tank the previous day, and some of that water flowed into the Pacific Ocean.

The leak occurred because water spilled after workers tried to inject more water into the nearly full tank. The tank was not equipped with a water-level indicator and was set up on unlevel ground, which TEPCO was aware of.

Just before the incident, TEPCO also allowed 5 tons of tainted rainwater to overflow from another tank because a worker erroneously connected a hose to the tank.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, meanwhile, announced that it will send a team of experts on decontaminating areas affected by the nuclear crisis at the request of the Japanese government.

The mission, to take place between Oct. 14 and 21, is a follow-up to a previous mission conducted in October 2011.

The IAEA said that the 16-member team plans to submit a report on the last day of the mission summarizing its findings and advice to the Japanese government.

Abe promises again

October 4, 2013

Abe pledges to tackle radioactive water issue

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131004_37.html

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe says his government will do all it can to deal with the massive buildup of radioactive water at the disabled Fukushima nuclear plant.

Abe on Friday met Seiichiro Murakami, a lower house member of the main governing Liberal Democratic Party who heads a LDP panel on the Fukushima nuclear accident.

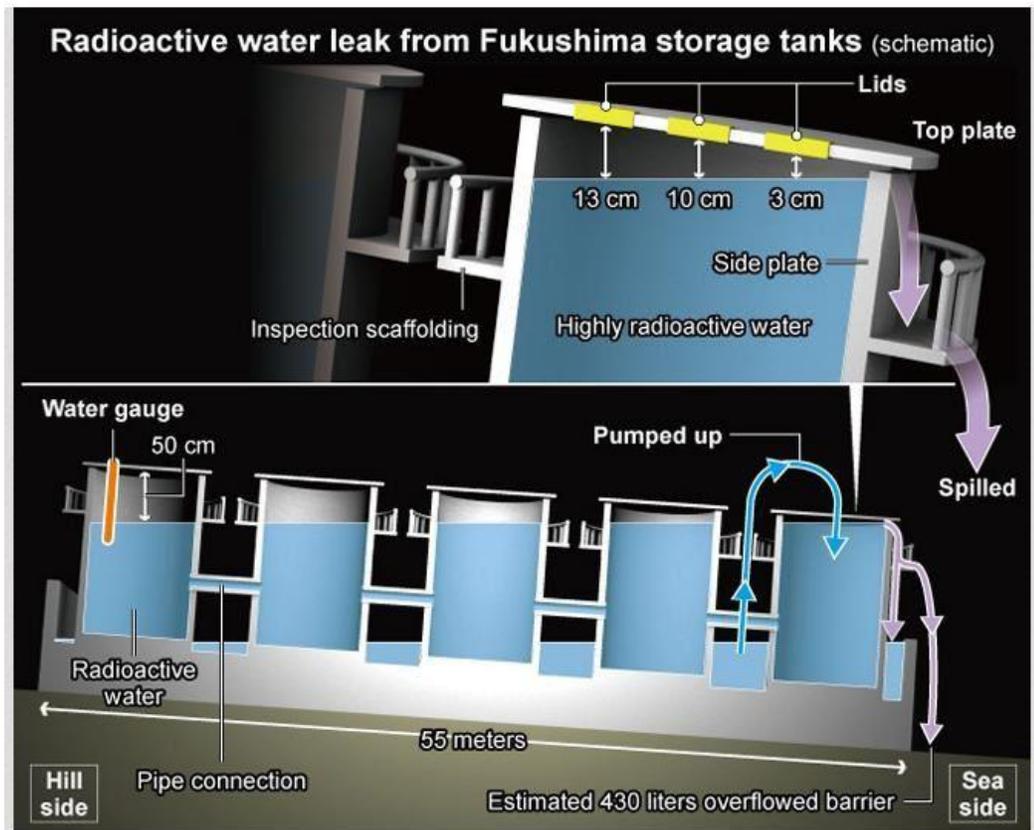
Murakami said uncovering the cause of the accident and containing the problem of contaminated water are pressing matters, as Japan reconsiders its energy policy.

Abe said the radioactive water issue will be a major topic of debate in the upcoming Diet session. He said the Abe administration will do all it can to tackle the problem.

A series of blunders

October 4, 2013

FUKUSHIMA WATER CRISIS: Combination of TEPCO errors led to latest radioactive water leak



<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310040068>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Patience is wearing thin over Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s continuing series of blunders at the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the latest one allowing more radioactive water to spill into the ocean.

Katsuhiko Ikeda, secretary-general of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, summoned TEPCO President Naomi Hirose on Oct. 4 and demanded a plan to deal with the contaminated water problem at the plant. Ikeda said effective measures must be taken, even if it involves bringing in personnel from TEPCO's other nuclear plants, including the one it plans to restart in Niigata Prefecture.

"Problems have been caused by basic mistakes," Ikeda said. "They will recur unless appropriate site control measures are taken."

Hirose said his utility will do its best to deal with the issue.

The Fukushima prefectural government on Oct. 3 asked Yoshiyuki Ishizaki, head of TEPCO's Fukushima Revitalization Headquarters, to ensure that no more radioactive water escapes from the hundreds of storage tanks at the site.

Ishizaki apologized and admitted to TEPCO errors in its assumptions and flaws in its control measures.

The latest leak of radioactive water into the ocean was caused by a combination of problems: an overpumping of rainwater into a storage tank due to a mistake in properly monitoring water levels, and an ill-arranged measure to ensure early discovery of radioactive water leaks.

The leak occurred on Oct. 2 as rainwater from an approaching typhoon threatened to fill and breach a barrier surrounding five storage tanks connected by pipes in the B-South area of the plant.

Workers decided to transfer the rainwater into the tanks, each with a capacity of 450 tons, until they were 98 percent full.

The ground where the five tanks sit is inclined toward the sea.

The only water gauge was mounted on the highest tank on the hill side.

The workers used that water gauge to monitor the water levels in the other lower tanks. It took them a while before they realized that water had reached the top of the tank at the lowest level on the sea side.

"We believed it was a narrowly safe level," Masayuki Ono, acting general manager of TEPCO's Nuclear Power and Plant Siting Division, told a news conference on Oct. 3.

They were wrong.

The water reached the top of the sea-side tank and spilled out as the rainwater continued to be pumped in.

TEPCO said it had never expected to fill the storage tanks near their capacity and thought it was safe to build such tanks as long as the ground incline did not exceed 1 percent.

The water in the tanks contained 580,000 becquerels of beta ray sources, such as radioactive strontium, per liter. The water pooling inside the barrier showed 200,000 becquerels per liter when TEPCO made the measurement on the afternoon of Oct. 2.

These figures indicate considerable amounts of radioactive water leaked from the tank into the interior of the barrier.

TEPCO officials said the leak may have started immediately after the pumping began and continued for up to 12 hours.

Radioactive water also dripped outside the barrier by way of scaffolding mounted on the tank. Part of that water likely entered a drainage ditch and flowed into the sea, TEPCO officials said.

Rainwater accumulated in the barrier because of a measure TEPCO took following the August discovery that 300 tons of highly radioactive water had leaked from a tank and breached a barrier in a separate area on the site. Some of that water eventually reached the ocean.

Until August, TEPCO workers kept the drainage valves on barriers permanently open to prevent rainwater from forming pools around tanks and making it difficult to immediately spot radioactive water leaks.

Because of that precaution, highly radioactive water that escaped the tank did leak unnoticed via drainage valves to the exterior of a barrier.

The NRA ordered TEPCO to keep the drainage valves shut and to pump water pooling inside barriers into the storage tanks.

But with the valves closed, TEPCO was forced to do something with the rainwater filling the barrier. The rainwater is supposed to be kept under control as potentially radioactive water.

TEPCO calculated that water would overflow barriers during a rainfall of 120 millimeters or more, a downpour that it believed occurs once or so a year, company officials explained.

When another typhoon approached on Sept. 15, water overflowed the barrier surrounding the B-South area--the site of the Oct. 2 leak. TEPCO workers collected 1,400 tons of water during that typhoon.

TEPCO hopes to check the radioactive levels of the rainwater once it has been transferred into temporary storage tanks, and release it into the sea if its levels are low. But the NRA has yet to approve that plan, citing flaws in TEPCO's measurement methods and standards for discharging waste into the environment.

The company said it plans to heighten the barriers to cope with the water situation, adding that the work will be completed at the end of this year.

TEPCO's Ishizaki told the prefectural government that the utility will install water gauges before the end of November on all storage tanks that are of the same type as the source of the latest leak.

(Ryuta Koike contributed to this article.)

Japan explains itself at WTO

October 5, 2013

Japan to explain contaminated water issue at WTO

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131005_11.html

Japanese government officials plan to take up the issue of leaks of contaminated water at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant at the World Trade Organization. **They want to address the concern of South Korea over radioactive contamination of seawater around the plant.**

The South Korean government last month banned imports of marine products from 8 eastern Japanese prefectures, including Fukushima, citing consumer concern about radioactive contamination.

The Japanese government has called for lifting the blanket embargo swiftly. But earlier this week, South Korea's fisheries minister called Japan "immoral" because it allowed radioactive wastewater to leak into the sea from the crippled nuclear plant without prior notification.

This week, fish samples showing radioactive contamination exceeding the government standard were confirmed by the Japanese government in some waters off the coast of Fukushima and Ibaraki prefectures.

The officials want to convey Japan's position on the issue at a WTO panel meeting, scheduled to be held later this month.

Japan's delegates are expected to explain that Japanese marine products are approved for shipping after inspection based on strict standards.

The officials will also seek understanding from the international community for Japan's assertion that the South Korean embargo impedes its exports.

More foreign help needed, Abe says

October 6, 2013

Abe seeks more foreign help in containing Fukushima crisis

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131006p2g00m0fp020000c.html>

KYOTO (Kyodo) -- Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Sunday sought more foreign assistance in containing the crisis at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, where decommissioning work that will go on for decades has been plagued by a series of contaminated water leaks.

"My country needs your knowledge and expertise" in coping with the aftermath of the nuclear accident triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, Abe said in a speech in English at an international science conference hosted by the city and the prefecture of Kyoto.

"We are wide open to receive the most advanced knowledge from overseas to contain the problem," he said.

Abe also said the Japanese government plans to start hosting a separate annual forum on technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emission from next year.

The first such forum will be held on Oct. 7 and 8 next year in Tokyo.

Abe: Japan wants advice on water leaks

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131006_18.html

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe says Japan wants to obtain advanced knowledge from other countries for use in preventing leaks of contaminated water at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Abe made the remark at the opening ceremony of the 10th annual meeting of the Science and Technology in Society forum in Kyoto on Sunday.

Abe called the Fukushima Daiichi accident a "bitter lesson". He called on participants at the forum to contribute in their most advanced knowledge for use in coping with problems at the plant, including radioactive water leaks.

The prime minister also referred to reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. He said Japan can contribute its carbon fiber technology to help achieve the goal of cutting the world's greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2050.

Carbon fibers are light and strong and can reduce the weight of cars and aircraft to save on gas.

More than 1,000 researchers and politicians from about 100 countries and regions are taking part in the 3-day conference.

Discussions focus on the theme "The Lights and Shadows of Science and Technology". Topics include climate change and energy issues.

Oct. 6, 2013 - Updated 05:51 UTC

Wonderful news...from TEPCO

October 7, 2013

TEPCO aims to eliminate human error

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131007_31.html

The president of Tokyo Electric Power Company says the utility will take steps to prevent problems caused by human error at its Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Naomi Hirose was speaking before an Upper House panel on Monday. Industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi and Nuclear Regulation Authority Chairman Shunichi Tanaka were also in attendance.

Hirose acknowledged the need to improve the working environment at the plant following a series of problems caused by human error. He said workers should not be allowed to become exhausted and that his company plans to increase the workforce and open more employee lounges.

Tanaka touched on the utility's application for safety screenings for the idled Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture.

He said regulators will carefully consider how to proceed with the screenings. He said the situation at Fukushima Daiichi has not been sufficiently stabilized to reassure the public about nuclear safety.

Tanaka added that the Authority is asking the utility for a report on safety management at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa by the end of the week.

Motegi expressed caution about the concept of liquidating Tokyo Electric Power Company.

He said that if the utility goes bankrupt under current laws, administrators would use its assets to pay institutional investors before compensating Fukushima residents or paying subcontractors at Fukushima

Daiichi.

He said that if this happens, efforts to deal with the massive amounts of contaminated wastewater would be delayed.

Motegi suggested that the government consider how to support the company by taking into account future energy policies and progress being made on compensation.

The panel was convened to discuss the massive wastewater problem at the plant while the Diet is not in session.

TEPCO's generous handouts

October 8, 2013

TEPCO paid 500 million yen to open Fukushima branch of Russian museum

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201310080064

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Lavish payments doled out by Tokyo Electric Power Co. to gain local support for nuclear power projects included 500 million yen (\$5 million) for an aborted attempt to open a branch of Russia's State Hermitage Museum, The Asahi Shimbun has learned.

The 500 million yen was paid during the 1990s for opening the facility by Lake Inawashiroko in Fukushima Prefecture, as a way to win local approval for adding the No. 7 and No. 8 reactors to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the sources said.

TEPCO failed to retrieve the payment, funded by the electricity rates paid by customers, even after the project went nowhere, sources said.

In 1994, TEPCO offered to build the J-Village soccer facility in Fukushima Prefecture at a cost of 13 billion yen when it approached the Fukushima prefectural government with plans to expand the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

"The museum project started after (then) President Hiroshi Araki showed enthusiasm for it," a senior TEPCO source said. "We donated 500 million yen (for the project)."

Isao Mizutani, former chairman of Mizutani Construction Co., said he took part in the project. He said Shiro Shirakawa, chairman of a security service provider, a senior TEPCO official who was in charge of plant site planning, and other individuals were also involved.

Mizutani, 68, said he temporarily paid 500 million yen on behalf of TEPCO as a construction deposit to the Russian museum.

“I paid (the money) because (the senior TEPCO official) said he would guarantee (repayment),” he told The Asahi Shimbun in Kuwana, Mie Prefecture. “He said (at the time) it would take some time before TEPCO could come up with the 500 million yen and that the advance payment was necessary.”

He said he did TEPCO a favor in hopes of winning contracts for the two reactors. The midsize general contractor had opened a branch in Fukushima Prefecture in 1993.

The expansion project came to naught after the Fukushima No. 1 plant was crippled by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Shirakawa, for his part, was known as “TEPCO’s ghost” for acting as a liaison with local communities for the utility’s nuclear plant affairs.

A preparatory office to organize the museum’s construction was set up in a building in Tokyo’s Minato Ward that houses Shirakawa’s company.

According to sources close to the Tokyo Regional Taxation Bureau, 500 million yen was paid by Mizutani Construction into the organization’s account and was later withdrawn.

Later, 500 million yen was paid by TEPCO into the same account and was transferred to Mizutani Construction’s account, the sources said.

A TEPCO spokesman said the company was “not aware of” the museum project or the donation.

In a statement, the State Hermitage Museum said the museum and Russia’s culture ministry have more than once discussed ways to cooperate with various Japanese organizations since the 1990s. However, it declined to discuss specific cases.

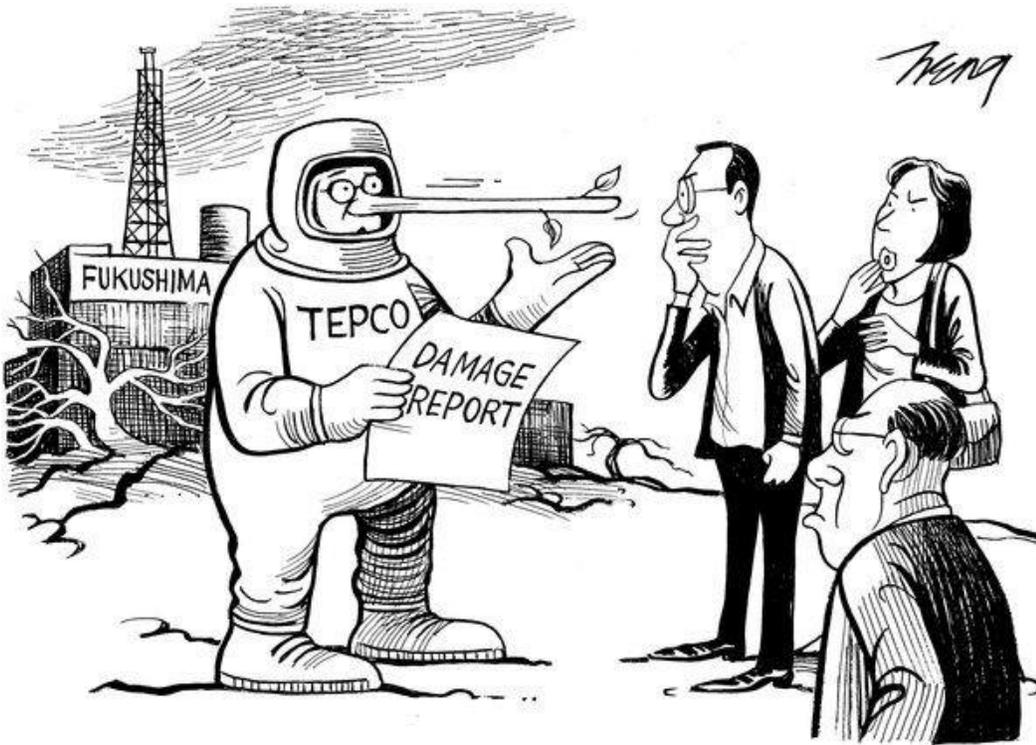
Mizutani Construction once amassed a large slush fund for winning public-works projects, according to prosecutors. The company allegedly paid 100 million yen off the books to a former aide of political heavyweight Ichiro Ozawa.

(This article was written by Ryota Kyuki, Kosuke Tauchi, Takashi Ichida and Osamu Murayama.)

New York Times: Leaks at Fukushima nuclear plant

October 8, 2013

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/10/opinion/global/leaks-at-the-fukushima-nuclear-plant.html?_r=1&



IAEA promises to help

October 9, 2013

Japan to work with IAEA on radioactive wastewater

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131009_41.html

Japan and the UN's nuclear watchdog have agreed to **work together to dispel global fears over radioactive wastewater** at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Japan's Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Toshimitsu Motegi met in Tokyo on Wednesday with International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Yukiya Amano.

Motegi stressed the **importance of highly reliable monitoring of radioactive substances in the wastewater, as well as quick public disclosure of accurate information.**

He sought help from the IAEA in these areas.

Amano said he believes the crippled plant is generally in stable condition, and promised to cooperate with Japan in monitoring the wastewater.

IAEA promises to help (2)

October 11, 2013

Japan and IAEA to jointly monitor seawater contamination off Fukushima plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310110046>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Japan and the International Atomic Energy Agency will jointly monitor waters off the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant to gauge radioactive contamination in the sea, a step aimed to bolster the credibility of checks in response to international concerns.

Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, and Yukiya Amano, director-general of the Vienna-based IAEA, met in Tokyo on Oct. 10 to affirm a policy of mutual cooperation in the monitoring of radiation levels in seawater off the plant and nearby areas.

Amano has been calling for checks that comply with international standards in terms of selecting observation sites and other criteria as well as releasing the results and relevant information to the global community.

Currently, the task is primarily conducted by Tokyo Electric Power Co., which owns and operates the plant, and the government's nuclear regulation agency.

The IAEA is expected to send a team of inspectors to Fukushima Prefecture in November to determine if the sites to sample seawater and the method to gauge pollution levels are appropriate.

Based on the outcome, officials with the NRA and the IAEA will discuss in detail how they can work together in monitoring and releasing information.

October 10, 2013

IAEA to vet Pacific radiation checks

Kyodo

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/10/national/iaea-to-vet-pacific-radiation-checks/#.UlfqNIM0_9k

Experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency will arrive in Japan in late November to undertake joint radiation monitoring of the sea around the Fukushima No. 1 plant, the Nuclear Regulation Authority said Thursday.

The decision was conveyed during talks between the NRA's commissioners and visiting IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano in Tokyo. The U.N. watchdog's experts are expected to study the monitoring activities of domestic authorities and Tokyo Electric Power Co., an NRA official said.

Concerns remain among neighboring countries about the impact of radioactive materials that continue to spill from Fukushima No. 1, which suffered three core meltdowns from the quake-tsunami disaster in March 2011. Most recently, these fears have centered on the 300 of tons of contaminated groundwater spewing into the Pacific every day.

"Sea monitoring is very important. The IAEA will very much like to cooperate," Amano told NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka at the outset of the meeting.

The Vienna-based watchdog's participation is expected to help increase, somewhat, the credibility of data released by the Japanese government and Tepco about the nuclear disaster.

A massive amount of toxic water is stored in tanks at the No. 1 plant, but leaks have occurred repeatedly. The government earlier said radioactive contamination of the sea has only been observed within the facility's harbor, an area less than 0.3 sq. km.

October 9, 2013

IAEA to join Japan's regulator to monitor seawater

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131010_37.html

The International Atomic Energy Agency is to join Japan's nuclear regulator in monitoring radioactivity in seawater near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano offered to cooperate when he met Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority chief Shunichi Tanaka on Thursday.

Tanaka accepted, saying that working together would help alleviate concerns among neighboring countries.

Seawater monitoring by the authority has shown that radioactivity levels in most examined sea areas are under detection limits.

But concerns about seawater contamination have been growing at home and abroad because of a series of radioactive water leaks at the plant.

South Korea recently banned imports of marine products from Fukushima Prefecture and elsewhere in Japan.

IAEA officials say figures obtained and released by Japan alone would not convince international society that the country's seafood is safe.

The IAEA plans to send a team of specialists to Japan in mid-November to study how to carry out joint monitoring.

LDP on splitting TEPCO

October 9, 2013

INTERVIEW: LDP's Oshima says TEPCO breakup an option

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310090079>

REUTERS

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party will make proposals this month on how to handle the embattled operator of the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant, including the possible break-up of the giant utility, a senior party policymaker said on Oct. 9.

Tadamori Oshima, head of LDP's task force on reconstruction after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that wrecked the reactors at the Fukushima plant, told Reuters the government needs to do more in dealing with floods of contaminated water at the plant and decommissioning the facility.

He declined to express a clear opinion on the controversial question of whether to break up Tokyo Electric Power Co., but said: "It's time for us to make a decision, not in order to save TEPCO, but to pave the way toward reconstruction."

The current set-up is not working, Oshima said in an interview, as progress is hindered by TEPCO remaining in charge of all the work.

TEPCO has lost \$27 billion since the disaster at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and faces massive liabilities as it decommissions the facility, compensates tens of thousands of evacuees and pays for decontamination of an area nearly the size of Connecticut.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has promised that the government would take primary responsibility for containing the contaminated water at Fukushima, telling the world the "situation is under control."

At the Fukushima plant, some 800 tons of groundwater flow into the basements of the wrecked reactor buildings every day, mixing with highly radioactive water used to cool melted fuel rods.

After months of denials, TEPCO in July admitted contaminated water was flowing into the nearby Pacific Ocean.

It also since found that 300 tons of highly radioactive water had leaked from one of hundreds of hastily-built storage tanks.

Last week, TEPCO said another 430 liters of water overflowed from another tank.

In the latest mishap, six Fukushima workers were exposed to a leak of highly radioactive water after one of them mistakenly detached a pipe.

HEATED DEBATE

The government effectively nationalized TEPCO last year with a taxpayer-funded rescue.

But there is heated debate over direct government involvement in the company and whether to split it up, such as by spinning off the Fukushima clean-up and letting the remainder of TEPCO focus on its traditional business of generating electricity for millions of homes and businesses in the Tokyo area.

Oshima, a former LDP vice president, reportedly last month proposed breaking off the function of decommissioning the wrecked Fukushima plant--a process that is expected to take at least 30 years and cost more than \$100 billion.

He declined to comment on what he proposed, saying it was a private letter to Abe that wasn't meant to be disclosed.

There is a push to enact a "special measures law" that would let the government take a more direct role, as it is now authorized only to participate in research and development on the water issue.

Oshima said careful negotiations are under way with a wide variety of parties, including government ministries and the LDP's junior coalition partner, New Komeito, on such issues as stronger government involvement and potential reorganization.

TEPCO has said it is not in a position to comment on its future structure, and aims to return to profitability this financial year.

The bureaucracy is pushing back, government officials say. The Finance Ministry fears that breaking up TEPCO would hand another large bill to taxpayers, while the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which regulates electric utilities, worries a break-up could have ripple effects through the industry.

Industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi said this week that a special measures law was not needed as the current legal framework allows the government to be more involved in TEPCO.

Blame the workers!

October 9, 2013

Chairman of Japanese nuclear regulator blames declining worker morale for Fukushima leaks and problems

<http://enformable.com/2013/10/chairman-japanese-nuclear-regulator-blames-declining-working-moral-fukushima-leaks-problems/>

On Wednesday, Shunichi Tanaka, Chairman of Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority, suggested that one of the causes of radioactive leaks and other problems at Fukushima Daiichi is due to a decline in worker

moral. Tanaka said that the problems would be prevented if the workers had strong morale in a positive work environment.

The majority of the workers on-site at Fukushima Daiichi are subcontracted and have no tenure or authority amongst circles of TEPCO workers. Why are the subcontracted workers there? Because TEPCO does not want to unnecessarily expose their key on-site personnel, who have the most knowledge and experience with the Fukushima Daiichi site, while stuck in the current feed and bleed doldrums with no obvious path forward. The workers who worked at the plant before the March 11th disaster have the most intimate knowledge of the site and the reactor buildings. They fill in the gaps where the blueprints leave off. Right now, human beings cannot even enter the reactor buildings, due to high radiation levels, so the intricate knowledge of the buildings is not as helpful as will be down the road. So, currently TEPCO is stuck in a holding pattern, and using **expendable** (red-shirt for all the Trekkie fans) **subcontracted workers; who are paid minimal amounts, sent in to do the most dangerous work, and now get blamed for all the mistakes.**

This week, TEPCO confirmed that the reason why radioactive water leaked from storage tanks, is because TEPCO decided to purchase storage tanks which were not welded, rather bolted, in order to save time and money. This was not a decision in any way affected by the subcontracted help at Fukushima Daiichi, it was a cost-effective decision made by TEPCO.

Tokyo Electric, not subcontracted workers, broke their promise made in June, 2011 to the Japanese government to build fences to block radioactive water from leaking directly into the Pacific Ocean. The utility asked the government not to announce they had committed to a \$1 billion construction project, due to fears of the financial fall-out that would ensue, then – did not even move forward with the work that they had promised to complete.

Personally, I resent the very idea submitted by the Chairman. I think that Tokyo Electric, the utility in charge of the power plant before and after the disaster is the main reason for the additional ongoing problems at Fukushima Daiichi.

I spoke to Dave Lochbaum with the Union of Concerned Scientists, to see if maybe I was missing the point. Dave also shared these concerns. He added, “Let us hypothetically suppose, that even if the problems at Fukushima Daiichi were caused by the poor moral of a single worker, then maybe we could advocate that TEPCO deserved to be cut some slack; but it is clear to me what when a large portion of the workforce becomes demoralized – TEPCO is definitely the one to blame. Each worker may be responsible for their own morale, but **TEPCO is responsible for the moral of the work force.** Additionally, if even the workers who are risking their lives are demoralized and have no trust in TEPCO wanting to do – or being capable of doing the right things, why should the Japanese citizens or international public at large have any confidence in the Japanese government or TEPCO?”

Source: NHK

Maximum demand for TEPCO power

October 12, 2013

Tepco power demand hits highest level of year

JJI

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/12/business/tepco-power-demand-hits-highest-level-of-year/#.UlmN21M0_9k

Maximum electricity demand in Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Kanto service area reached 95 percent of total supply capacity Friday, the highest level so far this year.

Power demand in and around Tokyo surged to 39.7 million kw between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. Friday, Tepco officials said.

It is the first time the rate has climbed to that level since Nov. 28 last year, when it hit 96 percent.

The officials attributed the high reading to people turning on air conditioners amid unseasonably hot weather, and the suspension of a 600,000-kw unit due to a glitch at Tepco's thermal power plant in Fukushima Prefecture.

The previous peak seen this year was 94 percent, in January and February, according to the officials.

LNG arrives from Angola

bloomberg

Tepco on Saturday received the nation's first spot cargo of liquefied natural gas from Angola, ship-tracking data show.

The Lobito, with a capacity of 155,000 cu. meters, docked at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Futtsu terminal in Chiba Prefecture, according to transmissions by IHS Fairplay.

It had been scheduled to arrive Friday.

The ship loaded the supercooled gas in Angola at a Chevron Corp.-led LNG plant in the city of Soyo and departed Aug. 11, the data show.

Japan, the world's largest importer of LNG, does not have any long-term contracts with Angola, according to Bloomberg data.

The Futtsu terminal has a capacity of 20.2 million tons per year and receives term shipments from Indonesia, Malaysia, Qatar, Australia, Oman, Abu Dhabi, Brunei and Russia. The Lobito's cargo was the third shipment loaded at the Angola LNG plant since June, when the facility became operational.

Hydrogeologists, gov't monitoring, better system to reuse water & constant attention

October 14, 2013

FUKUSHIMA WATER CRISIS: Water recycling system urgently needed, ex-chairman of U.S. nuclear watchdog says

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310140011>

By SHIRO NAMEKATA/ Correspondent

WASHINGTON--Japan urgently needs an effective system that reuses radiation-contaminated water to cool down the crippled reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, said Gregory Jaczko, former chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

In an interview with The Asahi Shimbun, the nuclear expert said failure to handle the contaminated water problem at the site will damage Japan's credibility.

Excerpts from the interview follow.

Question: As an outside expert, how do you view the serious problem of contaminated water leaks at the Fukushima nuclear power plant?

Jaczko: There is a long-term challenge in Japan with the clean-up from the Fukushima nuclear accident, which is going to take decades to resolve, and this is just one of the first incidents to show that it needs **continuous focus and attention.**

What I saw was somewhat surprising: the lack of monitoring of the tanks. That seems to be something that is more straightforward and easier to do--to ensure that there are not spills, or when there are spills, they are identified readily and quickly addressed and remediated.

But it did not appear that they had any type of instrumentation, monitoring, for those tanks; it was done as "walk-arounds" and identified by workers. They demonstrate a weakness in the safety system, in the oversight and the management of the project, and I think what is needed is corrections for those elements.

Q: Critics say that Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant's operator, has already lost control of the situation. What do you think?

A: It is unfortunate that TEPCO has not done more to address the situation. It has continued to raise concerns about their ability to do that, but it is also not an easy task to replace TEPCO because there are a number of workers who are involved in this effort. You cannot simply replace all those workers. Fundamentally, this issue comes down more to management and safety focus than anything else.

What is really needed is an effective, rigorous system of accountability and management at the site. And ultimately, that has to come from the bulk of the workers and the people who are there every day.

But there needs to be continued government oversight. The regulator should continue to play a strong role in ensuring that the activities that go on at the site are safe, that they are consistent with the requirements.

There should be experts within the regulator who understand hydrogeology and the groundwater issues. Whenever you are designing, siting and licensing nuclear power plants, you have to prepare for spills and other ways that the groundwater can be contaminated.

So, again, if the regulator does not have those experts, it would be important to hire them so that it could continue to provide effective oversight of TEPCO's activities.

Q: If you were responsible for the situation, how would you manage it?

A: As a long-term program of management of the wastewater, what needs to be done is a more effective system of reuse of the water, the existing water.

In a normal operating reactor, water is continuously reused and used for cooling purposes, periodically cleaned, and it is those systems that are not working effectively right now in Japan.

In the long term, a program to release the water would be very damaging for the credibility of the Japanese.

There may be certain amounts that are allowed to be released within acceptable regulatory limits, and that is certainly a practice at an operating reactor. Some of it has low levels of contamination, and that is a practice that happens.

If it is within acceptable limits, then that is something that could be done.

Q: Is it possible to use lessons learned from the Three Mile Island accident and from the handling of old nuclear facilities, such as the Hanford Site?

A: The normal methods for reactor cooling, for filtering, for reusing water, those systems are not fully functioning at all with the reactors at the Fukushima plant. As a result, there is this need to continue to inject large quantities of water and then store the wastewater as it comes out.

I don't believe that was the situation at Three Mile Island because there was not the damage to all of the water circulation systems.

Hanford and many other sites in the United States have more lessons because there were, perhaps, more similar issues with radioactive materials being put into tanks.

While it was a slightly different type of material, and liquid material, nonetheless, there were some very important lessons, like when you build tanks very quickly, those tanks may not be robust and last for a long period of time.

The other issue that is really relevant from those sites is just understanding the hydrogeology of the site, understanding how groundwater moves, what the impact from groundwater would be, how radionuclides will move through the groundwater, and ultimately how those processes work.

There is more to be learned from what happened at Hanford than the Three Mile Island accident at this point.

The Three Mile Island accident will become much more relevant when they get to the point of beginning to actually extract the fuel from the reactor vessels--or wherever it is--in the reactors.

The Hanford situation is a little bit different as a model because the activities that went on were government activities as part of the nuclear weapons program.

The issue of the water and the water contamination at the Fukushima plant is a very unique situation, and it does not offer any immediate examples of challenges.

Q: Many Japanese are opposed to the nation's dependence on nuclear power plants. What do you think about the future of nuclear energy?

A: The current generation and type of reactors will always suffer from this fundamental challenge--the possibility of having some type of very catastrophic accident.

For a country like Japan, that is even more significant because of the small size of the country. When you have an accident, it has the potential to contaminate, as a percentage, a significant portion of Japan.

For the long term, it is beneficial to look for alternative ways to generate electricity.

As we look 30 to 40 to 50 years down the road, one would hope that we are generating electricity in ways that are more efficient and effective than the current generation of nuclear reactors.

And then, there is the potential for these catastrophic accidents. If I were advising the Japanese industry, I would look to put effort and focus on new technologies and new industries to generate electricity.

By SHIRO NAMEKATA/ Correspondent

40% of exported nuke material never checked for safety

October 14, 2013

40% of Japan nuclear tech exported over past decade failed to go through safety check

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131014p2a00m0na015000c.html>

About 40 percent of Japanese nuclear plant equipment exported over the past decade -- worth some 51.1 billion yen -- failed to go through national government safety inspections, the Mainichi Shimbun has learned.

The government conducts safety inspections on nuclear plant equipment that is to be exported only if manufacturers receive loans from the government-affiliated Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), or take out insurance policies from Nippon Export and Investment Insurance, an independent administrative agency. This is in sharp contrast to the requirement that all devices for domestic nuclear power stations be subject to strict government safety inspections.

An expert involved in the Japan Atomic Energy Commission's compilation of a new nuclear power policy outline said the finding highlights insufficiencies in the government's system to examine nuclear plant equipment for export.

"It came as a surprise to me that many exported nuclear plant-related devices failed to undergo safety inspections," said Keio University professor Masaru Kaneko. "Prime Minister Shinzo Abe claimed in a speech overseas that Japan can provide the world's safest atomic power technology, but how can Japan guarantee the safety of nuclear plant equipment Japanese firms export without a proper system to examine it?"

Japanese manufacturers exported some 124.8 billion yen worth of nuclear plant equipment to 23 countries and territories from 2003 to 2012, according to the Finance Ministry's trade statistics.

Of that, some 73.7 billion yen worth sold to five countries -- China, the United States, France, Belgium and Finland -- received prior government safety inspections, according to documents that the Mainichi has obtained from the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy under the freedom of information system. **The remainder, worth approximately 51.1 billion yen, failed to go through such checks.**

Devices exported without going through safety inspections include those for the installation at Taiwan's fourth atomic power station, and repair works in Sweden and Brazil, according to manufacturer officials and the Japan Electrical Manufacturers' Association's internal documents.

Three major manufacturers of nuclear plants -- **Hitachi, Ltd., Toshiba Corp. and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Ltd.** are among the manufacturers that exported relevant equipment without safety inspections. Among the items exported without inspection are key components such as nuclear reactor pressure vessels, their lids and control rod driving systems.

Since many sections of the documents released by the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy had been redacted, it remains unclear whether all the 73.7 billion yen worth of devices underwent full government safety checks.

Japanese manufacturers must pay heavy compensation if nuclear plant devices they have exported fail.

Plenty to be depressed about

October 14, 2013

FUKUSHIMA WATER CRISIS: Declining worker morale at Fukushima plant may be behind recent mishaps

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310140095>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A series of recent mishaps at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant may be symptomatic of declining worker morale.

A major reason for this disturbing trend is the health concerns held by workers who still face high levels of radiation every time they enter the plant.

Workers receive what looks like a receipt at the end of each shift, which shows their level of radiation exposure. **Some workers are exposed to nearly 2 millisieverts over the course of a day, which is close to double the annual exposure limit for the general population.**

There are many locations within the plant site around the reactor buildings where radiation levels continue to exceed 100 millisieverts per hour.

Although work schedules are made while considering the amount of radiation a worker will be exposed to, those who have accumulated levels that exceed the annual 50-millisievert limit will not be allowed to enter the plant site for the rest of that year.

"If we exceed our radiation exposure limits, we will simply be disposed of as workers," said a man in his 30s who has worked at the Fukushima No. 1 and other nuclear plants for more than 10 years.

Before the Fukushima nuclear accident, the man was responsible for leading a team that worked within the reactor building. Immediately after the accident, he volunteered to return to work at the plant from where he had evacuated. One task he performed was to carry a hose to the reactor building so water could be pumped into the reactor. Dose levels exceeded 10 millisieverts per hour.

"I thought I would die," the man said.

Media reports about Fukushima tend to focus on the problems that have arisen, and **the voices of workers at the plant site are rarely reported**. Whenever celebrities visit the disaster site to encourage victims, they never meet with any plant workers.

"Right now, I do not feel that our efforts are being recognized by society," the man said. "My motivation to work is gradually disappearing."

Among the recent blunders at the plant have been storing too much contaminated water in storage tanks, leading to leaks. In another instance, workers were showered with contaminated water after piping was inadvertently removed.

At the building workers must pass through to enter and leave the plant site, another male worker feels with the increase in problems related to radiation-contaminated water this summer, there has also been an increase in workers whose skin or underwear has become contaminated with radiation.

Although workers are required to wear protective clothing and full face masks, some workers touch the back of their necks with their contaminated gloves when removing their masks.

"The workers brought in by the construction companies after the accident do not have much work experience or knowledge," the male worker said. "They cannot even skillfully remove their protective clothing."

Moreover, unlike other nuclear plants, the landscape of the Fukushima No. 1 plant is constantly changing with the removal of rubble and the installing of storage tanks to hold the massive volume of contaminated water left over after cooling the reactors. There are some areas of the plant where work experience from before the accident is of no use at all.

A worker in his 20s feels that more people are choosing to become involved in the decontamination efforts. One reason may be that those who do decontamination work receive an additional 10,000 yen (\$102) a day in the form of hazard pay, which comes from public funds. In 2011, when the accident occurred, the man received close to 30,000 yen a day in wages, but now he receives under 20,000 yen. That means there is almost no difference in pay with those doing decontamination work.

"The dose levels workers at the Fukushima plant can be exposed to are several hundred times that for those doing decontamination work," the man said. "I feel more workers have come to think it is not worth it."

Although such factors make it difficult to find good workers, there are some from the local community who continue to return to the Fukushima plant.

A man in his 30s was scolded by his mother for his decision to continue working at the Fukushima plant. He has with him a tablet computer on which he keeps an image of a person who died after being exposed to a large dose of radiation during the 1999 criticality accident at the JCO Co. plant in Ibaraki Prefecture.

"I work while thinking that is how I might end up," the man said.

One reason for the low worker morale is because a large percentage are employed by subcontractors. **Only 10 percent of those working at the plant site are employees of Tokyo Electric Power Co.,** the plant operator.

The central government and TEPCO estimate that **about 12,000 workers are needed over the course of a year.** However, workers who exceed their annual radiation exposure limit cannot continue to work, meaning **new workers have to continually be found.**

Inexperienced workers are recruited from around Japan, many by the subcontractors. The multi-layered structure of the companies involved in the work at the Fukushima plant means there is ambiguity about who is actually the employer, and that has left open the possibility of illegal hiring practices.

Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, raised concerns about TEPCO's tendency to leave things up to subcontractors.

"Efforts must be made to maintain the morale of each and every worker at the plant," Tanaka said on Oct. 9. "Careless errors cannot be corrected simply through regulations."

At an Oct. 11 news conference, Masayuki Ono, acting general manager of TEPCO's Nuclear Power and Plant Siting Division, said, "We will improve the situation after determining whether it is a structural problem or simply a careless error."

(This article was written by Takuro Negishi, Tetsuya Kasai, Susumu Okamoto and Toshio Tada.)

see also :

<http://fukushima-is-still-news.over-blog.com/article-blame-the-workers-120536560.html>

TEPCO promises more workers and better equipment

October 15, 2013

TEPCO vows to increase workers at Fukushima plant, improve water management

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310150104>

REUTERS

The operator of Japan's wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant, under fire to put right repeated contamination mishaps, promised on Oct. 15 to draft in extra workers and improve equipment as part of plans to make the site safe and keep the company solvent.

Tokyo Electric Power Company has been reprimanded twice in as many months by Japan's nuclear regulator for mismanagement in a cleanup operation more than 2 1/2 years after the Fukushima No. 1 plant was struck by an earthquake and tsunami.

Though the company has posted more than \$27 billion in net losses since the disaster, it has received pledges of financing from banks totaling \$5.9 billion.

Much of that, however, is contingent on TEPCO securing the regulator's approval to restart two of seven reactors at another of its plants, the world's largest nuclear plant.

"We will increase the workforce at Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and make sure we have an accurate grasp of the situation, follow procedures, introduce proper communications and instructions needed to carry out competent management of the site," TEPCO said in a statement after submitting a report to the regulator.

The increase, it said, would bring to 200 the number of workers drafted in since September to deal with contaminated water.

The cleanup of the disaster, the worst nuclear crisis since Chernobyl in 1986, is expected to take decades. TEPCO has been battling the rising contaminated water at Fukushima, 220 km northeast of Tokyo, that is leaking into the adjacent Pacific Ocean.

After months of denials, the utility acknowledged in July that the water was flowing into the sea from the wrecked reactor buildings.

Last week, it said radiation levels in nearby seawater had soared to the highest level in two years.

WITHOUT NUCLEAR POWER

Japan shut down all 50 of its reactors for safety checks in response to a wave of public revulsion after three meltdowns at Fukushima caused mass contamination and evacuations in the aftermath of the 2011 tsunami.

Two reactors restarted last year, but are now off line for maintenance, leaving the country without power generated from nuclear plants for only the third time in more than 40 years.

The chairman of Japan's new Nuclear Regulatory Agency has said TEPCO must prove its cleanup operations at Fukushima are in order before its plan to fire up two reactors at the giant Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant on Japan's west coast can be approved.

NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka said last month it had to be determined whether TEPCO "has the technological ability to operate a nuclear power plant".

In its submission on Oct. 15, TEPCO said it had taken steps to improve safety at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa based on lessons learned from the 2011 disaster.

But an early restart of the two new reactors is unlikely. A delay in TEPCO's plan to have them running by the end of the month has already prompted the company to revise its reorganization plan to cut costs and restore its finances.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, making a successful pitch last month to stage the 2020 Olympic Games, declared the plant stable. But he has also ordered TEPCO to set deadlines for stopping leaks.

The government, which controls TEPCO after a capital injection last year, will "respect" any decision by the NRA on a restart, an official familiar with the issues told Reuters.

30 years to recoup compensation fund

October 16, 2013

Taxpayers take note: State may need 31 years to recoup ¥5 trillion in Tepco redress aid

Kyodo

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/16/national/taxpayers-take-note-state-may-need-31-years-to-recoup-%C2%A55-trillion-in-tepco-redress-aid/#.Ul69EFM0_9k

It will take up to 31 years for the government to recover the ¥5 trillion in aid it may provide, just through this fiscal year, to Tokyo Electric Power Co. for compensation related to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster that started in 2011, a government agency said Wednesday.

Relevant interest payments to financial institutions through fiscal 2044 will cost the government an estimated ¥79.4 billion and will be effectively shouldered by taxpayers, the Board of Audit of Japan said.

The board's findings marked the first time an estimate has been released on how long it will take for the government to recover the money provided through a state-backed bailout fund as well as the financial burden taxpayers will face in the process.

The auditing was conducted at the request of the Diet in August 2012, after cash-strapped Tepco fell under effective state control after receiving a ¥1 trillion capital injection.

Apart from the ¥1 trillion in public funds, Tepco has received assistance from the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund to ensure swift compensation payments to people affected by the world's worst nuclear crisis since the 1986 Chernobyl disaster.

The fund entails allocated government bonds that can be redeemed when necessary for assistance to Tepco, with the ceiling set at ¥5 trillion. The government borrows money from financial institutions to redeem the bonds and pays the relevant interest.

The fund has so far provided Tepco with about ¥3.05 trillion, including ¥2.91 trillion already paid to people affected by the disaster.

But compensation payments are still ongoing and the assistance Tepco will need, including costs to clean areas contaminated by radioactive fallout from the Fukushima No. 1 plant, may eventually exceed the fund's ceiling.

Under the current scheme, the fund recovers the money provided to Tepco through annual contributions from 11 Japanese electricity firms that own nuclear plants, including Tepco.

Tepco is also required to pay what is called a “special contribution” to the fund once its financial conditions have improved.

The Board of Audit conducted its report on the assumption that ¥5 trillion will be provided to Tepco by the end of the current fiscal year through March.

If Tepco pays no more than the annual contribution, the Board of Audit’s estimate showed that the government will take 31 years to recover the aid.

If Tepco pays the annual contribution and the special contribution, however, the period will be shortened to 14 years, with interest payments totaling ¥37.4 billion.

The estimate also showed that Tepco will face ¥1.09 trillion in additional costs for failing to restart its idled nuclear reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata Prefecture in fiscal 2015 and fiscal 2016.

The additional costs represent the consumption of fossil fuel required to make up for the loss of nuclear power generation.

Nuclear compensation fund recovery to take decades

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131016_40.html

Japan's Board of Audit says it could take more than 30 years for the government to recover funds it has invested to help compensate victims of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident.

The government has issued bonds worth 5 trillion yen, or 50 billion dollars, to help the plant's operator Tokyo Electric Power Company pay compensation. It is for people who've had to evacuate, and farmers and fishermen who've lost their livelihood.

The government plans to recover the funds through an annual pay-back by TEPCO and contributions from other nuclear power companies.

But the Board of Audit says if TEPCO does not go into the black, recovery would not end until 2044. Even if the utility's profits improve, the funds would not be fully recovered until 2030.

The Board of Audit expects the need for government assistance to balloon further as demands for decontamination and real estate compensation increase.

The board wants TEPCO to quickly balance its finances, because the longer it takes for recovery, the heavier the burden on the national budget and taxpayers.

The board is also urging the utility to sell off its property assets and subsidiaries to minimize the burden on the public.

Abe lacks sense of crisis over water leaks

October 16, 2013

Editorial: Abe's policy speech shows lack of sense of crisis over radioactive water leaks

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20131016p2a00m0na021000c.html>

A policy speech that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe delivered on Oct. 15 at the outset of the extraordinary Diet session highlighted his lack of a sense of crisis over radioactively contaminated water accumulating at the tsunami-hit Fukushima nuclear plant.

Unless the government solves this problem, it cannot go ahead with the implementation of a growth strategy as the prime minister has pledged.

His policy speech was partially a counter-argument against public criticism of a remark he made at an International Olympic Committee (IOC) general meeting in September to the effect that the situation concerning radioactive water is "under control." Moreover, Prime Minister Abe mentioned harmful rumors about the contaminated water's effects on locally made food and other products and said, "The impact on foodstuffs and water is far below the legally permissible limit."

However, the problem is not limited to harmful rumors on locally produced goods. Since the IOC meeting, serious problems involving leaks of radioactive water have surfaced almost daily, and there is no prospect that the crisis will be brought under control in the foreseeable future. If the current situation continues, it will become impossible to decommission and dismantle crippled reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. The current response to the situation is only amplifying public concerns about the crisis.

The prime minister emphasized that the government will play a leading role in bringing the crisis under control and thereby fulfill its responsibility. However, he fell short of elaborating on the response to the crisis, such as specifically how the government and plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) will divide their responsibilities from a mid- to long-term perspective.

Naturally, efforts to bring the nuclear crisis under control will be a major issue during the current Diet session. There are calls within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) urging TEPCO be split into multiple companies and that an organization specializing in treating radioactive water and decommissioning the reactors be set up. Both the ruling and opposition blocs should seriously cooperate in working out specific measures to end the crisis before it is too late.

Prime Minister Abe also expressed optimism about Japan's future in his speech saying, "Japan can grow powerfully again" and "We can open the way for growth if we have willpower." These remarks apparently

reflect the self-confidence that he has gained as more than nine months have passed since he returned as head of the government. We have no objection to the prime minister's words, "Japan should restore a society filled with entrepreneurship and where young people can play an active role and women can shine."

However, "the actual feeling of economic recovery has not yet spread throughout the country," just as the prime minister acknowledged in his policy speech.

As part of the growth strategy, Abe unveiled a plan to ease regulations for companies that are actively developing new technologies as a preferential measure, among other plans. He said the most important thing is "deeds," and went on to say "simply writing an essay is meaningless." Now, whether the Abe government will achieve its goal of increasing wages for workers through the growth strategy is being tested.

Reform of the social security system is also an urgent task. The prime minister said financial resources to cover snowballing social security spending will be secured by raising the consumption tax rate from the current 5 percent to 8 percent in April 2014 and increasing the tax revenue by achieving economic recovery, while reforming the system into one in which benefits and burdens are well balanced. Abe should show the clear direction for his government's social security system reform to prove that it is not just an "essay."

Needless to say, there are numerous other challenges. Legislators from both the ruling and opposition parties should hold in-depth and thorough discussions on various pressing issues to make up for their long "summer vacation" as Diet members had not met since the end of June.

Abe's "flippant" remarks on water crisis raise concern

October 16, 2013

Abe claims Fukushima radioactive water woes are 'under control'

Kyodo

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/16/national/abe-claims-fukushima-radioactive-water-woes-are-under-control/#.U17mYFM0_9k

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said Wednesday the impact from accumulating radioactive water at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant has been "under control."

The government will "continue efforts to address the problem with multiple preventive measures," using the world's wisdom, Abe told a plenary session of the House of Representatives.

"The situation has been under control as a whole," Abe reckoned, answering questions from Banri Kaieda, head of the Democratic Party of Japan, about the policy speech Abe delivered Tuesday when the Diet

convened an extraordinary session. The DPJ was in power when the Fukushima nuclear crisis started in 2011.

Abe's repeated no-cause-for-alarm assessments of the situation at the Fukushima plant, which suffered three reactor-core meltdowns shortly after it was hit by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and monster tsunami, are raising the eyebrows of critics who regard the condition as worrying and warn of possible negative fallout on the environment and industries.

Critics also lashed out when Abe made similar assertions last month when he made a presentation to the International Olympic Committee in Buenos Aires for Tokyo's bid to host the 2020 Olympics. The city won the bid by beating Istanbul and Madrid, but at the same time repeated reports on the radioactive water spills plaguing the Tokyo Electric Power Co. nuclear plant were circulating, causing an international stir.

Kaieda said Wednesday that Abe should be more careful about assessing the situation at the plant, criticizing his remarks as being "extremely flippant."

Radioactive water is increasing daily at the plant as groundwater flows into reactor buildings and mixes with water used to cool the three crippled reactors.

Some of the contaminated water is kept in around 1,000 tanks set up at the site, and Tepco is struggling to prevent spills from the storage tanks, as well as to curb the daily flow, reportedly amounting to hundreds of tons, of radioactive groundwater into the Pacific Ocean from the plant.

Abe also reiterated in the Lower House that the government will play a major role in addressing the water problem, not leaving the task to the utility alone. The government has unveiled a basic policy to handle the situation, including potential financial assistance for the utility.

"Little effect has been seen", says NRA

October 16, 2013

Tepco's toxic water failures pitiful: NRA

JJI

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/16/national/tepcos-toxic-water-failures-pitiful-nra/#.U17nfVM0_9k

Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s efforts to keep radioactive water at its stricken Fukushima No. 1 power station from spilling into the sea have been ineffective, according to the Nuclear Regulation Authority.

"Our conclusion is that little effect has been seen" in Tepco's measures, NRA Commissioner Toyoshi Fuketa said at an NRA panel meeting Tuesday, citing an increase in the levels of radioactive materials in some seawater samples collected near the plant.

Tepco is pumping up groundwater and has injected a water-stopping agent into the ground near the plant's port in order to curb the flow of radioactive groundwater into the sea.

Despite such efforts, the levels of cesium-137 in seawater samples collected between the water intakes for reactors 1 and 2 inside the port rose to around 100 becquerels per liter this month from around 10 becquerels between late June and early July.

"It is reasonable to assume that the total amount of radioactive materials flowing into the sea has risen," said Masaya Yasui, an emergency response official at the NRA secretariat.

Radioactive water from the damaged reactors "may be leaking directly into the sea instead of mixing with groundwater before making its way into the sea," Fuketa said.

Last week, Tepco said the cesium level was 1.4 becquerels per liter of seawater sampled on Oct. 8 at a point 1 km from the seawall of the power plant, far below the safety limit of 10 becquerels for drinking water set by the World Health Organization.

But radioactive cesium was detected at the point for the first time since the firm started radioactivity checks there in mid-August.

The industry ministry now plans to introduce a system to examine the advisability of what nuclear experts call the "final" disposal method for highly radioactive waste from spent nuclear fuel every five years, a ministry official said Tuesday.

The ministry showed the drafted five-year review plan for the permanent underground disposal program to an expert panel the same day, hoping for the plan to facilitate finding of a municipality to host the final disposal facility.

Under the existing program, geological surveys and construction of a final disposal facility will be carried out for 30 years after a municipality agrees to host the facility. The facility will continue work to bring in and bury nuclear waste deep underground till it is shut down more than 40 years later. After the shutdown, the waste will be stored there for tens of thousands of years before it becomes no longer toxic to humans.

The ministry wants to revise the program to allow underground disposal to be replaced by safer disposal, if such a method is found in the more than 70 years till the facility's closure.

The draft plan also clarifies the stance of putting priority on the host municipality's preference on when to start operation of the disposal facility and shutter it.

The ministry aims to reflect the new plan in the final disposal program, which is now under review by the government, as well as the government's basic energy policy.

Spent fuel at the nation's atomic plants, all of which are currently offline, has been stored on-site at the facilities, but the storage pools are believed to be near capacity.

Meanwhile, no community has volunteered to host the "final" storage site.

Abe good at overlooking problems

October 16, 2013

Policy speech overlooks key issues

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/10/16/editorials/policy-speech-overlooks-key-issues/#.UJ_WL1M0_9k

An extraordinary Diet session started Tuesday to discuss important issues such as the leaks of contaminated water from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the reconstruction of areas devastated by the 3/11 disasters and Japan's strategy for the Trans-Pacific Partnership talks.

The session began 3½ months after the regular Diet session ended. During this period, there has been no substantive discussion on urgent matters. It's time for the government and the Diet to get serious about helping Japan overcome the problems that are having the biggest impact on people's lives.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe devoted about one-third of his policy speech to his economic growth strategy, which he said is aimed at increasing employment and wages for "young people and women." He said the effective ratio of job offers to applicants increased from 0.83 in late 2012 to 0.95 in August. But what he failed to do is mention the quality of employment. Businesses are adding irregular employees, whose wages are lower and who can be fired at any time.

According to the internal affairs ministry, the number of irregularly employed workers hit a record 18.81 million in the April-June period, while the number of regular workers declined by 530,000 from the same period of 2012 to 33.17 million.

Regarding the nuclear disaster, Mr. Abe said that in general contamination of food and water with radioactive substances from the Fukushima plant measures much lower than safety standards require. Cases are being reported of fish being caught off Fukushima that exceed permissible contamination standards. Contaminated water continues to leak, but Mr. Abe failed to give a detailed outline on how the government plans to contain it. Regarding the fact that little progress is being made in efforts to decontaminate areas around the plant, Mr. Abe only said that he will accelerate cleanup efforts as well as restore infrastructure.

Mr. Abe stated that efforts to resettle 3/11 disasters victims in highland areas have entered a stage of acquiring land and preparing sites. But he failed to mention that his policy of pushing public works projects nationwide is draining workers and equipment from disaster areas, thus slowing reconstruction.

As for the TPP, Mr. Abe did not mention people's worries about food safety, access to public health insurance and a lower national food self-sufficiency rate. He said only that he will take the initiative where necessary and defend what he must defend.

Mr. Abe stressed the importance of "proactive pacifism" as a way of contributing to world peace and stability. He neglected to mention his goal of allowing Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defense by changing the government's traditional interpretation of the Constitution's war-renouncing Article 9. Nor did he mention his plan to submit a bill that will not only impose up to 10 years' imprisonment for national public servants and up to five years' imprisonment for Diet members who leak "special secrets" in the fields of security and diplomacy but also punish reporters who investigate such secrets. The bill will undermine two pillars of democracy: Freedom of the press and the people's right to know.

Mr. Abe's speech shows that he ignores issues that don't mesh with his agenda, even if people are deeply concerned by them. If this continues, people will increasingly question his sincerity.

See also :

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/16/national/abe-claims-fukushima-radioactive-water-woes-are-under-control/#.UI7mYFM0_9k

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<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20131016p2a00m0na021000c.html>

Abe talks of Fukushima plant, economic measures

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131016_42.html

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe says radioactive water leakage at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant is under control.

Abe made the remark in a lower house session on Wednesday in response to a question from an opposition leader about Abe's policy speech on the previous day.

The questioner asked whether Abe adheres to his remark that the situation at Fukushima Daiichi is under control. The lawmaker argued that a senior official of the plant operator said he cannot confirm that this is the case.

Abe said leaks still occur, but that the radioactive water is affecting a limited area inside the plant's port.

He stressed that the government will keep working to address the problem with preventive measures based on knowhow from around the world.

Abe also referred to a wage hike and expansion of employment, answering a question from a member of his governing party.

Abe said Japan's economy is picking up smoothly. He said his government has launched a meeting with business and labor leaders to nurture common understanding to create a positive growth cycle with a wage hike and job creation.

Abe also referred to a plan to scrap a reconstruction tax imposed on businesses after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami one year earlier than initially planned.

He stressed that the plan was expected to help realize a pay raise for workers

"There is nobody who has solutions"

Radioactivity level spikes 6,500 times at Fukushima well

Published time: October 18, 2013 02:08

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Irina Galushko, Japan, Nuclear, Thabang Motsei

Radioactivity levels in a well near a storage tank at the Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan have risen immensely on Thursday, the plant's operator has reported.

Officials of the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) said on Friday they detected 400,000 becquerels per liter of beta ray-emitting radioactive substances - including strontium - at the site, a level 6,500 times higher than readings taken on Wednesday, NHK World reported.

The storage tank leaked over 300 tons of contaminated water in August, some of which is believed to have found its way into the sea through a ditch.

The well in question is about 10 meters from the tank and was dug to gauge leakage.

TEPCO said the findings show that radioactive substances like strontium have reached the groundwater. High levels of tritium, which transfers much easier in water than strontium, had already been detected.

Officials at TEPCO said they will remove any contaminated soil around the storage tank in an effort to monitor radioactivity levels of the water around the well.

The news comes after it has been reported a powerful typhoon which swept through Japan led to highly radioactive water near the crippled nuclear power plant being released into a nearby drainage ditch, increasing the risk of it flowing into the sea.

On Wednesday TEPCO said it had detected high levels of radiation in a ditch leading to the Pacific Ocean, and that it suspected heavy rains had lifted contaminated soil.

‘Decades-long problems being faced at Fukushima’

Robert Jacobs, a professor at Hiroshima Peace University, told RT the compounding problems at Fukushima Daiichi underscore one critical reality: no one really knows what to do.

“Nobody really knows how to solve the problems at Fukushima. There is nobody who has solutions.

The problems at Fukushima are unprecedented, so even bringing in outside expertise, all that they can try to do is problem solve. There is no solution that other countries have that they can come in and fix the reactors, or rather, shut down the contamination, shut down the leaks.”

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s open request for advanced knowledge from overseas is a welcome step, as this will bring a higher degree of professionalism than Tepco has demonstrated since the crisis first erupted, Jacobs says. But even though, those experts will be at a loss to solve the immense problems they’ll be facing for decades at Fukushima.

Even in the one area where Japan could potentially help contain the disaster, the authorities have wavered, Konstantin Simonov from the Moscow-based Fund for Energy Security told RT.

“Fukushima should be treated just like Chernobyl – as a wreck that must be retired and put in a sarcophagus, with radioactive waste slowly and thoroughly utilized. Why does the problem persist at Fukushima? Because they can’t decide whether they want to close it or to keep it going.”

Tokyo Electric Power Company in fact seems reluctant to shut down Fukushima for good. Tepco is in fact pushing to reopen its Kashiwazaki Kariwa facility – the world’s largest nuclear power station – which itself was shut down in 2007 following reports of radioactive leaks in the wake of an earthquake.

In September, Japan announced its only operating nuclear reactor had been closed for maintenance, leaving the country with no nuclear power supply for only the second time in four decades.

Atomic power accounted for 30 percent of Japan’s energy needs prior to the Fukushima disaster, and the country was forced to increase fossil fuel imports to make up for the deficit.

As a result, Japan become the world’s largest importer of liquefied natural gas (LNG), prompting the world’s third-largest-economy to post its first trade deficit since the second oil shock 31 years ago.

Under these circumstances, the crisis gripping Fukushima will not be the only factor in deciding the fate of the country’s nuclear industry.

Interview with Robert Jacobs

'Fukushima might make 2020 Tokyo Olympics impossible'

Published time: October 08, 2013 13:46

<http://rt.com/op-edge/fukushima-impossible-tokyo-olympics-2020-895/>

There is no reason to believe that radiation leaks at Fukushima will be contained by 2020, so the Tokyo Olympics can become impossible, nuclear technology historian Robert Jacobs told RT.

Last August Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) for the first time requested international help in its increasingly desperate fight to contain the leaks at the crippled nuclear plant. Historian of social and cultural aspects of nuclear technology and Associate Professor at Hiroshima Peace University, Robert Jacobs believes this means the problem is catastrophically large.

RT: *What does this SOS call tell us about the scale of the leaks at the plant?*

Robert Jacobs: The main thing it tells us is that they are so significant and so large that the Japanese government and Japanese nuclear industry is at a loss at how to deal with them. Now remember Japan has over 50 nuclear power plants, so there's a lot of expertise and a lot of experience in Japan. If these leaks are so significant that the Japanese nuclear industry and government are at a loss of how to deal with them then they are catastrophically large. So this is a very, very big problem and it's not an easy problem to solve.

RT: *Japan's Prime Minister says his country, and I quote, 'needs your knowledge and expertise' - which countries do you think could be most useful in this situation?*

RJ: Clearly the countries that would be the most useful are the countries with the largest and oldest groups of power-plants, so this would be the United States, Russia and also the United Kingdom or rather France. These are the countries with the largest amount of nuclear power plants in the world and the longest amount of experience, so these are countries that have both expertise and experience. However, given that nobody really knows how to solve the problems at Fukushima, there is nobody who has solutions to this. The problems of Fukushima are unprecedented, so even bringing in outside expertise all that they can do is to try to problem solve, there is no solution that other countries have that they can come in and fix the reactors or rather shut down the contamination, shut down the leaks. Even other countries coming in and bringing their expertise will hopefully bring more professionalism than TEPCO has shown in the last two and a half years, but even those experts would be at a loss at how to solve the immense problems that we'll be facing for decades in Fukushima.

RT: *What about Russia's experience in cleaning up such problems?*

RJ: Russia's experience is instructive, but as many people I'm sure know the nuclear fuel at Chernobyl is still melting, and it's still needing to be contained, and there's new containment being built at Chernobyl even this long after the event. So part of the expertise that Russia has shown in dealing with Chernobyl is to evacuate a much larger area and move people further away from the contamination. This is not being done in Japan. But this won't solve the problems of the leaks and this won't solve the problems of the contamination.

RT: *What is it going to take to get the situation at the plant under control?*

RJ: Nobody knows that. And this is the terrifying part is that the situation when there's a large nuclear disaster like this the situation is so unprecedented that there is no solution. Right now there are so many problems at the Fukushima plant. You have over a thousand tanks of water with highly contaminated radioactive water inside these tanks, because of the ground water that is also flowing through there and the water that's being poured on every day in order to keep the melting cores cool, in order to keep them from heating up the level of water saturating that ground is incredibly high. And then you have over 1000 tanks and more tanks being built every few days to store thousands of tons of water - this is all on ground saturated with water. So how they are going to be able to keep that water in place without these tanks all leaking is anybody's guess. How they are going to be able to find where underneath these reactors the nuclear fuel is and limit and contain them so that they stop leaching radiation into the environment is likely to take decades even with all expertise in the world.

RT: *How could all this affect the 2020 Tokyo Olympics?*

RJ: It could be very devastating for the Tokyo Olympics. Right now there is still all throughout northern Japan caesium being found in the urine of children there which means that the exposure and contamination is ongoing, they have not gone down for children in these areas, they are still being exposed to radiation. So two and a half years later it has yet to be contained. There is no reason to believe that it will be contained even by 2020. What's more, there's likelihood of a potentially more catastrophic happening in Fukushima. If there was another large earthquake, if there was a large typhoon there could easily be more destruction there. As we know there is a spent fuel pool in the number 4 reactor that holds an immense amount of spent nuclear fuel rods and the building has been damaged and is leaning. This spent fuel pool is several floors up, so if this building were to collapse which could happen it would spill these spent nuclear fuel rods all over the ground which would make the 2020 Tokyo Olympics impossible and could threaten all kinds of health problems throughout northern Japan and Tokyo itself. So it's a wish that Tokyo Olympics will not be affected by this, but there's no doubt that the radioactive leakage will be continuing at that time.

RT: *The Fukushima tragedy has got a massive anti-nuclear movement rolling - is the world ready to abandon this energy source for good?*

RJ: It has to for the well-being of the population of the world and the eco-system. The benefits from nuclear power last one or two generations but the burden of taking care of the spent fuel from those two generations of power last over a thousand generations. That's an incredible burden to ask thousand generations to take care of our garbage so that we could have energy for one or two generations. When you are creating toxins that are the most dangerous toxins in the world and some of them will remain dangerous toxins for 20 thousand or a 100 thousand years. Once those toxins are manufactured, plutonium is manufactured, it doesn't exist in nature, once these manufactured elements enter into the ecosystem they will be something that has to be dealt with by human beings by tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands years. So to continue to create more of these poisons for the purpose of having easier electricity is unsustainable that's putting a burden on our future, that's too much to bear. The world cannot continue with nuclear power. The way forward are not with limited fuels or contaminating fuels, the way forward over the course of hundreds maybe thousands of years if we are able to sustain human civilization is through renewable and sustainable energy sources that do not pollute or contaminate our ecosystem. What's happening in Fukushima is a catastrophic problem that is not finished, will not be finished any time soon, and remains a dire threat to the people of Japan as well as for people all around the world as long as it continues to spill radiation into the ocean and into the ecosystem.

77 % of decontamination budget unused

Ministry fails to use 77% of Fukushima decontamination budget; TEPCO refuses to pay

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310170058>

By TAKUYA KITAZAWA/ Staff Writer

The Environment Ministry has failed to use 76.6 percent, or 247.2 billion yen, of its budget to decontaminate radioactive areas around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the Board of Audit said. Progress has been slow because opposition from local residents is making it difficult for the ministry to secure places to temporarily store the contaminated soil and debris collected in the work. The ministry faces another problem: Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the stricken Fukushima plant, refuses to cover all the costs of the decontamination work as required under law. The Board of Audit investigated the ministry's budget of about 322.8 billion yen (\$3.2 billion) for decontamination work for the period until March 2013, the end of fiscal 2012.

The results were released on Oct. 16.

In September, the Environment Ministry withdrew its plan to complete the decontamination work within fiscal 2013. The slow use of the budget made it clear that the goal was overly optimistic.

“We will make efforts for smooth progress of the decontamination work by obtaining the consent of local residents,” a ministry official said.

The ministry has been decontaminating areas known as “hinan-shiji kuiki,” from where residents were ordered to evacuate immediately after the March 2011 accident at the nuclear plant. The areas are located in 11 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture.

By the end of July this year, only three of the municipalities-- Tamura, Naraha and Kawauchi--had obtained sufficient storage space for radioactive debris gathered in the decontamination process.

Seven municipalities have secured less than 50 percent of the necessary storage space, including Iitate at 15.2 percent and Minami-Soma at 18.0 percent.

Namie has not acquired any storage place.

By fiscal 2013, the central government had earmarked 1.287 trillion yen for decontamination work. The amount needed is expected to increase.

Under the special measures law to deal with contamination caused by radioactive materials, TEPCO must shoulder all costs of decontamination work conducted by the central government and local governments. The law also stipulates that TEPCO must make efforts to quickly make the payments.

For the work that has been completed so far, the ministry sent TEPCO a bill for about 40.4 billion yen. However, the utility has paid only about 6.7 billion yen, or 16.7 percent.

According to the Board of Audit, TEPCO refuses to cover much of the costs.

The utility has raised doubts over whether certain contamination work was carried out appropriately. It also questioned if such requests for payment are within the limit stipulated under the special measures law, according to the board.

“We are paying the costs we were able to agree on,” a TEPCO official told The Asahi Shimbun. “We cannot comment on the details because we have to discuss them with the Environment Ministry.”

TEPCO promises new business plan in November

Tepco vows new rehab plan next month reflecting cost cuts, restarts

Jiji

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/17/business/tepco-vows-new-rehab-plan-next-month-reflecting-cost-cuts-restarts/#.UmDTolM0_9k

Tokyo Electric Power Co. plans to map out a new business reconstruction plan in late November, Jiji Press has learned.

The utility briefed creditor banks about the plan, sources said. Tepco’s present plan calls on it to return to profitability in the current business year to next March.

In the new plan, Tepco will increase the size of its cost cuts and show when it aims to restart reactors 6 and 7 at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture, the sources said.

Tepco has asked the Nuclear Regulation Authority for safety checks of the reactors under new regulatory safety standards.

Tepco plans to obtain fresh loans worth some ¥300 billion and refinance loans worth some ¥200 billion possibly in December. Banks are expected to accept additional loans after examining the new business plan, a step to ease concerns over the company's financing.

For its reconstruction, Tepco has to assess how much it should bear in costs for decontamination and other measures in dealing with the meltdown disaster that started in 2011 at its Fukushima No. 1 plant.

The current business plan endorsed by the government in May 2012 does not state Tepco's share of such costs, which may exceed ¥10 trillion, with the company unable to draw any concrete road map for its reconstruction.

Tepco is thus expected to accelerate negotiations with the government in order to show a certain course in the new plan, the sources said.

LNG project financing

Japan Petroleum Exploration Co. may seek some project financing for its \$10 billion liquefied natural gas project in Canada from Japan Bank for International Cooperation, according to an official from the producer.

Japan's second-biggest oil and gas explorer, known as Japex, acquired a stake in April in the Pacific Northwest Project, which plans to build an LNG plant in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, with a production capacity of 12 million metric tons a year.

"Given our 10 percent equity in the project, our investment could reach ¥100 billion or more," Koichi Shimomura, who advises the president of Japex's Americas and Russia project division, said at the World Energy Congress in Daegu, South Korea, Thursday. "As much as 50 percent of the total could be covered with the project finance."

Japex purchased its stake in Pacific Northwest from Malaysian state-owned Petroliam Nasional Bhd., known as Petronas. It also bought 10 percent of a shale-gas field in the North Montney area of British Columbia in the same month.

Japex and Kuala Lumpur-based Petronas plan to complete a front-end engineering design study in early 2014 and reach a final investment decision by the end of that year, Shimomura said.

“Our priority is on the Pacific Northwest LNG Project,” he said at a briefing.

Japex is part of a Japanese consortium comprising Inpex Corp., Itochu Corp., and Marubeni Corp. that signed a memorandum of understanding with Russian state-owned Gazprom OAO in June to market in Japan LNG supplies from a project in Vladivostok.

Energy policy committee: Only 2 anti nuclear out of 15 members

October 18, 2013

Pro-nuclear voices dominate energy policy committee

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201310180073

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Kikuko Tatsumi has found herself increasingly isolated on a government panel discussing the nation's energy policy.

As one of only two anti-nuclear people on the 15-member subcommittee, Tatsumi's words were largely brushed aside at a two-and-a-half-hour meeting on Oct. 16.

“The important voices expressed in last year's nationwide discussions are not being reflected here,” Tatsumi, an adviser to the Nippon Association of Consumer Specialists, said.

Tatsumi was referring to the public hearings and deliberative polling that prompted the Democratic Party of Japan-led government in September last year to adopt a policy of steering the nation away from nuclear energy.

But since the Liberal Democratic Party ousted the DPJ and regained control of government in December 2012, the anti-nuclear voices have waned in talks about energy policy.

The subcommittee of the Advisory Committee for Natural Resources and Energy is expected to work out the state's middle- and long-term energy policies within this year for Cabinet approval.

Based on the views expressed on Oct. 16, it is clear which direction the subcommittee is taking.

"Given the time needed to secure alternative energy sources, it is dangerous to sharply lower the dependence on nuclear power," said Hajimu Yamana, professor of engineering at Kyoto University.

Masakazu Toyoda, chairman of the Institute of Energy Economics, Japan, who used to be a bureaucrat at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, also expressed his pro-nuclear view.

"I want the government to put in the basic energy plan a message that makes it possible to construct new nuclear reactors to secure a certain scale of nuclear power generation," he said.

In light of the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the DPJ-led government's policy was to abolish all nuclear reactors by the end of the 2030s and withhold approval of construction of new nuclear reactors.

The DPJ-led administration also set up a committee on basic issues, with about one-third of the members considered anti-nuclear.

However, the LDP-led government nullified the previous administration's policies. It also changed the basic issues committee into the predominantly pro-nuclear policy subcommittee, which started discussions in March this year.

The subcommittee is headed by Akio Mimura, an adviser to Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corp.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has said the government will reduce Japan's dependence on nuclear power generation as much as possible.

But the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has no intention of setting a future ratio of energy sources in the basic energy plan because of the current difficulties in predicting how many idled nuclear reactors can be restarted.

Unless the ratio and a time frame are clarified, however, companies will be unable to decide on how much importance they should place on solar power and other renewables.

Electric power companies will also have difficulties in determining the size of their investment in plant and equipment for each energy source.

In addition, the government faces problems on whether to approve the reconstruction or new construction of reactors and where to store the spent nuclear fuel.

Anti-nuclear sentiment is again rising following a series of mishaps and leaks of radioactive water at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

A high-ranking industry ministry official doubted the basic energy plan will include government approval of the construction of new reactors under the current circumstances.

A different senior ministry official said, "We want to wait until we can discuss the issue in a calm manner." The government could also postpone a decision on how it will address potential safety problems if the existing nuclear reactors are maintained.

(This article was written by Yuriko Suzuki and Mari Fujisaki.)

Can the situation be "under control" for the Olympics?

October 19, 2013

Fukushima 2020: Will Japan be able to keep the nuclear situation under control?

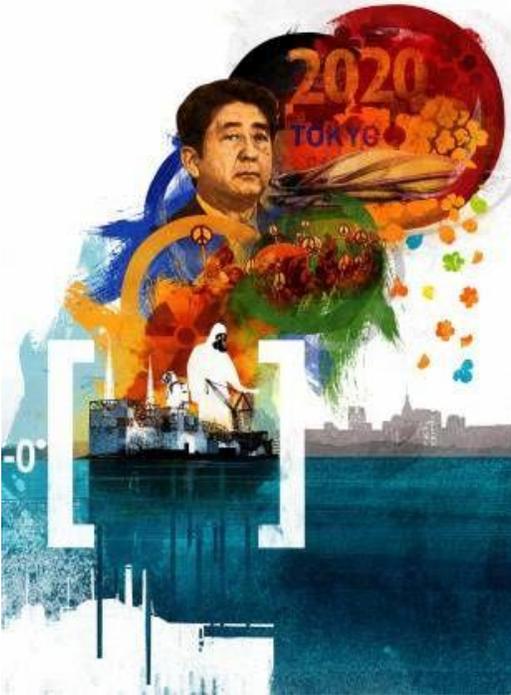
by Jun Hongo

Staff Writer

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/19/national/fukushima-2020-will-japan-be-able-to-keep-the-nuclear-situation-under-control/#.UmN5I1M0_9k

Thirty seconds into what may ultimately be regarded as one of the defining speeches of his career, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe slowly raised his hands chest high, then spread them out sideways in a gesture of confidence.

| IAN DODDS ILLUSTRATION



“Let me assure you,” he said, addressing members of the International Olympic Committee on Sept. 7. “The situation is under control.”

The prime minister was attempting to convince his audience in Buenos Aires that the multiple meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, initiated by tsunami triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, should not be a cause of concern for Tokyo hosting the Summer Olympic Games in 2020.

The nuclear accident, he said, “has never done and will never do any damage to Tokyo.”

However, cleaning up the crippled nuclear power plant certainly won’t be plain sailing, with decommissioning plans believed to include the removal of spent nuclear fuel rods from a cooling pool littered with debris, the creation of a permafrost wall around the four damaged reactors in order to prevent the spread of radioactive isotopes and the discovery of the precise location of the melted nuclear fuel in the highly toxic containment vessels.

“On a scale of zero to 10, I’d say the decommissioning process has advanced by about 0.1 (since the nuclear accident),” said Michio Ishikawa, president of the Association for Nuclear Decommissioning Study.

“I think the prime minister was right in saying that things are under control now,” Ishikawa said, but “predicting what the situation will be in 2020 is still very difficult.”

According to the latest road map released by the government and the Tokyo Electric Power Co. in June, decommissioning Fukushima’s four damaged nuclear reactors is expected to take up to 40 years to complete. The first — and most pressing — item on Tepco’s to-do list is stem the flow of contaminated water leaks from the on-site facilities.

The government has earmarked roughly ¥30 billion on an unprecedented project to freeze the ground around the reactors to prevent groundwater from leaking into the plant. Under a plan proposed by Kajima Corp. in April and endorsed by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry on Oct. 9, a frozen wall spanning 1.4 km will be formed by coolant tubes drilled into the ground at 1-meter intervals around the plant. The government expects to finish the project by the end of the country’s fiscal 2014.

The annual running cost of the permafrost wall hasn’t officially been revealed yet. However, several critics have suggested that it could total up to ¥3 billion annually based on current estimates. Critics have also expressed concern that the system will require an abundant electricity supply around the clock, despite the nationwide shortages that have continued since the country’s nuclear reactors have been taken offline for maintenance in the wake of the Fukushima catastrophe.

In addition to the proposed permafrost wall, Tepco hopes to remove most radioactive materials from contaminated water on the site by employing the Advanced Liquid Processing System at full capacity soon.

However, creating an artificial permafrost of this scale has never been attempted before, while the filtration system that commenced trial operations in June has already been suspended three times after malfunctions were detected.

Despite the ongoing setbacks, the government only officially reached out to nuclear experts worldwide in September for advice on how to handle the contaminated water issue. The government has been notably slow to act on several occasions, which has even left pro-nuclear advocates scratching their heads in bewilderment.

“It isn’t completely clear that freezing the soil will contain the radioactive water,” University of Tokyo professor Satoru Tanaka said.

In June 2011, Tanaka was named head of the Atomic Energy Society of Japan, which boasts a membership of 7,000 nuclear experts nationwide. He was involved in designing the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, and issued apologies after the crisis for not being able to handle the calamity better.

When asked about the ongoing problems hampering the cleanup, Tanaka noted that none of the proposed solutions had ever been successfully implemented anywhere else in the world on such a massive scale. “The whole process will be trial and error, and then fixing the error and trying again. It’s the only way things will move forward,” Tanaka said. “It is crucial that everyone involved anticipate what may go wrong and be ready to implement countermeasures quickly.”

Presuming Tepco is able to control the spread of contamination beyond 2015, it would still have only scratched the surface of the issue. The mammoth task of removing the melted nuclear fuel and debris from the reactors lies ahead.

In mid-November, the embattled utility is preparing to remove 400 tons of spent fuel from the damaged reactor 4, 2½ years after a hydrogen explosion damaged the structure’s exterior.

According to the Nuclear Regulation Authority, there are 1,533 spent and unused fuel rod bundles in the cooling pool that contain radiation equivalent to 14,000 times the amount released in the atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima in 1945.

To remove the rods, Tepco has erected a 273-ton mobile crane above the building that will be operated remotely from a separate room.

Up to 22 spent fuel rods will be pulled from the racks they are stored in and inserted one by one into a heavy steel chamber while the assemblies are still under water. Once the chamber is removed from the pool and lowered to the ground, it will be transported to another pool in an undamaged building on the site for storage.

Under normal circumstances, such an operation would take little more than three months, but Tepco is hoping to complete the complicated task within fiscal 2014.

The plan has received mixed reviews regarding its safety from nuclear experts. Removing the fuel rods is a task usually assisted by computers that know their exact location down to the nearest millimeter. Working virtually blind in a highly radioactive environment, there is a risk the crane could drop or damage one of the rods — an accident that would heap even more misery onto the Tohoku region. The more alarmist critics out there have even argued that residents in Tokyo, located more than 200 km away, could be forced to evacuate if another earthquake flattened the reactor 4 building.

Others, meanwhile, say the reactor 4 building is more straightforward to work with than those housing other reactors since the pressure vessel didn't contain fuel rods at the time of the earthquake and tsunami. The cooling pool has also been made substantially stronger than it was before the accident, with Tepco saying that reinforced concrete measuring up to 18.5 cm is structurally sound on all sides, and the entire pool is shielded by a 6-mm stainless steel sheet.

While successfully removing the spent fuel rods from the reactor 4 cooling pool will probably go some way to allaying the fears of those living in Tohoku, it merely puts Tepco and the government on a collision course with the hitherto great unknown: finding the melted nuclear fuel in the remaining three reactors.

Tepco is planning to submerge the entire pressure vessel of each reactor in water in order to reduce radiation levels. Exactly how the utility is going to fill the 32-meter-high light-bulb-shaped containment vessel — in addition to sealing any cracks or holes it stumbles across along the way — is expected to be decided within fiscal 2016.

Subsequent steps regarding the pressure vessels are not expected to be decided until fiscal 2018, paving the way for the actual removal of the fuel in the remaining three reactors in the first half of fiscal 2020 — about the same time the Olympic torch is being relayed across the country.

Bearing all of this in mind, it's extremely hard to predict exactly how far along the decommissioning schedule the Fukushima plant will have come by 2020.

Ishikawa, whose career has also included stints at the International Atomic Energy Agency, is one of the few people who can claim to have an insight into the process.

"First, I would like to explain that decommissioning a nuclear power plant is not as complicated as it sounds," the 79-year-old told The Japan Times On Sunday. "It's all about removing the nuclear fuel, which contains 99.9 percent of the radioactive material. After that, it's basically the same as deconstructing any other building."

Employed at the Japan Atomic Energy Research Institute, Ishikawa was involved in designing Japan's first nuclear reactor. And then, toward the end of his career, he was tasked with creating technology in the 1980s to decommission the first nuclear plant in Japan.

"The first time, it was strenuous," Ishikawa said. "We needed ways to operate machines remotely and we had to build them from scratch."

He said he was excited by the prospect of creating a brand new form of technology to clean up nuclear waste.

But the Fukushima No. 1 cleanup remains a different story, even in his eyes. Nuclear fuel inside reactors 1, 2 and 3 is believed to have breached the inner containment vessels and accumulated in the outer steel containment vessels — what experts describe as a “melt-through.”

Assuming the reactor pressure vessels are submerged before the Olympics, as Tepco plans, still won't help much in figuring out where the nuclear fuel is located.

“It could be mixed with other metal, it could be as hard as iron or as breakable as a concrete block,” Ishikawa said. “There is no way to know such factors and, without them, removal isn't a possibility.”

Ishikawa believes that designing a specialized robot to locate the melted fuel is probably going to be required. If that doesn't work, easing the upper limit of radiation exposure for decontamination workers at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant is going to be essential, as laborers would need to work in close proximity to the vessels.

“If a sample of the nuclear fuel lying at the bottom of a vessel is extracted for study within the next four to five years, I'd call it a success,” Ishikawa said.

Forecasting the cleanup timetable in the aftermath of a nuclear crisis is also complex because there are few precedents that can provide an accurate guidance.

The Chernobyl disaster in 1986, which along with Fukushima remains the only level 7 incident to occur since the International Nuclear Event Scale was created, is very much an ongoing effort as of 2013.

Nine years after the plant exploded and caught fire, the World Health Organization linked nearly 700 cases of thyroid cancer among children and adolescents in the region to the accident. Some believe that radioactive iodine released in the calamity was deposited in pastures and eaten by cows who then concentrated it in their milk — a favorite source of nourishment for young children.

The Russian government is still in the process of strengthening Chernobyl's containment structure, and reports say that more than 95 percent of the nuclear fuel that sat in the pressure vessel at the time of the accident remain under the sarcophagus today. A new containment shelter over what's left of the devastated power plant in the Ukraine is scheduled to be completed in 2015.

By comparison, workers cleaning up the site of Three Mile Island were in the middle of shipping critical debris components to an off-site storage facility using specialized chambers and rail carriages nine years after America's worst nuclear accident. The debris shipments began in 1986 and continued until 1990.

The accident, however, was substantially easier to mop up compared to Fukushima or Chernobyl, as it was only a level 5 incident on the International Nuclear Event Scale.

Ishikawa does not believe the reactors at Fukushima No. 1 will be in a state that would worry the International Olympic Committee seven years from now in 2020.

While several radioactive materials that were released following the 2011 accident have half lives that will render much of the surrounding countryside unusable for many decades, there is no reason to believe that Fukushima will become an issue in hosting the Olympics, he said.

Tanaka of the University of Tokyo went further, saying it was virtually senseless to debate whether Abe's claim that "the situation is under control" is true.

And he agreed that at least in terms of hosting the Olympics, the nuclear plant posed no obvious risk to Tokyo.

"Look around, people are living in the city without any serious risk today," Tanaka said.

"Trying hard to convince the world that Japan is safe isn't enough," he said.

"What counts now is that the government makes it easier for everyone to understand — in tangible numbers — that it is, in fact, safe," Tanaka said.

"For example, we need to explain the leaks more clearly to the public and what it means. That is the responsibility of the government now" as Japan gears up for 2020, Tanaka said.

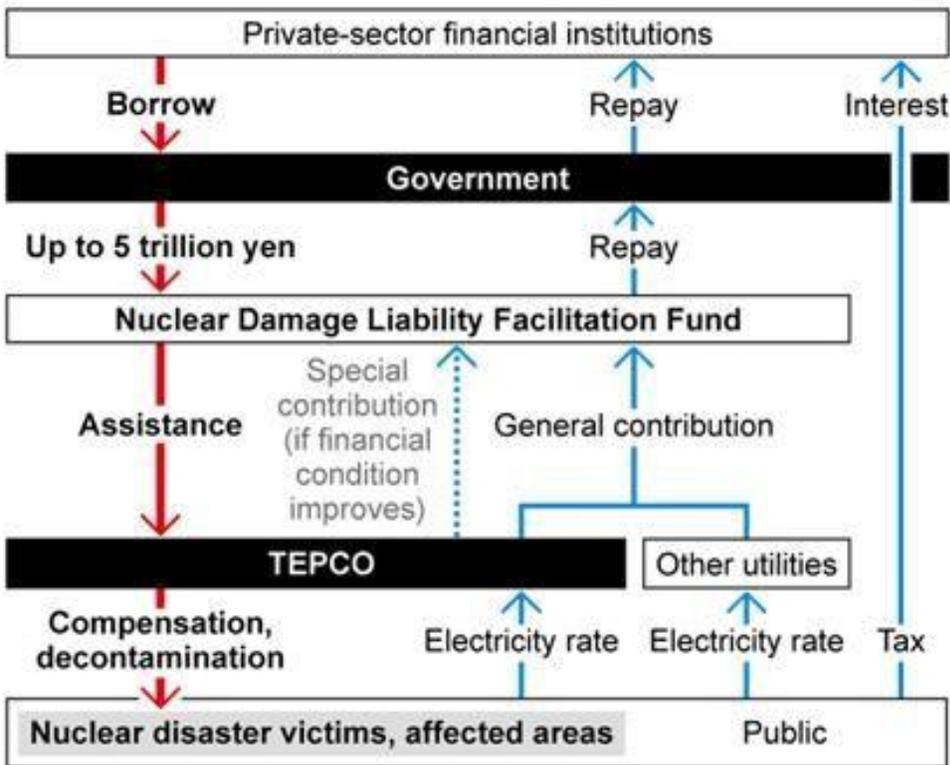
79 billion yen taxpayer money to help TEPCO

October 17, 2013

Board of Audit: Taxpayers face 79 billion yen tab for TEPCO assistance

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310170069>

Government financial assistance to TEPCO



THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The cost to taxpayers to help Tokyo Electric Power Co. compensate victims of the Fukushima nuclear disaster and clean up radioactive contamination could total 79.4 billion yen (\$810 million), according to Board of Audit estimates.

The figure is based on the assumption the government will lend 5 trillion yen, which is the maximum amount under a framework to support TEPCO, and is repaid over 31 years.

Under the setup, the government will lend the money to the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant through the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund.

TEPCO and other power companies will pay back the principal by making “general contributions” to the fund that they will primarily finance through electricity rates.

TEPCO will additionally make “special contributions” from its earnings if its financial condition improves. Still, interest payments will be borne by the government.

It is almost certain that the loans will reach the 5-trillion-yen ceiling. The government has already provided more than 3 trillion yen for compensation, while nearly 1.3 trillion yen has been budgeted for decontamination.

Government auditors have warned that the public financial burden could grow further if compensation payouts and decontamination expenses increase.

“(The government) can gain public understanding (for its assistance to TEPCO) only by forecasting the total amount and timing of compensation with greater accuracy as soon as possible and providing a definite projection for the financial burden,” a Board of Audit report concluded.

The board estimates that it will take 31 years for the government to recoup the 5 trillion yen if the fund receives no special contributions from TEPCO. Interest payments will reach 79.4 billion yen.

The estimates also show that the collection period will shorten to 17 years and interest payments will drop to 45 billion yen if TEPCO allocates half of its net earnings projected under its rehabilitation plan to the special contributions.

TEPCO has yet to make a special contribution.

The estimates are based on the assumption that the government will borrow money from private-sector financial institutions at an ultra-low interest rate of 0.1 percent. The board has warned that the public financial burden will increase if interest rates rise.

This is the first time the Board of Audit has looked at the financial health of TEPCO, which was effectively brought under state control after the Fukushima nuclear crisis unfolded in March 2011.

Still, it remains unclear how much compensation to the victims and decontamination will total in the end, meaning taxpayers may shoulder a far greater financial burden if those costs snowball.

(This article was compiled from reports by Motoki Kaneko and Takashi Ebuchi.)

Why is TEPCO not accountable for its actions?

October 20, 2013

Whether Tepco fails or not, it's taxpayers' tab

by Tomoko Otake
Staff Writer

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/20/national/whether-tepco-fails-or-not-its-taxpayers-tab/#.UmQBGM0_9k

It is impossible to put a price tag on all the pain and suffering inflicted on people as a result of the March 2011 meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The ongoing crisis has created more than 140,000 wandering "nuclear refugees," has stripped farmers and fishermen of their livelihoods, and continues to expose hundreds of plant workers to daily health risks as they battle to contain the radioactive water accumulating in leaky storage tanks and pipes and flowing into the ocean as groundwater, as well as other hazards.

The monetary cost alone is immeasurable because the crisis is far from over and the decontamination of areas hit by the radioactive fallout is way behind schedule. Just neutralizing the three reactors that suffered core meltdowns and the other reactor whose fuel pool looms as a major danger will take decades.

But one thing is clear: the final tab will be huge, and the public will end up paying for it, either through taxes or utility bills. **While estimates vary, the total cost will probably top ¥10 trillion — or 20 percent of what the central government collects every year through taxes, experts say.**

And last month's pledge by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe before the International Olympic Committee in Buenos Aires that the government will take the lead in bringing the crisis to an end, somewhat, in time for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics could mean additional financial burdens placed on taxpayers.

This has led to mounting calls in recent weeks, from academics and lawmakers, and even within the ruling, pro-nuclear Liberal Democratic Party, that the government should force Tepco into bankruptcy.

Doing so, they say, is also the only way for top management, as well as creditors and shareholders, to shoulder some of the blame for the fiasco at the inadequately defended coastal complex.

Others in the ruling party, meanwhile, propose splitting the utility into two parts, separating the profit-making power generation business from the unprofitable crisis-containment.

Tepco, which posted a ¥326.9 billion net loss in fiscal 2012, has stayed alive under a state-backed bailout scheme.

Through the Nuclear Damage Liability Fund, set up in September 2011, the firm has secured ¥5 trillion in public funds and is under effective government control amid enormous damages claims. As of June, the utility planned to pay an estimated ¥3.9 trillion in compensation, according to papers submitted by the fund and the utility to the government that month.

In addition to compensating victims of the disaster, the nation's biggest utility also bears the main onus of containing the radioactive water used to cool the damaged reactors, as well as the technologically daunting task of scrapping the stricken plant.

“Tepco is a private company, earning profits and listing its stock on the market,” said Masatoshi Akimoto, a Lower House LDP member. A rookie politician first elected in December, he heads a small study group with colleagues on the nation's energy policy.

“A normal private company would shoulder its management risks and would be accountable for its actions,” Akimoto said. **“How is it possible that a company that caused a nuclear accident can avoid bankruptcy, and its shareholders and creditor banks aren't held liable?”**

Akimoto acknowledged that his views are well outside the LDP mainstream. Still, he argued that the bankruptcy filing is the only way Tepco can be held accountable for its failure to bolster the plant's disaster defenses, when the risks the facility faced were no mysteries.

If Tepco goes under, he said, shareholders and creditors will also pay for the risks in investing in a nuclear plant operator. Their shares would plummet and they would be forced to lose much of their outstanding loans to Tepco. Management would be sacked and the utility's remaining assets would be sold off — saving “trillions of yen” for taxpayers, Akimoto figured.

The reality, however, is that the government is trying to prevent Tepco's failure at all costs, by introducing new accounting rules that smack of "window-dressing," fumed Kenichi Oshima, a professor of environmental economics at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto.

On Oct. 1, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry released new accounting rules for the nation's utilities whereby Tepco can now continue to report the six reactors at Fukushima No. 1 as assets, while booking depreciation reserves for the reactors over a 50-year period, even though four of the reactors will never run again, and the other two, anyway idled, face mounting calls for decommissioning.

Under previous rules for reactors whose operations had stopped prematurely, the utility had to report depreciation costs yet to be booked as a one-time extraordinary loss, which meant Tepco would have gone belly up under massive debts.

METI's rule changes have made it possible for Tepco to attach all future decommissioning costs onto utility bills. The move came after three meetings, between June and August, by a panel of experts within the ministry — with little public discussion and no deliberations in the Diet.

"This is the same as window-dressing, because it goes against the principles of corporate accounting, by which companies should report costs as costs, not as assets," Oshima said. "It's also wrong to change rules for depreciation halfway through."

Oshima estimated that the disaster has so far cost over ¥7.4 trillion. (See table) The scrapping of the damaged reactors, for example, could end up costing more than what is budgeted for now, as the current estimates are based on the assumption that the reactors undergo decommissioning after normal operations, he said.

Oshima said it is hard to estimate the total cost for the decontamination work, because it depends on how thorough the cleanup will be.

But according to a 2011 estimate by the nonprofit group Citizens' Nuclear Information Center, if all the affected land, roads, farms and forests are decontaminated, not just in Fukushima but also in "hot spots" in surrounding prefectures, the total cost will reach ¥28 trillion.

The government's bailout of Tepco comes with serious problems, Oshima argued, because it has effectively turned the nuclear power industry into a risk-free one.

“Nuclear power is a highly risky venture by nature,” Oshima said. “But if the government assumes all the consequences of a major disaster (without holding the guilty party accountable), nuclear power becomes a zero-risk industry. There’s no other industry like this.”

But Taku Yamamoto, a veteran Lower House member who heads the ruling party’s research committee on natural resources and energy, said Tepco should not go bankrupt or get broken up. “Tepco is a private company, and true, it’s like a zombie,” he said. “But we have a system where it still is the window (for all the compensation claims).”

Tepco needs to exist until it pays off all the compensation claims, Yamamoto said.

“If we let Tepco go bankrupt now, creditors would probably collect only 10 percent of their outstanding claims. Those creditors include disaster victims. To keep paying its obligations, it must keep standing, even in a zombie state.”

If the government forces Tepco to go under, the state will be sued for compensation by creditors and shareholders and thus be embroiled in a drawn-out court battle, Yamamoto said.

Oshima, while agreeing that the demise of Tepco alone will mean a loss of an institution through which compensation can be made, claimed the current arrangement is unhealthy.

“Why should the government pay all the costs of the disaster?” he asked. “Tepco should fail like any other firm does. What the government needs to do, instead, is to make sure the firm’s existing power generation facilities, workers and engineers are smoothly absorbed by a new entity, so electricity-generating operations continue.”

March 2011: Information barriers in crisis response

October 21, 2013

Obama cited bureaucratic barriers in nuclear crisis response

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310210077>

By TOSHIHIRO OKUYAMA/ Senior Staff Writer

U.S. President Barack Obama feared that entrenched bureaucratic behavior would exacerbate an unfolding nuclear disaster in Japan and called on Tokyo to remove those barriers to avert a catastrophe, Foreign Ministry records show.

Obama talked with the prime minister, Naoto Kan, days after the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant was damaged by the magnitude-9.0 earthquake and tsunami.

The two leaders spoke for 33 minutes from 10:22 a.m. on March 17, 2011. It was their second telephone conversation after the Great East Japan Earthquake struck six days earlier.

Obama was alarmed at the situation at the Fukushima plant and felt the Japanese government was not responding with sufficient urgency, according to the documents obtained by The Asahi Shimbun based on the freedom of information law.

The U.S. president told Kan he hoped a catastrophic situation could be avoided.

He also griped about bureaucratic barriers to offers of overseas assistance and said he hoped they would be removed so that support could be realized.

The two leaders spoke at the request of the U.S. side. It is not known how Obama spoke because the records were kept in Japanese.

At that time, U.S. officials believed that the pool holding spent nuclear fuel for the No. 4 reactor had lost water.

Earlier on March 17, John Roos, the U.S. ambassador to Japan at the time, had advised U.S. nationals to evacuate from an 80-kilometer radius of the Fukushima plant.

Kan told Obama, "We do not have the word 'retreat' (in our vocabulary). We are going all out to deal with (the crisis)," according to the Foreign Ministry records. He also said Japanese and U.S. experts were sharing information "without holding back anything."

The prime minister explained what was going on with the reactors and the spent nuclear fuel storage pools.

He said U.S. officials in charge of nuclear power plants were shown video footage of water remaining in the No. 4 reactor pool during discussions with their Japanese counterparts, which lasted until early March 17.

He also said Self-Defense Forces helicopters had dumped water over the No. 3 reactor pool shortly before their telephone conversation started.

Toward the end, Obama said he would keep in close touch with Kan. He promised to be ready to take a phone call from Kan at any time.

Kan said he would keep the U.S. side fully informed, particularly about the nuclear crisis.

It turned out that Kan and Obama did not discuss the situation again until March 30, or 13 days later. Their first conversation after the earthquake and tsunami was early on March 12.

* * *

In a recent interview, Kan said it was no surprise that the U.S. side felt there were bureaucratic obstacles in the early stages of the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

“I think the president was feeling what I was feeling,” Kan said. “Accurate information did not reach me. Information conduits were clogged up.”

Kan said information started to flow smoothly only after an integrated response headquarters set up in Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant’s operator, was up and running.

Abe tones down rosy assessment of crisis

October 22, 2013

Abe soft-pedals assessment on Fukushima radioactive water leaks

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310220048>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe toned down his rosy assessment of the Fukushima nuclear crisis that had helped Tokyo win its bid to host the 2020 Olympic Games.

At the Lower House Budget Committee on Oct. 21, the prime minister’s words were less assuring concerning the ongoing radioactive water leaks plaguing the nuclear plant.

"The situation is under control all in all," he said. "I believe that the impact of the contaminated water is blocked."

On Sept. 7 in Buenos Aires, Abe told the International Olympic Committee that the contaminated water problem was "under control." He also said radioactive water was "completely blocked" within the 300,000-square-meter harbor in front of the plant.

Tokyo was picked to host the 2020 Games after Abe's assurances, beating out Madrid and Istanbul. Abe's new assessment of the Fukushima situation came after Yasuhisa Shiozaki of his Liberal Democratic Party and Yuichiro Tamaki of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan raised the issue at the committee meeting.

Tamaki mentioned the widespread mistrust of Abe's evaluation given to the IOC.

"A survey conducted by a newspaper found that about 80 percent of respondents lacked faith (in Abe's assessment)," Tamaki said.

Abe responded by saying the government should provide additional and more accurate information.

Tamaki also pointed out that the real problem facing the government is how to stem the outflow of radioactive water and preventing it from reaching the sea.

"What has been blocked is the impact of contaminated water, not the contaminated water itself," he said.

Industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi echoed Abe's assessment, saying the contaminated water remains in a certain area.

In the latest of a series of leaks, Tokyo Electric Power Co., which operates the plant, said Oct. 21 that radioactive water exceeding safety standards had overflowed barriers surrounding storage tanks as a result of heavy rainfall a day earlier and likely made its way to the ocean.

TEPCO's "ineptitude"

October 22, 2013

No. 1 water woes laid to Tepco's ineptitude

Cleanup confounded by failure to foresee mess, accept advice

by Chico Harlan

The Washington Post

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/22/national/no-1-water-woes-laid-to-tepcos-ineptitude/#.UmZrjFM0_9k

Two and a half years after the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant experienced its three reactor-core meltdowns, efforts to clean up what remains of the complex is turning into another kind of disaster.

The site now stores some 340 million liters of radioactive water, more than enough to fill Yankee Stadium to the brim. An additional 400 tons of toxic groundwater is flowing daily into the Pacific Ocean, and almost every week Tokyo Electric Power Co. acknowledges a new leak.

Tepco started the cleanup process more than two years ago and was subsequently given a government bailout as its debts soared. The job of dismantling the facility was supposed to give the company an opportunity to rebuild its credibility.

But many lawmakers and nuclear industry specialists say Tepco is perpetuating the kinds of mistakes that led to the March 2011 meltdowns: underestimating the plant's vulnerabilities, ignoring warnings from outsiders and neglecting to draw up plans for things that might go wrong. Those failures, they say, have led to the massive buildup and spills of radioactive water.

"Tepco didn't play enough of these what-if games," said Dale Klein, a former chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, who recently joined a Tepco advisory panel. "They didn't have enough of that questioning attitude" about their plans.

The spills into the ocean are far less toxic than the radioactive plumes that emanated from the plant after the earthquake and tsunami, forcing 160,000 people to move out of the vicinity. Thanks to that quick evacuation, experts say, there are no expectations of a Chernobyl-style spike in cancer cases — although the government is conducting thyroid checks on thousands of children. But the flow of radioactive water amounts to a slow-burning environmental disaster with implications for Japan's wildlife and its food chain.

The problems have prompted the central government to step in with around ¥50 billion to fund new countermeasures, including a subterranean "ice wall" designed to keep groundwater from flowing into radioactive buildings.

The latest government-led actions are particularly galling for some, who say Tepco should have taken similar measures earlier. One lawmaker, Sumio Mabuchi, who was also an adviser at the start of the crisis to then-Prime Minister Naoto Kan, says Tepco, deep in debt, neglected to take important steps against the groundwater two years ago because of concerns about its bottom line.

Tepco's president, Naomi Hirose, testified in the Diet last month that the utility hasn't "scrimped" on the cleanup, though he did say that it is "majorly at fault" for its failure to manage the groundwater buildup.

The 40-year decommissioning is expected to cost ¥10 trillion — roughly two years' worth of Tepco's revenue — and the company says it is trying to save up and cut other costs.

But for many Japanese, the company's assurances inspire little confidence. Two members of the Diet, speaking on condition of anonymity to share what they describe as sensitive details, say Tepco continues to spend irresponsibly on lobbying politicians, offering them free trips to nuclear sites that include meals and lodging in hot springs resorts. A Tepco spokesman said the company does not offer such trips.

Fukushima No. 1 is on an old riverbed, its backyard a line of forested hills and mountains. Even before the 2011 disaster, rainfall from across the region would funnel toward the plant. Such inflow was rarely a problem because a piping system collected groundwater and spit it into the ocean. Minor leaks would sometimes form in buildings built below sea level, but even that water, uncontaminated, was easy to pump out and dump.

The magnitude 9.0 earthquake and 15-meter tsunami of March 11, 2011, threw the plant's groundwater system out of whack. Damaged pipes no longer corralled the inflow, meaning the plant lost its first line of defense against water streaming in from the hillsides.

Worse, any water that flowed under or through the area picked up toxicity of its own. Groundwater that made its way into the reactor buildings also mixed with a separate channel of intensely contaminated water that had been used to douse and cool the reactors.

No longer could the groundwater simply be discarded into the ocean.

The first months of the disaster were chaotic, an improvised battle to cool melted nuclear fuel that involved fire trucks, helicopters, robots and workers. As the emergency calmed and the groundwater problem emerged, Tepco was left with two options: It could either block the groundwater from entering the site, or it could pump it out and store whatever had leaked into buildings.

Tepco opted for the latter — a mistake, many outside experts say.

Atsunao Marui, a groundwater expert and member of a government-led panel that advises Tepco, said the company was slow to assess just how rapidly groundwater from mountains was flooding the buildings. At the time the disaster struck, Tepco didn't have a single groundwater specialist among its 40,000 employees, Marui said.

Tepco also declined a June 2011 request from Mabuchi, the lawmaker and adviser to the prime minister, to build a special wall extending 30 meters underground around the reactor and turbine buildings, sealing them off from the groundwater flow. Tepco initially agreed to the project, Mabuchi said, but backed out because of concerns about the estimated cost of ¥100 billion.

“We are already in a very severe financial situation,” Tepco wrote to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry in a letter shared with The Washington Post. “And by taking on an additional ¥100 billion, the market could evaluate that we are one step closer to insolvency. That is something we’d like to avoid.”

In the following months, Tepco never considered alternative options to cut off the groundwater, according to minutes from more than 10 hours of meetings, during which Tepco and a Cabinet-formed team of advisers planned a “road map” for decommissioning the facility.

The company’s plan was to pump toxic water from the reactor and turbine rooms and then cleanse it of radionuclides — isotopes that radioactively decay — using systems that worked like high-end Brita filters. Tepco would then have “clean water” that could be stored in tanks.

But Tepco’s attempts to create clean water have been repeatedly derailed. Two systems have proven successful in filtering cesium. But others have been plagued by mechanical troubles — not surprising, experts say, because they have been constructed at a breakneck pace, often with parts shrunken and custom-built to accommodate Fukushima No. 1’s cramped spaces.

Because of those malfunctions, some water stored in hastily built tanks is laced with contaminants, including strontium, which can burrow into bones and irradiate tissue. More than 1,000 gray tanks, some the size of small apartment buildings, now form a patchwork on a cliff above the plant — an area where workers once spent their breaks taking nature walks. Enough toxic water accumulates each week to fill an Olympic-size swimming pool. One such tank has leaked, another overflowed, and regulators fear that more spills are inevitable. Tepco must constantly build more tanks to keep pace with the accumulating water.

“It’s not sustainable,” said Lake Barrett, a new adviser to Tepco who directed cleanup operations at Three Mile Island after the 1979 nuclear accident in the United States.

Tepco estimates that 800 tons of water flows under the plant daily — half of it traveling into the ocean, the other half making its way into the facility’s buildings and requiring storage. Tepco acknowledged the long-presumed ocean flow in July; the company said it had held off on the disclosure because it didn’t want to worry the public until it was certain of a problem.

Both the government and Tepco say the ocean contamination is confined mostly to a man-made harbor around the plant.

But some scientists say that assurance plays down significant long-term concerns about marine life and the food chain. Cesium levels are still hundreds of times the pre-accident norm in areas beyond the harbor, said Ken Buesseler, a senior scientist with the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution who has monitored waters around the nuclear plant, most recently last month.

Radionuclides also fall to the ocean floor, where they could be ingested by bottom feeders. Many local fish species show high-enough levels of radiation that the government bars their sale.

“I could swim in that water” outside the plant, Buesseler said. “But you might not want to eat those fish. It’s a serious concern for internal doses. (Radionuclides) are now on the seafloor and could stay in the food chain for years, if not decades.”

Some nuclear industry executives who have worked with Tepco say the company shouldn’t be faulted for prioritizing issues other than the groundwater. They note that Tepco has managed to cool the molten reactors while also reinforcing damaged buildings against further earthquakes.

But the buildup of contaminated water also complicates other work at the plant.

“Right now, the groundwater is the biggest problem at the plant, and one Tepco needs to solve thoroughly,” said Tsuneo Futami, who was superintendent of Fukushima No. 1 from 1997 until 2000. “Dealing with this is almost a prerequisite for decommissioning.”

The remaining options to deal with the buildup are unpopular or flawed. The latest plan includes the ice wall, a new groundwater pumping system and yet another system to filter radionuclides. But the ice-wall technology is unproven, and taxpayers will foot the bill because Tepco lacks the funding to deal with major, unplanned problems at the plant.

Tepco can repair its fragile economic situation with a restructuring plan featuring major cost-cutting that was approved by the government last year. But Tepco says its profitability also depends on the restart of its largest nuclear power plant, Kashiwazaki-Kariwa, a seven-reactor complex in Niigata Prefecture. A majority of Japanese, though, oppose nuclear power. All of the nation’s 50 operable reactors are currently shuttered.

Some activists say Tepco should be allowed to go bankrupt, with the government taking full control of the Fukushima No. 1 scrapping. But bankruptcy would cause “just one more disaster,” this one economic, said

Mana Nakazora, a Tokyo-based chief credit analyst at BNP Paribas. Bankruptcy might have been conceivable in the months after the disaster started, but Tepco has since been kept afloat with emergency loans from banks and cash injections from the government — debts that, if not paid, would rock the financial system.

Some nuclear engineers and government officials say Tepco has one other option that would ease management of the site: It can dump the stored water into the ocean, provided it can be refiltered and its now-high radiation levels lowered to within legal limits.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said in April that Japan should consider such “controlled discharges.” The chairman of Japan’s nuclear watchdog, Shunichi Tanaka, said last month that dumping might be necessary.

The National Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations said its members are against any releases, no matter the level of the water’s toxicity, and local governments also have expressed opposition.

Their stance highlights the enormous public distrust of Tepco: Few in Japan are willing to take the firm at its word if it says the controlled releases will be safe.

“They’re going to have to release the water eventually,” said Barrett, the adviser. “No ands, if or buts about it in my view. But how they get there is a huge societal problem, not just for Tepco but for Japan.”

No surprise to be expected from IAEA

October 21, 2013

IAEA Press Releases

Press Release 2013/19

IAEA Expert Remediation Mission to Japan Issues Preliminary Report

<http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/2013/prn201319.html>

21 October 2013 | *Tokyo* -- The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s international expert mission to review remediation efforts in areas affected by the Fukushima Daiichi accident concluded

today with the presentation of a *Preliminary Summary Report* to Japan's Senior Vice-Minister of the Environment, Shinji Inoue.

The Follow-up IAEA International Mission on Remediation of Large Contaminated Areas Off-site the Fukushima Daiichi NPS recognised the huge effort and enormous resources that Japan is devoting to its remediation strategies and activities, with the aim of improving living conditions for people affected by the nuclear accident and enabling evacuees to return home.

The Mission Team highlighted important progress since the first IAEA remediation mission in October 2011, noted that Japan had made good use of advice from that earlier Mission, and offered fresh advice in a number of areas where it is still possible to further improve current practices, taking into account both international standards and the experience of remediation programmes in other countries.

"Japan has done an enormous amount to reduce people's radiation exposure in the affected areas, to work towards enabling evacuees to go back to their homes and to support local communities in overcoming economic and social disruption," said team leader Juan Carlos Lentijo, Director of the Division of Fuel Cycle and Waste Technology in the IAEA Department of Nuclear Energy.

"The Mission Team has been really impressed by the involvement of a wide range of ministries, agencies and local authorities in driving these crucial remediation efforts."

Among the findings of the Mission, which was requested by the Japanese government and began on 14 October, the team welcomed the extensive provision of individual dosimeters so that residents can monitor their own radiation dose rates, helping to boost public confidence.

Good progress has been made in the remediation of affected farmland, and comprehensive implementation of food safety measures has protected consumers and improved consumer confidence in farm produce. A comprehensive programme to monitor fresh water sources such as rivers, lakes and ponds is ongoing, including extensive food monitoring of both wild and cultivated freshwater fish.

The Mission encouraged the Japanese government to strengthen its efforts to explain to the public that an additional individual radiation dose of 1 millisievert per year (mSv/y), which it has announced as a long-term goal, cannot be achieved in a short time by decontamination work alone. In remediation situations, with appropriate consideration of the prevailing circumstances, any level of individual radiation dose in the range of 1 to 20 mSv/y is acceptable and in line with international standards and the recommendations of the relevant international organisations such as the IAEA, International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP), United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effect of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) and World Health Organisation (WHO).

The Mission encouraged the relevant institutions in Japan to assess the role that the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) could play in the independent review of the remediation activities, particularly those required for the long term. The Mission also encouraged the relevant organisations to conduct safety assessments of the facilities and activities for the long-term management of contaminated materials, and to allow for their independent review.

The Mission Team acknowledged that the Japanese authorities have implemented a practical option for remediating the region's extensive forest areas, taking a limited approach by removing material under the trees in a 20-meter buffer strip adjacent to residences, farmland and public spaces. It recommended concentrating efforts on areas that bring the greatest benefit in reducing doses to the public, while avoiding damage to the ecological functioning of the forest where possible.

The 16-person team consisted of international experts and IAEA staff working in a range of disciplines, including radiation protection, remediation technologies, waste management and stakeholder involvement.

The Mission's Preliminary Summary Report can be viewed [here](#). The final report will be presented to the Japanese government in December.

Background

The Mission, which is the follow-up to the *IAEA International Mission on Remediation of Large Contaminated Areas Off-site the Fukushima Daiichi NPS* in October 2011, had the following three objectives:

- To provide assistance to Japan in assessing the progress made with the remediation of the Special Decontamination Area (not included in the previous mission of 2011) and the Intensive Contamination Survey Areas;
- To review remediation strategies, plans and works, in view of the advice provided by the previous mission on remediation of large contaminated off-site areas; and
- To share its findings with the international community as lessons learned.

The Mission Team assessed comprehensive information provided by the Japanese authorities and held discussions with the relevant institutions, including national, prefectural and local institutions. It also visited the affected areas, including several sites where remediation activities were conducted and some temporary storage sites for radioactive waste and soil, as well as a survey area for an interim storage facility, and a demonstration facility for incineration of sewage sludge.

The Mission was in line with the *IAEA Action Plan on Nuclear Safety*, which was unanimously endorsed by the IAEA's Member States in September 2011 and defines a programme of work to strengthen the global nuclear safety framework.

See also:

<http://independentwho.org/en/who-and-iaea-aggreement/>

The Agreement WHA 12-40 between WHO and IAEA



The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) signed the Agreement “WHA 12-40” on 28th May 1959.

One should note in particular :

The International Atomic Energy Agency and the World Health Organization recognize that they may find it necessary to apply certain limitations for the safeguarding of confidential information furnished to them

...

The Secretariat of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Secretariat of the World Health Organization shall keep each other fully informed concerning all projected activities and all programmes of work which may be of interest to both parties.

It is recognized by the World Health Organization that the International Atomic Energy Agency has the primary responsibility for encouraging, assisting and co-ordinating research on, and development and practical application of, atomic energy for peaceful uses throughout the world without prejudice to the right of the World Health Organization to concern itself with promoting, developing, assisting, and co-ordinating international health work, including research, in all its aspects.

Whenever either organization proposes to initiate a programme or activity on a subject in which the other organization has or may have a substantial interest, the first party shall consult the other with a view to adjusting the matter by mutual agreement.

?

Since the signing of this agreement, WHO has shown no autonomy of action towards achieving its stated objectives in the field of radiation protection.

On the contrary it has shown its capacity for misinforming the public about the health consequences of radioactive contamination caused by the civil and military nuclear industries.

WHO waited five years before visiting those territories that had been heavily contaminated by the accident at Chernobyl. They gave no instructions for evacuation or for the provision of clean food to the affected populations.

WHO has kept hidden the health consequences of this catastrophe, especially by not publishing the proceedings of the 1995 and 2001 conferences.

WHO still estimates the number of deaths caused by Chernobyl at less than fifty and attributes the health problems of populations of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia to fear of radiation.

WHO does not recognise the validity of the work published in 2009 by the Academy of Sciences of New York which estimates the number of deaths caused by Chernobyl to be nearly one million.

With Fukushima, WHO has the same attitude as for Chernobyl.



The World Health Organisation (WHO) does not respect its constitution which lays down the following principle:

“Informed opinion and active cooperation from the public are of paramount importance for improving the health of people ...”

In the first chapter, Article 1:

“The goal of the World Health Organization shall be the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health.”

In chapter 2 – FUNCTIONS of WHO:

a) to act as the directing and co-ordinating Authority on International Health Work.



Revision of the agreement WHO / IAEA

The revision must be agreed by a General Assembly of WHO which is held in May each year. Before that, it must be placed on the agenda of the General Assembly. This is drawn up by the Executive Council in the January before. A proposal that the revision of the WHO-IAEA Agreement should be put on the agenda must be made to the Executive Council by a Member State and with the support of another Member State. Leading up to that, the support of recognized NGOs is very useful in convincing Member States to propose the revision and also useful for the final vote. It needs to be understood that putting an item on the agenda of the WHO is a long process that can take years. We know also that the more powerful Member States are able to influence decisions through informal channels.



20 millisieverts: An "optimum" balance between costs and benefits ?

October 23, 2013

IAEA urges Japan to give public a dose of reality on decontamination work

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310230076>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

An International Atomic Energy Agency team is urging Japan to temper public expectations that decontamination work near the devastated Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant will quickly bring radiation levels with the national legal limit.

The team said in a report that there is a gap between what the ongoing cleanup operation can achieve and the expectations of residents in communities impacted by the nuclear disaster.

In the report, compiled on Oct. 21, the IAEA mission said most residents expected cleanup in their communities to lower contamination to an annual dose of 1 millisievert, the nation's safety limit.

But the team said **a reading of up to 20 millisieverts is acceptable** under international standards in areas where cleanup is under way, citing recommendations from international bodies such as the International Commission on Radiological Protection and the World Health Organization.

It urged the Japanese government to **better educate the public that an annual dose of 1 millisievert is the long-term goal**, and that that level cannot be reached in the short term through cleanup work alone.

The 1-millisievert yardstick is the legal annual dose for people living in a natural environment, excluding doses from medical X-rays and other sources.

Juan Carlos Lentijo, who led the IAEA mission involving a team of 13 experts, told a news conference on Oct. 21 that the Japanese government should find **an optimal balance between the costs and the benefits, with a target of achieving a dose of 20 millisieverts or less**.

The IAEA team has been in Fukushima Prefecture since Oct. 14 to observe the progress of decontamination work in areas surrounding the plant and identify challenges facing officials dealing with the nuclear crisis.

The team's report, which directed eight points of advice to Japan, said by offering the public a realistic picture of decontamination and avoiding unnecessary steps to lower radiation levels, the nation can reallocate funds for this effort to restoring vital infrastructure to improve living conditions.

It said the IAEA, and possibly the international scientific community, would back Japan in this "challenging task" in getting the public to accept a step-by-step approach to decontamination.

After the accident unfolded at the plant in March 2011 following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, the government ordered the evacuation of residents in communities with an annual dose of 20 millisieverts or more.

The government's decontamination work aims at bringing radiation levels in the heavily contaminated areas to within 20 millisieverts a year to allow residents to return and eventually to "1 millisievert or less" as a long-term goal.

Some local governments agreed that achieving the 1 millisievert a year target through cleanup work alone is not realistic.

In Date, Fukushima Prefecture, the city government told the IAEA team that there would be little progress in rebuilding efforts if it adhered to the 1-millisievert yardstick.

"It will be costly, require a lot more manpower and more time," a city official said.

Radiation levels at some sites in the city measured several millisieverts a year.

But a prefectural government official handling decontamination operation said such a level should be acceptable from a rebuilding viewpoint.

"An annual dose of 1 millisievert is a targeted long-term goal," said the official.

But most residents are intent on lowering the level to 1 millisievert a year, which they believe ensures their safety.

Most expressed their discontent when officials explained that decontamination work did not reduce radiation levels to within 1 millisievert a year at some sites at a meeting for residents in the Miyakoji district in Tamura, also in Fukushima Prefecture, on Oct. 14.

The central government completed cleanup in the district in June. Although it planned to allow residents to return to the district by lifting the evacuation order on Nov. 1, it is heeding their concerns and set to delay the timetable until next spring.

The district was originally part of the no-entry zone, an area within a radius of 20 kilometers from the crippled plant.

The U.N. agency also called for a realistic approach to cleanup in a report it compiled after a visit to Japan in October 2011. The central government plans to spend 5 trillion yen (\$50.86 billion) on decontamination work.

Abe sticks to his guns

October 23, 2013

Abe again insists that radioactive water at Fukushima plant is 'completely blocked'

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131023p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has again repeated his insistence that radioactive water leaks at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant are being kept within the bay there.

"We are monitoring radiation levels, and they are far below the safety limits for radioactive materials. The effects of the contaminated water are being completely blocked," Abe said on Oct. 22 at the House of Representatives' Budget Committee, denying that radioactive materials are affecting the outside ocean. The remarks were made in response to a question by the Japanese Communist Party's Akira Kasai.

At the International Olympic Committee Session in September, Abe said that "the effects (of the radioactive water) are being completely blocked to inside of the bay" and "the situation is under control." However, in questioning during the Lower House plenary session on Oct. 16, he didn't use the word "completely" and qualified his "under control" statement with "overall," saying, "The effects are blocked to within the bay. Overall the situation is under control."

Kasai questioned Abe, "Why has your phrasing changed?" The prime minister responded, "Basically the phrases mean the same thing. From the stance of the impact on health as well, the effects are completely blocked. My thinking has not changed."

Meanwhile, on the subject of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) talks and the exemption of certain products from tariff elimination, minister in charge Akira Amari said, "By untouchable products, we mean

things that Japan must have for its survival. We have not specified particular products." The statement suggests that tariffs on 586 products under five important categories such as rice might be eliminated.

In its policy platform for the July House of Councillors election, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) wrote clearly that it would "prioritize exempting products like those in the five important types, and if we cannot secure their tariff status we will not hesitate to quit the negotiations." Koji Hata of the People's Life Party criticized the LDP for apparently backing off from this policy, calling it "betraying the people."

Kasai and Hata called for intensive Budget Committee deliberations on the radioactive water and TPP issues.

Anand Grover (UN) critical of IAEA Report

October 25, 2013

Human rights experts rap U.N. report on Fukushima radiation

Kyodo

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/25/national/human-rights-experts-rap-u-n-report-on-fukushima-radiation/#.UmoV-VM0_9k

NEW YORK – Human rights experts, including a U.N. special rapporteur, are criticizing a U.N. scientific report dismissing concerns about the effects of radiation from the Fukushima nuclear disaster on the Japanese public.

Speaking Thursday at an event organized by U.S. and Japanese nongovernmental groups, U.N. special rapporteur on the right to health Anand Grover took issue with the report's conclusion that "there is nothing to worry about" for members of the public exposed to radiation from Fukushima No. 1.

The report was prepared by the U.N. Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation.

The committee, which studied the levels and effects of radiation exposure caused by the nuclear disaster after the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami, found that for the general public, "no discernible increased incidence of radiation-related health effects are expected."

Grover, who visited Japan in November 2012 and compiled his own report on the situation from a human rights perspective, said the data on radioactive exposure is insufficient to rule out the possibility that low doses could have ill effects on health.

He also said that ensuring the participation of affected communities in decision-making is “one of the core obligations” of governments and that the public has a right to information.

Special rapporteurs are independent investigators tasked by the United Nations with investigating human rights issues and can only investigate a country if invited to do so by its government.

Mari Inoue, a representative of Tokyo-based Human Rights Now, meanwhile called for the UNSCEAR report to be revised.

She said the report should endorse evacuation from areas where exposure exceeds 1 millisievert of radiation per year, well below the Japanese government’s yardstick of 20 millisieverts per year.

It should also recommend continued study of contract workers exposed to radiation, increased community participation in the government response to the disaster, and recognition that it is too early to rule out future health effects for the exposed, Inoue said.

Also on Thursday, Human Rights Now released a statement signed by 64 community organizations in Japan calling for revisions to the report.

The UNSCEAR’s full report, including scientific data supporting its findings, has not yet been published. The group said when finished, the report will be “the most comprehensive scientific analysis of the information available to date.”

See also:

Human rights experts criticize U.N. report on Fukushima radiation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131025p2g00m0dm028000c.html>

"Down and out at Fukushima"

October 25, 2013

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/10/25/uk-fukushima-workers-specialreport-idUKBRE99004220131025>

Special Report - Help wanted in Fukushima: Low pay, high risks and gangsters

Fri, Oct 25 2013

By Antoni Slodkowski and Mari Saito

IWAKI (Reuters) - Tetsuya Hayashi went to Fukushima to take a job at ground zero of the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl. He lasted less than two weeks.

Hayashi, 41, says he was recruited for a job monitoring the radiation exposure of workers leaving the plant in the summer of 2012. Instead, when he turned up for work, he was handed off through a web of contractors and assigned, to his surprise, to one of Fukushima's hottest radiation zones.

He was told he would have to wear an oxygen tank and a double-layer protective suit. Even then, his handlers told him, the radiation would be so high it could burn through his annual exposure limit in just under an hour.

"I felt cheated and entrapped," Hayashi said. "I had not agreed to any of this."

When Hayashi took his grievances to a firm on the next rung up the ladder of Fukushima contractors, he says he was fired. He filed a complaint but has not received any response from labour regulators for more than a year. All the eight companies involved, including embattled plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co, declined to comment or could not be reached for comment on his case.

Out of work, Hayashi found a second job at Fukushima, this time building a concrete base for tanks to hold spent fuel rods. His new employer skimmed almost a third of his wages - about \$1,500 (£925) a month - and paid him the rest in cash in brown paper envelopes, he says. Reuters reviewed documents related to Hayashi's complaint, including pay envelopes and bank statements.

Hayashi's hard times are not unusual in the estimated \$150-billion effort to dismantle the Fukushima reactors and clean up the neighbouring areas, a Reuters examination found.

In reviewing Fukushima working conditions, Reuters interviewed more than 80 workers, employers and officials involved in the unprecedented nuclear clean-up. A common complaint: the project's dependence on a sprawling and little scrutinised network of subcontractors - many of them inexperienced with nuclear work and some of them, police say, have ties to organised crime.

Tepco sits atop a pyramid of subcontractors that can run to seven or more layers and includes construction giants such as Kajima Corp and Obayashi Corp in the first tier. The embattled utility remains in charge of the work to dismantle the damaged Fukushima reactors, a government-subsidized job expected to take 30 years or more.

Outside the plant, Japan's "Big Four" construction companies - Kajima, Obayashi, Shimizu Corp and Taisei Corp - oversee hundreds of small firms working on government-funded contracts to remove radioactive dirt and debris from nearby villages and farms so evacuees can return home.

Tokyo Electric, widely known as Tepco, says it has been unable to monitor subcontractors fully but has taken steps to limit worker abuses and curb the involvement of organised crime.

"We sign contracts with companies based on the cost needed to carry out a task," Masayuki Ono, a general manager for nuclear power at Tepco, told Reuters. "The companies then hire their own employees taking into account our contract. It's very difficult for us to go in and check their contracts."

The unprecedented Fukushima nuclear clean-up both inside and outside the plant faces a deepening shortage of workers. There are about 25 percent more openings than applicants for jobs in Fukushima prefecture, according to government data.

Raising wages could draw more workers but that has not happened, the data shows. Tepco is under pressure to post a profit in the year to March 2014 under a turnaround plan Japan's top banks recently financed with \$5.9 billion in new loans and refinancing. In 2011, in the wake of the disaster, Tepco cut pay for its own workers by 20 percent.

With wages flat and workers scarce, labour brokers have stepped into the gap, recruiting people whose lives have reached a dead end or who have trouble finding a job outside the disaster zone.

The result has been a proliferation of small firms - many unregistered. Some 800 companies are active inside the Fukushima plant and hundreds more are working in the decontamination effort outside its gates, according to Tepco and documents reviewed by Reuters.

Tepco, Asia's largest listed power utility, had long enjoyed close ties to regulators and lax government oversight. That came under harsh scrutiny after a 9.0 magnitude earthquake and a massive tsunami hit the plant on March 11, 2011.

The disaster triggered three reactor meltdowns, a series of explosions and a radiation leak that forced 150,000 people to flee nearby villages.

Tepco's hapless efforts since to stabilise the situation have been like someone playing "whack-a-mole", Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Toshimitsu Motegi has said.

'NUCLEAR GYPSIES'

Hayashi is one of an estimated 50,000 workers who have been hired so far to shut down the nuclear plant and decontaminate the towns and villages nearby. Thousands more will have to follow. Some of the workers will be needed to maintain the system that cools damaged fuel rods in the reactors with thousands of tonnes of water every day. The contaminated runoff is then transferred to more than 1,000 tanks, enough to fill more than 130 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Dismantling the Fukushima Daiichi plant will require maintaining a job pool of at least 12,000 workers just through 2015, according to Tepco's blueprint. That compares to just over 8,000 registered workers now. In recent months, some 6,000 have been working inside the plant.

The Tepco hiring estimate does not include the manpower required for the government's new \$330 million plan to build a massive ice wall around the plant to keep radiated water from leaking into the sea.

"I think we should really ask whether they are able to do this while ensuring the safety of the workers," said Shinichi Nakayama, deputy director of safety research at the Japan Atomic Energy Agency.

Japan's nuclear industry has relied on cheap labour since the first plants, including Fukushima, opened in the 1970s. For years, the industry has rounded up itinerant workers known as "nuclear gypsies" from the Sanya neighbourhood of Tokyo and Kamagasaki in Osaka, areas known for large numbers of homeless men.

"Working conditions in the nuclear industry have always been bad," said Saburo Murata, deputy director of Osaka's Hannan Chuo Hospital. "Problems with money, outsourced recruitment, lack of proper health insurance - these have existed for decades."

The Fukushima project has magnified those problems. When Japan's parliament approved a bill to fund decontamination work in August 2011, the law did not apply existing rules regulating the construction industry. As a result, contractors working on decontamination have not been required to disclose information on management or undergo any screening.

That meant anyone could become a nuclear contractor overnight. Many small companies without experience rushed to bid for contracts and then often turned to brokers to round up the manpower, according to employers and workers.

The resulting influx of workers has turned the town of Iwaki, some 50 kilometres (30 miles) from the plant, into a bustling labour hub at the front line of the massive public works project.

In extreme cases, brokers have been known to "buy" workers by paying off their debts. The workers are then forced to work until they pay off their new bosses for sharply reduced wages and under conditions that make it hard for them to speak out against abuses, labour activists and workers in Fukushima said.

Lake Barrett, a former U.S. nuclear regulator and an advisor to Tepco, says the system is so ingrained it will take time to change.

"There's been a century of tradition of big Japanese companies using contractors, and that's just the way it is in Japan," he told Reuters. "You're not going to change that overnight just because you have a new job here, so I think you have to adapt."

A Tepco survey from 2012 showed nearly half of the workers at Fukushima were employed by one contractor but managed by another. Japanese law prohibits such arrangements, in order to prevent brokers from skimming workers' wages.

Tepco said the survey represents one of the steps it has taken to crack down on abuses. "We take issues related to inappropriate subcontractors very seriously," the utility said in a statement to Reuters.

Tepco said it warns its contractors to respect labour regulations. The company said it has established a hotline for workers, and has organised lectures for subcontractors to raise awareness on labour

regulations. In June, it introduced compulsory training for new workers on what constitutes illegal employment practices.

Tepco does not publish average hourly wages in the plant. Workers interviewed by Reuters said wages could be as low as around \$6 an hour, but usually average around \$12 an hour - about a third lower than the average in Japan's construction industry.

Workers for subcontractors in the most-contaminated area outside the plant are supposed to be paid an additional government-funded hazard allowance of about \$100 per day, although many report it has not been paid.

The work in the plant can also be dangerous. Six workers in October were exposed to radioactive water when one of them detached a pipe connected to a treatment system. In August, 12 workers were irradiated when removing rubble from around one of the reactors. The accidents prompted Japan's nuclear regulator to question whether Tepco has been delegating too much.

"Proper oversight is important in preventing careless mistakes. Right now Tepco may be leaving it all up to the subcontractors," said the head of Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority, Shunichi Tanaka in response to the recent accidents.

Tepco said it will take measures to ensure that such accidents are not repeated. The utility said it monitors safety with spot inspections and checks on safeguards for workers when projects are divided between subcontractors.

The NRA, which is primarily charged with reactor safety, is only one of several agencies dealing with the Fukushima project: the ministries of labour, environment, trade and economy are also responsible for managing the clean-up and enforcing regulations, along with local authorities and police.

Yousuke Minaguchi, a lawyer who has represented Fukushima workers, says Japan's government has turned a blind eye to the problem of worker exploitation. "On the surface, they say it is illegal. But in reality they don't want to do anything. By not punishing anyone, they can keep using a lot of workers cheaply."

Economy Minister Motegi, who is responsible for Japan's energy policy and decommissioning of the plant, instructed Tepco to improve housing for workers. He has said more needs to be done to ensure workers are being treated well.

"To get work done, it's necessary to cooperate with a large number of companies," he told Reuters. "Making sure that those relations are proper, and that work is moving forward is something we need to keep working on daily."

FALSIFIED PASSBOOK

Hayashi offers a number of reasons for his decision to head to Fukushima from his home in Nagano, an area in central Japan famous for its ski slopes, where in his youth Hayashi honed his snowboarding skills.

He says he was sceptical of the government's early claim that the Fukushima plant was under control and wanted to see it for himself. He had worked in construction, knew how to weld and felt he could contribute.

Like many other workers, Hayashi was initially recruited by a broker. He was placed with RH Kogyo, a subcontractor six levels removed from Tepco.

When he arrived in Fukushima, Hayashi received instructions from five other firms in addition to the labour broker and RH Kogyo. It was the sixth contractor up the ladder, ABL Co. Ltd that told him he would be working in a highly radioactive area. ABL Co reported to Tokyo Energy & Systems Inc, which in Fukushima manages some 200 workers as a first-tier contractor under Tepco.

Hayashi says he kept copies of his work records and took pictures and videos inside the plant, encouraged by a TV journalist he had met before beginning his assignment. At one point, his boss from RH Kogyo told him not to worry because any radiation he was exposed to would not "build up".

"Once you wait a week, the amount of radiation goes down by half," the man is seen telling him in one of the recordings. The former supervisor declined to comment.

The statement represents a mistaken account of radiation safety standards applied in Fukushima, which are based on the view that there is no such thing as a safe dose. Workers are limited to 100 millisieverts of radiation exposure over five years. The International Atomic Energy Agency says exposure over that threshold measurably raises the risk of later cancers.

After Hayashi's first two-week stint at the plant ended, he discovered his nuclear passbook - a record of radiation exposure - had been falsified to show he had been an employee of larger firms higher up the ladder of contractors, not RH Kogyo.

Reuters reviewed the passbook and documents related to Hayashi's employment. The nuclear passbook shows that Hayashi was employed by Suzushi Kogyo from May to June 2012. It says Take One employed Hayashi for ten days in June 2012. Hayashi says that is false because he had a one-year contract with RH Kogyo.

"My suspicion is that they falsified the records to hide the fact that they had outsourced my employment," Hayashi said.

ABL Co. said Hayashi had worked with the firm but declined to comment on his claims. Tepco, Tokyo Energy & Systems, Suzushi Kogyo and RH Kogyo also declined to comment. Take One could not be reached for comment.

In September 2012, Hayashi found another job with a subcontractor for Kajima, one of Japan's largest construction companies. He didn't want to go back home empty-handed and says he thought he might have been just unlucky with his first bad experience at the plant.

Instead, his problems continued. This time a broker who recruited several workers for the subcontractor insisted on access to his bank account and then took almost a third of the roughly \$160 Hayashi was supposed to be earning each day, Hayashi says.

The broker, according to Hayashi, identified himself as a former member of a local gang from Hayashi's native Nagano.

Ryo Goshima, 23, said the same broker from Nagano placed him in a crew doing decontamination work and then skimmed almost half of what he had been promised. Goshima and Hayashi became friends in Fukushima when they wound up working for the same firm.

Goshima said he was fired in December after complaining about the skimming practice. Tech, the contractor that had employed him, said it had fired another employee who was found to have skimmed Goshima's wages. Tech said Goshima left for personal reasons. The firm paid Goshima back wages, both sides say. The total payment was \$9,000, according to Goshima.

Kajima spokesman Atsushi Fujino said the company was not in a position to comment on either of the cases since it did not have a contract with Hayashi or Goshima.

"We pay the companies who work for us and instruct those companies to pay the hazard allowance," the Kajima spokesman said in a statement.

THE YAKUZA CONNECTION

The complexity of Fukushima contracts and the shortage of workers have played into the hands of the yakuza, Japan's organised crime syndicates, which have run labour rackets for generations.

Nearly 50 gangs with 1,050 members operate in Fukushima prefecture dominated by three major syndicates - Yamaguchi-gumi, Sumiyoshi-kai and Inagawa-kai, police say.

Ministries, the companies involved in the decontamination and decommissioning work, and police have set up a task force to eradicate organised crime from the nuclear clean-up project. Police investigators say they cannot crack down on the gang members they track without receiving a complaint. They also rely on major contractors for information.

In a rare prosecution involving a yakuza executive, Yoshinori Arai, a boss in a gang affiliated with the Sumiyoshi-kai, was convicted of labour law violations. Arai admitted pocketing around \$60,000 over two years by skimming a third of wages paid to workers in the disaster zone. In March a judge gave him an eight-month suspended sentence because Arai said he had resigned from the gang and regretted his actions.

Arai was convicted of supplying workers to a site managed by Obayashi, one of Japan's leading contractors, in Date, a town northwest of the Fukushima plant. Date was in the path of the most concentrated plume of radiation after the disaster.

A police official with knowledge of the investigation said Arai's case was just "the tip of the iceberg" in terms of organised crime involvement in the clean-up.

A spokesman for Obayashi said the company "did not notice" that one of its subcontractors was getting workers from a gangster.

"In contracts with our subcontractors we have clauses on not cooperating with organised crime," the spokesman said, adding the company was working with the police and its subcontractors to ensure this sort of violation does not happen again.

In April, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare sanctioned three companies for illegally dispatching workers to Fukushima. One of those, a Nagasaki-based company called Yamato Engineering, sent 510 workers to lay pipe at the nuclear plant in violation of labour laws banning brokers. All three companies were ordered by labour regulators to improve business practices, records show.

In 2009, Yamato Engineering was banned from public works projects because of a police determination that it was "effectively under the control of organised crime," according to a public notice by the Nagasaki-branch of the land and transport ministry. Yamato Engineering had no immediate comment.

Goshima said he himself had been working for the local chapter of Yamaguchi-gumi since the age of 14, extorting money and collecting debts. He quit at age 20 after spending some time in jail. He had to borrow money from a loan shark to pay off his gang, which demanded about \$2,000 a month for several months to let him go.

"My parents didn't want any problems from the gang, so they told me to leave and never return," Goshima said. He went to Fukushima looking for a well-paying job to pay down the debt - and ended up working for a yakuza member from his home district.

DECONTAMINATION COMPLAINTS

In towns and villages around the plant in Fukushima, thousands of workers wielding industrial hoses, operating mechanical diggers and wearing dosimeters to measure radiation have been deployed to scrub houses and roads, dig up topsoil and strip trees of leaves in an effort to reduce background radiation so that refugees can return home.

Hundreds of small companies have been given contracts for this decontamination work. Nearly 70 percent of those surveyed in the first half of 2013 had broken labour regulations, according to a labour ministry report in July. The ministry's Fukushima office had received 567 complaints related to working conditions in the decontamination effort in the year to March. It issued 10 warnings. No firm was penalized.

One of the firms that has faced complaints is Denko Keibi, which before the disaster used to supply security guards for construction sites.

Denko Keibi managed 35 workers in Tamura, a village near the plant. At an arbitration session in May that Reuters attended, the workers complained they had been packed five to a room in small cabins. Dinner was typically a bowl of rice and half a pepper or a sardine, they said. When a driver transporting

workers flipped their van on an icy road in December, supervisors ordered workers to take off their uniforms and scatter to distant hospitals, the workers said.

Denko Keibi had no insurance for workplace accidents and wanted to avoid reporting the crash, they said.

"We were asked to come in and go to work quickly," an executive of Denko Keibi said, apologising to the workers, who later won compensation of about \$6,000 each for unpaid wages. "In hindsight, this is not something an amateur should have gotten involved in."

In the arbitration session Reuters attended, Denko Keibi said there had been problems with working conditions but said it was still examining what happened in the December accident.

The Denko Keibi case is unusual because of the large number of workers involved, the labour union that won the settlement said. Many workers are afraid to speak out, often because they have to keep paying back loans to their employers.

"The workers are scared to sue because they're afraid they will be blacklisted," said Mitsuo Nakamura, a former day labourer who runs a group set up to protect Fukushima workers. "You have to remember these people often can't get any other job."

Hayashi's experiences at the plant turned him into an activist. He was reassigned to a construction site outside Tokyo by his second employer after he posted an online video about his first experiences in the plant in late 2012. After a tabloid magazine published a story about Hayashi, his managers asked him to leave. He has since moved to Tokyo and filed a complaint with the labour standards office. He volunteered in the successful parliamentary campaign of former actor turned anti-nuclear activist, Taro Yamamoto.

"Major contractors that run this system think that workers will always be afraid to talk because they are scared to lose their jobs," said Hayashi. "But Japan can't continue to ignore this problem forever."

(Additional reporting by Kevin Krolicki, Sophie Knight and Chris Meyers in Tokyo and Yoshiyuki Osada in Osaka; Editing By Bill Tarrant)

779 offers to help contain water crisis

October 25, 2013

Japan receives global offers to contain water spills at Fukushima No. 1

Bloomberg

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/25/national/japan-receives-global-offers-to-contain-water-spills-at-fukushima-no-1/#.UmuVjVM0_9k

The government-linked nuclear decommissioning body said Friday it received expressions of interest from 779 companies and individuals with technology to help contain radioactive water spills at the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant after Japan launched a global appeal.

Tokyo made the appeal between Sept. 25 and Tuesday through the International Research Institute for Nuclear Decommissioning, formed in August to support Tokyo Electric Power Co., according to a statement by the industry ministry. About 30 percent of the proposals came from overseas, ministry official Yoji Ueda said Friday at a briefing.

The technology ranges from separating tritium from radioactive water to building ice walls to stem contaminated water flows into the ocean, according to the statement. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe last month vowed to end the nation's "ad hoc" response to the disaster. The government said it would spend ¥47 billion to stop the leaks.

IRID was formed in August by a group of 17 Japanese companies, including Toshiba Corp. and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd., to support efforts by Tepco.

Questions about JAEC's neutrality

October 24, 2013

Atomic commission advised to quit policy making

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131024_40.html

A government panel says the Japan Atomic Energy Commission should no longer set the country's nuclear policy.

Panel members on Thursday discussed a proposal for ending the policy-making role of the commission.

They gave their general approval to the proposal. Panel members said the commission's work is limited to the field of nuclear energy, while the industry ministry drafts the country's overall energy policy.

But some panel members question the ministry's neutrality, since it promotes nuclear energy.

The panel agreed to continue discussions on this and other related issues.

The commission has since 1956 revised Japan's long-term nuclear policy about once every 5 years.

The policy deals with issues such as the ratio of nuclear power in the country's total energy use and recycling spent nuclear fuel.

The panel has also been discussing abolition of the commission itself. It plans to make a decision by the end of this year.

NRA & TEPCO meet on Fukushima crisis

October 28, 2013

NRA, Tepco heads discuss Fukushima No. 1 water woes

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/28/national/nra-tepco-heads-discuss-fukushima-no-1-water-woes/#.Um4VFVOWT9k>

Nuclear Regulation Authority Chairman Shunichi Tanaka held a rare meeting Monday with Tokyo Electric Power Co. President Naomi Hirose to discuss ways to get a grip on the radioactive water spilling from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"To resolve the situation at the Fukushima plant, I want to hear frank opinions from you," Tanaka told Hirose at the outset of the meeting held at the NRA office in Tokyo.

The outcome of the talks may affect the course of the NRA's safety checks of two idled reactors at Tepco's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture. The utility seeks to have the two units restarted to improve its tough business conditions stemming from the Fukushima No. 1 crisis.

The repeated flows, spills and leaks of radioactive water plaguing Fukushima No. 1 have led NRA commissioners to doubt Tepco management adequately realizes the situation of the workers at the plant or whether the utility has the wherewithal to ensure the safety of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa reactors.

Tepco has submitted an analysis of the recent water spills and measures it plans for preventing further incidents, including transferring about 20 workers from Kashiwazaki-Kariwa to Fukushima No. 1, but the steps have failed to impress the NRA.

The NRA made the Tanaka-Hirose meeting open to the media, except for the beginning, to allow what it called "frank discussions."

Tepco, which continues to struggle with the buildup of massive amounts of radioactive water at the Fukushima plant, filed for the NRA safety assessments for idled reactors 6 and 7 at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa in September.

But a formal safety screening meeting for the reactors, usually held in public, has not convened, meaning the assessment process has yet to get into full swing.

Tepeco is desperate to curtail the heavy costs it's paying to purchase fuel for thermal power generation in place of atomic power.

NRA, TEPCO heads meet over problems at Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131028_23.html

The head of Japan's nuclear regulating body has summoned the president of Tokyo Electric Power Company to hear how the utility intends to prevent additional trouble at the crippled Fukushima plant.

Nuclear Regulation Authority Chairman Shunichi Tanaka met Naomi Hirose, president of the operator of the Fukushima nuclear power plant on Monday.

Tanaka asked Hirose what TEPCO plans to do to prevent radioactive water leaks and other problems at the plant.

Hirose later said he told Tanaka that he plans to send workers from other parts of the utility firm, including the idled Kashiwazaki Kariwa nuclear plant, to the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Hirose said he also told Tanaka that his firm will provide support to the workers to ensure that they can make full use of their skills.

Tanaka reportedly said that he wants TEPCO to carry out drastic long-term reforms. He asked Hirose to improve the working conditions inside the Fukushima plant, including the radioactive decontamination process.

NRA Secretary-General Katsuhiko Ikeda, who also attended Monday's meeting, referred to the possibility that the agency will begin safety screening for 2 reactors at the Kashiwazaki Kariwa plant.

Ikeda repeated his stance that the agency will make a decision after carefully studying how TEPCO intends to improve the situation at the Fukushima plant.

The utility says it will be able to deal with the problems at the Fukushima plant and maintain safety at the Kashiwazaki Kariwa plant simultaneously.

But many NRA members have expressed skepticism about TEPCO's explanation.

Why the NRA can't win

October 27, 2013

Nuclear regulators can't win

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/10/27/commentary/nuclear-regulators-cant-win/#.Um4VgFOwT9k>

The Nuclear Regulation Authority – , which observed the first anniversary of its creation on Sept. 19, faces two diametrically opposed criticisms. Proponents of nuclear power generation criticize the NRA as the root cause of the delay in the government's policy to promote nuclear power, while "no-nuke" groups brand the body as a mouthpiece of the "nuclear power village" (the strong network of public organizations and power companies that work toward expansion of nuclear power).

These bitter criticisms coming from both ends of a spectrum seem to summarize the contradictions of Japan's nuclear power policy. The NRA has become a skewed organization because the idea behind creating it was to satisfy both proponents and opponents of nuclear power. That has resulted in the lack of capabilities to execute its missions, thus making nuclear power plants in Japan even more dangerous than before.

Besides drawing up regulatory standards, the NRA has during the past year tackled two principal issues: safety inspection of nuclear power plants and the fiasco at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant of Tokyo Electric Power Co.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe got himself laughed at when he said the situation at the Fukushima nuclear power plant was "under control."

He was talking about the leak of radioactively contaminated water from the plant at a general meeting of the International Olympic Committee (held in Buenos Aires in September in his bid to invite the 2020 summer games to Tokyo).

The leak was first detected in April, and things are going from bad to worse. A Tepco insider confided, "While it is true that we have been taking makeshift measures, the biggest cause has been the lack of cooperation with the NRA."

When a leak of contaminated water from a tank on the ground came to light in April, the NRA was hesitant to deal with the problem. NRA chief Shunichi Tanaka refused to work with Tepco and the trade and industry ministry's Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, saying it would be self-contradictory for his organization to both work out a plan to contain the leak and to do the regulation work.

This attitude came under bitter criticism from a professor at a national university well-versed in nuclear safety. He pointed out that the NRA first gave its tacit approval to Tepco and the energy agency pushing a

plan to build a bypass for underground water at the plant site while doing nothing to control contaminated water, and that it then started complaining only after the leak problem surfaced.

After Tokyo was selected as the site for the 2020 Olympics, the government decided to become fully involved with the problem of contaminated water at Fukushima No. 1. Simultaneously it was decided that the NRA work closely with Tepco.

But the Tepco insider said that this would not solve the problem because the NRA's secretariat charged with implementing the NRA's policies does not have sufficient capability to solve the problem.

The secretariat is currently staffed with a little more than 500 workers, mainly technical workers who came from the trade and industry ministry and the education and science ministry. Of them, about 300 are assigned to examining and inspecting the safety of nuclear reactors, leaving a very limited number of workers to be in charge of the accident at Fukushima No. 1 and contaminated water leakage from the plant.

Although the NRA was patterned after the Nuclear Regulatory Commission of the United States, the difference in scale is obvious. The U.S. NRC has nearly 4,000 full-time employees looking after 104 reactors in the U.S. against the NRA's some 500 employees in charge of 54 reactors in Japan.

The national university professor said that the NRA's shortcomings are not just in the number of workers but also in the quality of work. He pointed out that sufficient training has not been given to NRA staffers to get them familiar with real nuclear power plants. A nuclear engineer of a power company said that the NRA workers are just a disorderly crowd.

In preparation for the Diet session opening in October, the government planned to double the NRA's staff to 1,000. But the university professor said it would be "a mere drop in the bucket" because the increase comes from a merger with the Japan Nuclear Energy Safety Organization (JNES).

The merger was to take place when the NRA was created last year, but has been delayed due partly to the high wages being paid to high-ranking JNES officials who had parachuted down from the trade and industry ministry.

JNES came into being in 1999 following a criticality accident at a nuclear fuel reprocessing facility operated by JCO Co. in Tokai, Ibaraki Prefecture. It does not have a great reputation for how it undertakes inspection and regulatory work.

The Tepco insider said that even though there are capable experts in the former Japan Atomic Energy Research Institute (JAERI), it has been taboo to rely on JAERI, which merged with the Power Reactor and Nuclear Fuel Development Corporation and the Japan Nuclear Cycle Development Institute to form the Japan Atomic Energy Agency.

It must be recalled that the appointment of Tanaka as NRA chief was criticized since he is originally from JAERI.

The failure to use the human resources buried in JAERI has exposed nuclear reactors in Japan to greater risks, said the national university professor. Japan's nuclear power plants are becoming riskier because people from the nuclear power village are excluded from the NRA. This is a great contradiction.

On Sept. 2, the NRA concluded that a seismic fault near the Oi nuclear plant of Kansai Electric Power Co. in Fukui Prefecture was not active. This came only two months after the same body had proposed decommissioning the Tsuruga nuclear power plant of Japan Atomic Power Co., also in Fukui Prefecture, after an active fault was identified nearby.

These decisions would seem acceptable if based on scientific findings. But the truth is that the opinions of one of the four experts responsible for making the decisions, who is a geologist, swayed the outcome of their conclusions, according to a reporter at a national newspaper. The remaining three are dynamic geomorphologists. This episode shows just how unreliable the NRA's geological surveys are.

The university professor said that while it is true that the nuclear power village is partly responsible for sloppy nuclear power plant designs that have led to reactor accidents, it is also a fact that only the village has the necessary human resources.

In a bid to further promote nuclear power generation, the government and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party are preparing to reform the NRA. But they have not gone much further than superficially increasing the number of personnel as described above.

Not only has the restart of nuclear power plants been delayed but also the safety of such plants cannot be ensured. As a result of completely disconnecting the NRA from the nuclear power village, Japan's nuclear energy policy is drifting in the direction not favored by anybody.

This is an abridged translation of an article from the October issue of Sentaku, a monthly magazine covering Japanese political, social and economic scenes.

Tacit acceptance ?

October 27, 2013

Documents show government tacitly accepts TEPCO's refusal to pay for cleanup

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310270048>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the embattled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, declared early this year that it will not repay radioactive cleanup costs in Fukushima Prefecture, forcing taxpayers to shoulder the burden, The Asahi Shimbun has learned.

The government, which did not release TEPCO's statement, apparently accepts the refusal, in a tacit understanding to prevent the cash-strapped utility from being driven into bankruptcy.

Documents obtained by The Asahi Shimbun through a freedom of information request showed that TEPCO in February made clear its intention not to pay the full cleanup costs.

Under a special measures law designed to deal with radioactive waste, TEPCO is required to pay back costs involved in the decontamination operation that the government shouldered. The government is decontaminating areas around the plant that are highly polluted with radioactive substances.

The Environment Ministry, which is in charge of the cleanup, has asked TEPCO to repay a total of 40.4 billion yen (\$415 million).

The utility has repaid 6.7 billion yen to date.

In a document dated Feb. 21 sent to the ministry, TEPCO declined to pay most of the first invoice in November last year.

“The company reached a conclusion that it is too difficult to pay,” the paper stated.

In a reply to the ministry’s request for further explanation on the utility’s refusal to pay, TEPCO listed reasons why it is not repaying the money, totaling 7.4 billion yen for 95 projects, in a document dated Feb. 27.

The total sum the ministry asked the company to pay in that instance was 14.9 billion yen, including the figure in a second bill, involving 118 projects.

TEPCO also suggested that the ministry should consider settling their disagreement over the payment at the science ministry’s center for alternative dispute resolution. The mechanism was set up to mediate between parties that failed to settle compensation claims for damages from the nuclear disaster.

One of the payments TEPCO declined to make is 105 million yen to fund an Environment Ministry preliminary survey ahead of the construction of interim storage facilities to hold radioactive soil removed and other waste in the decontamination effort.

The company refused to pay, saying, “A preliminary survey and other studies are part of the projects that the government should undertake in accordance with its policy line.”

TEPCO also refused to pay 440 million yen for an experimental program that assesses the effectiveness of new decontamination technology and 960 million yen for public relations efforts.

“These steps are not based on the special measures law,” it said.

The Environment Ministry argued in a paper dated March 1 that, “How to interpret the special measures law is within the jurisdiction of the government, and TEPCO has the responsibility of paying.”

But the ministry has yet to take any steps to settling the dispute at the science ministry’s center for alternative dispute resolution. According to one estimate, the cleanup cost will total more than 5 trillion yen.

But TEPCO's refusal so far to pay the full amount involved in cleanup, and the government's failure to force the payment, showed that there is a tacit understanding between the two parties to prevent the utility from going into bankruptcy.

TEPCO crafted its rebuilding plan on the premise of receiving up to 5 trillion yen in financial assistance from national coffers. But the plan has effectively fallen apart.

The company expects to pay a total of 3.8 trillion yen in damages to affected residents. As of the current fiscal year alone, the government has set aside 1.3 trillion yen for the decontamination operation.

Many experts say they suspect that TEPCO is waiting for the government to finally decide to inject taxpayer money into the decontamination operation by continually refusing to repay the costs the government covered.

Meanwhile, some lawmakers within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party are now calling on the government to pick up the cleanup tab on behalf of TEPCO. The industry ministry welcomes the proposal.

On the other hand, the Finance Ministry wants the utility to pay the decontamination costs out of its revenues from increasing electricity rates.

(This article was written by Shinichi Sekine and Toshio Tada.)

Tepco trying to get more workers into Fukushima Daiichi

TEPCO seeks to rotate more workers to Fukushima nuclear plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310280108>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The president of Tokyo Electric Power Co. told the chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority Oct. 28 that the utility is seeking to place more of its workers at the embattled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant to better deal with the continuing leaks of radioactive water.

TEPCO President Naomi Hirose talked about the plan with Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the NRA, as the utility is facing mounting criticism over its handling of the situation.

Tanaka summoned Hirose to discuss how to fix the problems and improve working conditions for workers there.

Hirose explained that it is getting difficult for the utility to secure sufficient manpower at the plant and that it was grappling with tasks the company was not familiar with.

He even said **workers there were having difficulty trying to communicate while wearing surgical masks to protect them from radiation.**

The one-on-one meeting, their first, was held behind closed doors. One official with the NRA said the meeting was called to "listen to (TEPCO's) problems in a little heart-to-heart talk."

The Fukushima No. 1 plant has been plagued by numerous troubles, in addition to the enormous task of cooling its melted fuel rods. The most immediate challenge is how to prevent radioactive water from escaping into the sea.

Hirose said that TEPCO plans to mobilize more of its employees, including some from its hydraulic and thermal power plants, to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant as part of a company-wide effort to stop the leaks and proceed with decommissioning.

Tanaka also called on Hirose to **implement sweeping steps to safeguard workers from high doses of radiation** and other troubles at the plant by drawing up a long-term plan of action on how best to proceed.

(This article was written by Ryuta Koike and Toshio Kawada.)

IAEA interim report "little more than cheerleading"

Exposing IAEA to a dose of reality

by Andrew Dewit and Christopher Hobson

Special To The Japan Times

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/10/28/commentary/exposing-iaea-to-a-dose-of-reality/#.Um6nz10wT9k>

On Oct. 21 the International Atomic Energy Agency's Expert Remediation Mission to Japan submitted their preliminary findings based on their visit to Tokyo and Fukushima over the previous seven days.

Remediation is a very important area of the IAEA's work, and "aims to reduce the radiation exposure from contamination of land areas or other contaminated media, such as surface — or groundwater." In line with this role, the IAEA were requested to inspect Japan's decontamination efforts after the Fukushima No. 1 disaster. This is in fact their second visit, a followup to an October 2011 mission.

Reading the IAEA's findings, and contrasting them with the reality in Fukushima, one is left wondering whether the IAEA mission got lost in a Potemkin village during their trip.

The interim report consists of little more than cheerleading, highlighting 13 areas of "important progress," while providing eight points of very softball advice.

The IAEA's main finding, for example, is that Japan has "achieved good progress in the remediation activities and ... good progress in the coordination of remediation activities with reconstruction and revitalization efforts."

Team leader Juan Carlos Lentijo, director of the IAEA's Division of Fuel Cycle and Waste Technology, also breathlessly related that "The Mission Team has been really impressed by the involvement of a wide range of ministries, agencies and local authorities in driving these crucial remediation efforts."

The IAEA would seem to have no eyes for noticing "poor progress" and no vocabulary for expressing it, but they would have done Japan, the nuclear industry and the world a great favor by being more forthright. A final report on the mission will be submitted to the Japanese government in December, so they still have the chance to amend their recommendations and incorporate some of the difficult realities they have sidestepped to date.

One of the "highlights" identified by the IAEA team was Japan's "enormous efforts to implement the remediation program in order to reduce exposures to people in the affected areas, to enable, stimulate and support the return of people evacuated after the accident, and to support the affected municipalities in overcoming economic and social disruptions."

Yet making "efforts" seems far too ambiguous and subjective a standard for judging the program. Surely a better, more objective measure would be the number of people able to return to their homes with some reasonable sense of assurance that they can live there safely.

Indeed, on the same day that the IAEA submitted its preliminary findings to Shinji Inoue, senior vice minister of the environment, the Environment Ministry announced that decontamination efforts in six of the 11 municipalities in the exclusion zone around Fukushima No. 1 are considerably behind schedule and will need to be significantly revised.

That means more than 90,000 people will thus be unable to return to their homes in the exclusion zone for another three years, a reality that differs starkly from the positive account presented by the IAEA. And contrary to the IAEA's lauding of inter-agency cooperation, a large part of the problem is poor communication and deep distrust between the Environment Ministry and the region's municipal governments.

To date, decontamination attempts have been plagued by problems and setbacks. One of the biggest impediments has been determining what to do with the contaminated soil and debris, which in many cases has been left in temporary storage. This has been identified as an important factor in the Environment Ministry failing to use 76.6 percent of its budget for decontamination, according to the Board of Audit.

Of the money that has been spent, much has been wasted on shoddy work undertaken by contractors, as has been detailed by the Asahi Shimbun in its "Crooked Cleanup" investigation. Yet such problems are simply ignored in the IAEA's report. The remit of the mission was specifically limited to contaminated areas surrounding Fukushima No. 1, and not the plant itself, nor the massive movement of groundwater in and out of it.

The result is a rather surreal situation where the IAEA can praise Japan for its handling of the decontamination process, while overlooking the endless stream of problems at the stricken nuclear plant. In the advice it offers the Japanese government, the IAEA emphasizes the importance of improving communication "in order to achieve a more realistic perception of radiation and related risks among the population" and to "reduce some uncertainties and provide greater confidence in the decisions being made."

Surely the government getting a grip on the situation at Fukushima No. 1 is essential to accomplishing this. After all, the public's worries about radiation are stoked by Fukushima No. 1's inventory of accidents, mistakes and leaks of contaminated water, combined with Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s gross mismanagement and the government's limited attempts at oversight.

Another important part of that reality is the truly deplorable working conditions of the several thousand workers at the site. Recent articles on this issue have highlighted workers' serious depression and anxiety,

high levels of radiation exposure, alcohol abuse, low pay and a variety of other factors that are exacerbating the many other problems at the plant.

While the workers engaged in cleanup “efforts” around the site itself may not have to endure the full slate of dangers and deprivations faced by those at ground zero, they have an ample share of difficulties to contend with, such as the involvement of organized crime and questionable workplace practices.

These matters all impede remediation, but are completely absent from the IAEA’s account.

Rather than undue cheerleading, the IAEA ought to aim a few recommendations at remedying the poor governance and blatant mismanagement that has come to define the response by the Japanese government and Tepco to the nuclear accident. It is in no one’s interest, least of all the global nuclear industry’s, to pretend that all is well when it so manifestly is not.

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TEPCO's profits

October 29, 2013

TEPCO likely to post mid-year profit

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131029_50.html

Tokyo Electric Power Company is likely to post a profit in its midterm earnings report.

The operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant is expected to post about 1.1 billion dollars in profits for the April-September period.

It will be the company's first midterm profit since the nuclear accident in March 2011.

Profits rose due to an increase in electricity sales during this summer's record heat wave, as well as a rise in household rates in September of last year.

The company instituted huge spending cuts that include putting off repair work at other power plants and transmission facilities.

TEPCO aims to post a profit for the full business year that ends in March of 2014.

But the company will continue to face the huge costs of compensation related to the nuclear accident, as well as those of decommissioning nuclear reactors and measures to handle contaminated wastewater at the Fukushima plant.

TEPCO wants to restart 2 reactors at the Kashiwazaki Kariwa plant to improve earnings, but nuclear regulators have not yet begun the required safety screening.

Prefectural gov't pressed to compensate loss of donations

October 29, 2013

Aomori municipalities ask prefecture to cover lost 'power industry money'

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131029p2a00m0na007000c.html>

AOMORI -- A group of municipal governments in Aomori Prefecture have petitioned the prefectural government for **financial relief in place of donations that the power industry is going to discontinue from spring.**

The group handed over the request to Aomori Gov. Shingo Mimura on Oct. 28. While the city of Aomori and 24 other municipalities in the prefecture have received donations from the power industry in return for hosting nuclear energy-related facilities, the donations are set to be terminated at the end of fiscal 2013 due to the deteriorating business environment of power companies in the aftermath of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster.

The **massive donations** were initiated in fiscal 1994 by the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan -- comprising 10 power companies -- and Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd in return for Aomori Prefecture's hosting of nuclear fuel cycle facilities. The municipalities utilized the donated money in regional promotional projects such as local festivals and fireworks events. **Over the past 20 years, a total amount of some 13 billion yen was paid to those municipalities,** which was distributed by a public utility foundation. The donations were renewed every five years. Following the Great East Japan Earthquake, the donations totaled 1.37 billion yen in fiscal 2011 and 2012, respectively. Around 872 million yen is scheduled to be contributed to the municipalities this fiscal year.

On Oct. 28, Aomori Mayor Hiroshi Shikanai, chairman of a group of 10 mayors in the prefecture, and Itayanagi Town Mayor Ichiro Tateoka, chairman of a group of 30 towns and villages in the prefecture, visited Gov. Mimura and requested that a new support system be created in place of the donations. In response, the governor said, "I'm aware that prefecture-wide promotion is necessary. I take your request seriously, but will make a decision in a comprehensive manner while taking our financial status into account."

The power industry has made the donations to "show consideration" for the 25 municipalities, which are not eligible for the central government's subsidy system under the so-called three laws for hosting power plants. The Aomori Prefecture village of Rokkasho -- the host of the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant -- and 14 other municipalities in the prefecture benefit from the subsidy system.

Commenting on the municipalities' request, one senior prefectural government official said, "We've been financially-strapped. I wonder if we can obtain understanding among prefectural residents."

Professor Shuji Shimizu at Fukushima University, who is versed in local finance issues in municipalities hosting nuclear plants, said, "The financial structure, in which municipalities complain about the termination of donations, is distorted and problematic in itself. I must say the prefectural government, which has promoted such a structure, deserves the outcome, where it is pressed to make up for the money."

Takeshi Fukui, a lecturer at Fukui Prefectural University, said, "Aomori Prefecture is burdened with exceptional circumstances as it also hosts nuclear fuel cycle facilities. Measures to ease the drastic changes are necessary."

LDP wants gov't help on decontamination and storage costs

October 29, 2013

LDP wants government to cover Fukushima decontamination costs

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310290072>

By SAWAAKI HIKITA/ Staff Writer

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party will propose that the government cover part of the costs for decontamination work around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and all expenses to build intermediate storage facilities for radioactive debris.

The decontamination costs alone are estimated at more than 5 trillion yen (about \$50 billion).

Under the current law, Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled nuclear plant, must foot the entire bill for decontamination work and compensation to residents by borrowing funds from the government. TEPCO is also required to decommission the reactors at the plant with its own funds.

But LDP officials decided that it would be impossible for TEPCO to cover all the costs. They warned that if the current system is maintained, the reconstruction of Fukushima communities could be delayed.

“While paying attention to the discussions in the party, we will consider the proposal seriously if it is submitted to the government,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said at a news conference on Oct. 29.

Finance Minister Taro Aso also appeared to support what would be a drastic change in the government’s policy on who should pay for the cleanup of the Fukushima disaster.

“I have doubts on the view that all responsibilities lie only with TEPCO,” Aso said.

The party’s headquarters to accelerate Fukushima reconstruction, headed by former LDP Vice President Tadamori Oshima, will compile a proposal that includes the new policy.

The LDP will discuss the matter with junior coalition partner New Komeito and government organizations, such as the Finance Ministry and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

A final version will be submitted to the government and then be reflected in the budget for next fiscal year, which starts in April.

Beleaguered TEPCO is scheduled to soon show a revised financial rehabilitation plan to its creditors. The LDP announced the proposal to make clear the division of roles between the government and TEPCO in dealing with the Fukushima disaster before the utility’s plan is released.

Decontamination work in some communities around the nuclear plant has been completed. It was part of a huge project intended to speed up the return home of thousands of families that evacuated after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused the meltdowns at the plant in March 2011. However, radiation readings have not declined to the predicted levels, and the actual decontamination work has been criticized as sloppy and ineffective.

The Environment Ministry complained that TEPCO was refusing to cover all the costs of the decontamination work as required under the law, but it took no significant measures to force the utility to pay.

The ministry also faces difficulties finding local governments willing to host intermediate storage facilities for the huge accumulations of radioactive soil and debris removed in the decontamination process.

TEPCO, meanwhile, is still struggling to prevent radioactive water from leaking at the Fukushima plant and spilling into the ocean.

The LDP’s proposal suggests separating the divisions in charge of contaminated water and decommissioning the reactors from TEPCO, and turning them into a government-affiliated organization or a spin-off company. That way, the electric power company can concentrate on its management and compensation payments.

A government council consisting of state ministers would work out business plans of the new organization and issue instructions, according to the proposal.

Thinking about it

October 29, 2013

Govt. to study paying part of decontamination cost

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131029_37.html

A Japanese Cabinet minister has suggested the government should bear part of the costs for clearing radioactive substances from the area around the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The central and local governments are currently conducting decontamination work and charging the costs to the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company.

But TEPCO has asked the government to cover some of the massive expenses. Government and governing party officials are discussing the utility's request.

On Tuesday, industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi told reporters that accelerating the cleanup work is crucial for early recovery of Fukushima Prefecture.

He said the government wants to study the matter from a comprehensive point of view, although there is a financial problem.

Finance Minister Taro Aso told reporters it is unfair to focus blame for the 2011 accident at the plant solely on TEPCO when the government has long promoted nuclear energy as a national policy.

He added that the government should discuss with the governing Liberal Democrat Party who should bear the decontamination costs, and how much.

Oct. 29, 2013 - Updated 08:46 UTC

TEPCO & cleanup costs

October 29, 2013

Tepco refuses to fund outside cleanup

Utility leaves ministry holding ¥30 billion bill; exemption eyed

by Kazuaki Nagata

Staff Writer

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/29/national/tepc-refuses-to-fund-outside-cleanup/#.Um_0KFOWT9k

Tokyo Electric Power Co. is refusing to reimburse the Environment Ministry for more than ¥30 billion that was spent to decontaminate land hit by radioactive fallout from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the ministry said Tuesday.

Under the special decontamination law adopted in August 2011, the state is responsible for leading and initially financing the decontamination effort, but it can ask Tepco, responsible for the Fukushima crisis, to pay the bill later.

Tepco has paid ¥6.7 billion so far, while the Environment Ministry has sought ¥40.4 billion.

The ministry said Tepco is unwilling to pay for work not directly involving decontamination. For instance, the bill includes costs related to public relations and research and development.

The ¥6.7 billion Tepco has paid covers direct decontamination work such as washing road surfaces and removing tainted soil.

According to a document presented by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry to senior ruling party officials this month, Tepco is insisting that shouldering the cost for decontamination as damages will be “duplicate payments” because it is already compensating for land and buildings.

Tepco “has said it will continue to think over whether it will reimburse the government, so we understand that Tepco has not finalized its decision to completely refuse to pay it back,” said Satoshi Watanabe of the Environment Ministry’s cleanup team, hinting Tepco may be sued. “This situation is totally unacceptable.”

The government has budgeted about ¥1.3 trillion for decontamination, of which about ¥470 billion has been used.

Facing trillions of yen in compensation payments for the Fukushima debacle and soaring fuel costs for thermal power to replace nuclear, Tepco may not even have the means to cover the decontamination bill.

Meanwhile, METI is considering exempting Tepco from paying most of the cleanup costs.

The government has not reached a consensus on the move, which could trigger a public backlash because it would mean further taxpayer help.

METI officials believe it would be difficult to win public approval for releasing Tepco from all of the decontamination costs, but it is considering limiting the bill to the ¥470 billion that has already been used, the sources said.

Finance Minister Taro Aso indicated Tuesday that his ministry may give the green light to using government money to clean contaminated areas around the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear complex.

“I wonder if we can put all the blame on Tepco, given that (nuclear policy) has been framed by the government,” Aso said.

Information from Kyodo added

Abe calls Koizumi's position on nukes "irresponsible"

October 25, 2013

Abe dismisses Koizumi's call for zero nuclear power plants

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201310250045

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Shinzo Abe has brushed aside the suggestion by Junichiro Koizumi, a former prime minister and his political mentor, that Japan move away from nuclear power generation.

"I think it is irresponsible to promise zero (nuclear power plants) at this stage," the prime minister said on a television program broadcast Oct. 24. It was recorded the previous day.

Abe said Japan cannot keep relying on thermal power generation, with all of its nuclear plants shut down until their safety is confirmed after the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

"Koizumi is probably playing his hunch (in arguing for zero nuclear plants), but Japan is losing nearly 4 trillion yen (\$41 billion) in national wealth a year," Abe said, referring to increased fuel costs for thermal plants. "We will be in big trouble if this continues."

In speeches, Koizumi, a popular prime minister for five years through 2006, has called for Japan to wean itself from atomic energy.

"Most business leaders say it is irresponsible to call for zero nuclear plants," the retired politician said recently. "But it is even more irresponsible to promote nuclear power without any prospect of constructing disposal sites for nuclear waste."

Abe was asked about Koizumi's arguments during a Lower House Budget Committee meeting on Oct. 21. "My teachers in politics are former prime ministers Koizumi and (Yoshiro) Mori," Abe said. "(But) as a person responsible for government, I will pursue a responsible energy policy so that people's lives and economic activities are not impacted under any circumstances."

During an Upper House Budget Committee meeting on Oct. 24, Tadatomo Yoshida, leader of the Social Democratic Party, pressed Abe to break away from atomic energy, showing photo panels of Koizumi and Akie Abe, the prime minister's wife, who has expressed her opposition to nuclear power.

"Both individuals are extremely important to me," Abe said. "But from the government's standpoint, (nuclear plants) are extremely important for a stable energy supply and economic activities."

Yoshida is asking for a meeting with Koizumi to discuss how they can work together to end Japan's reliance on atomic energy.

“As Koizumi said, political parties other than the ruling Liberal Democratic Party have outlined, albeit in varying degrees, a direction toward moving away from nuclear power,” Yoshida said at an Oct. 23 news conference. “If Abe makes up his mind, Japan will make a significant step forward.”

Kazuo Shii, chairman of the Japanese Communist Party’s executive committee, has also hinted that his party may form an alliance with Koizumi on the single issue of no nuclear plants.

“(Koizumi says) Japan must do away with nuclear plants because it cannot dispose of nuclear waste. It makes perfect sense,” Shii said Oct. 17. “We will cooperate with people with any stance as long as we agree on zero nuclear plants.”

Your Party chief Yoshimi Watanabe, Ichiro Ozawa, leader of the People’s Life Party, and former Prime Minister Naoto Kan of the Democratic Party of Japan have also shown support for Koizumi’s call for no nuclear plants.

Information on 3/11 made more palatable

October 30, 2013

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=0IHL_Glgv1o

Video clips spell out findings of panel probing nuclear crisis

by Sayuri Daimon

Staff Writer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/30/national/video-clips-spell-out-findings-of-panel-probing-nuclear-crisis/#.UnILXFOWT9k>

The independent Diet panel investigating the Fukushima nuclear crisis wrapped up its mission and compiled a 592-page report in July 2012, but probably only a handful of people have read the full account and even fewer understand it.

However, six short video clips explaining the lengthy report in simple language have been a hit on the Internet, making it very easy to understand what happened at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. Starting Thursday, English versions will be available.

The video clips were made by a group of people who include university students and former members of the Diet panel, according to Satoshi Ishibashi, a representative of the group and a former director of the panel’s research project management team.

The six clips, which include titles such as “Was the nuclear accident preventable?” and “What happened inside the nuclear plant?” explain the catastrophe with illustrations and simple words that even elementary school students can understand.

They were part of efforts by the group, which was created last November by 18 people, to help the public understand what happened in Fukushima in March 2011 and to spur open discussions on the disaster’s lessons.

Titled the “Wakariyasui (easy to understand) Project,” it carries the subtitle “The Simplest Explanation of the National Diet of Japan Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission Report.”

Besides creating the video clips, the group offers workshops and lectures on the crisis.

“We spent six months compiling the report, but the problem is the report is not attractive to the public,” Ishibashi said.

“We poured taxpayers’ money and our effort into compiling the report, and if we don’t do anything more with it, it will simply have been a waste.”

The English versions of the video clips can be viewed at naiic.net/en/iv/ and the Japanese versions at naiic.net/iv/.

US offers help

October 31, 2013

U.S. energy chief offers Japan aid with nuke cleanup

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310310098>

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz says he expects deepening cooperation with Japan over cleaning up and decommissioning of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Moniz says on Oct. 31 the world has a strong interest in seeing the next steps are "taken well and efficiently and safely" in the cleanup from the multiple meltdowns triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami on Japan's northeastern coast.

Moniz was on Oct. 31 with top Japanese officials during his visit, including industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi, who is overseeing the government's role in the plant cleanup.

Japanese regulators on Oct. 30 approved removal of fuel rods from an uncontained cooling pool at a damaged reactor building considered the highest risk at the plant.

M.Abe's priorities all wrong

ANALYSIS: Abe leads nuclear plant exports while problems pile up at home

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201310310074>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

As the Abe administration crows about Japan's first nuclear plant export after the 2011 disaster, it continues to face the daunting tasks of containing radioactive water at the stricken Fukushima plant and cleaning up contaminated communities.

"I'm delighted that commercial negotiations on a nuclear plant contract have been completed and an agreement has been reached," a beaming Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said at a news conference in Istanbul on Oct. 29.

The Turkish government the same day signed an agreement with a consortium led by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. to build four nuclear reactors in the Black Sea city of Sinop at an estimated cost of more than \$22 billion (2 trillion yen).

Since he took office in December, Abe has been pushing exports of nuclear power plants, among other infrastructure facilities, as a pillar of his economic growth strategy.

His latest trip to Turkey came only five months after his last visit to discuss nuclear cooperation with Recep Tayyip Erdogan, his Turkish counterpart.

“The deal was sealed in one go,” said an aide to Abe, attributing the success to the prime minister’s initiative.

No one was perhaps more surprised than Abe about the outcome of the trip. Before leaving for Turkey on Oct. 28, Abe told aides he did not expect that a formal agreement would be reached during his visit.

The Abe administration has signed a nuclear energy agreement, a precondition for exporting nuclear technology, with Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.

Under Abe, the government has also agreed to start discussing a nuclear energy pact with Saudi Arabia and resumed talks with India, which were suspended after meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

The government hopes that the contract with Turkey will improve Japan’s chances in winning competition for nuclear power projects in Vietnam, India and Russia, among other countries.

Based on International Atomic Energy Agency forecasts, the industry ministry estimates that a maximum of 370 new nuclear reactors will be built around the world by 2030.

With construction costing 400 billion to 500 billion yen per reactor, Japanese companies, including MHI, Toshiba Corp. and Hitachi Ltd., are competing with foreign rivals for a slice of the market worth more than 100 trillion yen.

“Led by the prime minister, government officials have been working on many fronts,” Makoto Kubo, a Toshiba vice president, said at a news conference on Oct. 30. “We want to go ahead with (nuclear plant exports) in tandem with the government.”

According to government estimates released Oct. 29, Japan received 5.04 trillion yen worth of orders for exporting infrastructure facilities during the first nine months of the year, 50 percent more than the full-year amount for 2012.

“Aggressive efforts have paid off,” an official at the Cabinet Secretariat said. “The prime minister has led sales promotions in 21 countries.”

While pushing nuclear plant exports, Abe has said that Japan will lower the ratio of atomic energy in electricity generation. But he has not explained how he plans to reduce nuclear plants and by when.

At the Fukushima No. 1 plant, operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. has spent months struggling to keep ever-increasing radioactive water from leaking from storage tanks and other facilities.

In a speech at an International Olympic Committee meeting in September before the IOC members picked Tokyo to host the 2020 Games, Abe said, "The situation is under control," referring to the radioactive water problem.

But leaks have continued, with some water believed to be finding its way into the Pacific Ocean. Groundwater has been contaminated after mixing with water used to cool the reactors in which melted fuel is still releasing heat.

High levels of radioactive materials have also been detected in drainage ditches and observation wells on the premises.

Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, summoned TEPCO President Naomi Hirose on Oct. 28 and pressed the company to take a more effective approach to deal with the radioactive water problem.

On a longer term, decommissioning the reactors and removing radioactive materials covering surrounding areas are two primary challenges facing TEPCO.

On Oct. 30, the utility received NRA approval to begin removing nuclear fuel from a storage pool for the No. 4 reactor, one of the first steps toward decommissioning.

The No. 4 reactor is the first from which nuclear fuel will be removed among the four crippled reactors. TEPCO believes that it will take until the end of 2014 to remove about 1,500 fuel assemblies from the No. 4 reactor building.

Senior officials of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party on Oct. 30 approved an LDP task force's proposal calling on the government to play a greater role in cleaning up contaminated areas and other post-disaster operations.

Some estimate that 10 trillion yen will be required for decontamination, decommissioning and compensation to disaster victims, with clean-up operations accounting for half of the costs.

LDP panel members said TEPCO will not be able to shoulder the costs alone, and the nuclear crisis cannot be brought under control as long as the government leaves the task solely in the company's hands.

Still, some members of the LDP and junior coalition partner New Komeito are opposed to forking out taxpayer money for post-disaster operations in what would amount to a government bailout of TEPCO.

Some of the disaster victims were clearly not happy with Abe's push for nuclear plant exports while problems continue to mount in Japan.

Soichi Saito, a 63-year-old who evacuated from Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, after the nuclear disaster, criticized Abe's double talk on nuclear energy policy.

"How dare he sell nuclear power plants abroad when he has not been able to bring an accident under control?" asked Saito, chief of an association of temporary housing residents in Iwaki in the same prefecture. "What does he think of victims of the nuclear disaster?"

(This article was compiled from reports by Kotaro Ono in Istanbul, Osamu Uchiyama and Norihisa Hoshino in Tokyo and Takuro Negishi in Iwaki.)

Is this a comeback?

October 30, 2013

Anti-nuclear Koizumi agitating for comeback?

by Reiji Yoshida

Staff Writer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/30/national/anti-nuclear-koizumi-agitating-for-comeback/#.UnIK4VOwT9k>

Long silent and out of the public eye, former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's recent rumblings against nuclear power are causing many to wonder if the most popular leader of recent decades is laying the groundwork for a political comeback.

The 74-year-old Koizumi has met separately with two opposition party heads — Tadatomo Yoshida of the Social Democratic Party and Yoshimi Watanabe of Your Party — to discuss his mission to rid the nation of all 50 of its nuclear reactors.

A visit to a spent-fuel disposal site in Finland following the 2011 Fukushima crisis converted him to an anti-nuclear activist, Koizumi claims.

Recent speeches given at closed-door meetings made the headlines of gossip magazines. Now Koizumi is stepping up his anti-nuclear campaign.

On Oct. 16, for the first time he allowed TV cameras from media outlets to shoot an anti-nuclear lecture in its entirety in Kisarazu, Chiba Prefecture.

Next up, Koizumi is scheduled to hold a news conference at the Japan National Press Club on Nov. 12, where he will face senior reporters from all the major news outlets for the first time since stepping down as prime minister in 2006.

“He has great power to send messages to the public. That’s what I felt today,” Yoshida of the SDP said after meeting Koizumi on Tuesday.

While serving as prime minister, Koizumi was often touted as a powerful communicator, a telegenic genius of the sound bite.

Critics called him a political agitator who labeled his foes “anti-reformers.” But his popularity with voters carried the Liberal Democratic Party to a landslide victory in the 2005 Lower House election, in part due to his quest to privatize the postal system.

In office, Koizumi rose above his party, a “lone wolf” who relied on communication skills to achieve his popularity. It is this approach, rather than by forming an alliance with a political force, that he appears to be adopting again to get his message across to the public.

During Tuesday’s meeting, Koizumi declined Yoshida’s offer to team up on the abolition of nuclear plants. Instead, Koizumi stressed that each party and politician should make their own appeals to the public, and denied any intention to form a new political party, as gossip magazines have speculated, according to Yoshida.

It's possible that Koizumi sized up the SDP and other anti-nuclear suitors and decided an alliance would not benefit him.

The SDP and Seikatsu no To (People's Life Party) — the only parties to advocate for the immediate abolition of all nuclear plants — performed poorly in the latest Lower House election, in July, and their public support rates have remained below 1 percent all year, according to NHK polls.

Another hurdle to an alliance: The two share few views with Koizumi other than the anti-nuclear stance. The SDP and Seikatsu no To support big government with increased spending on social security, while Koizumi was a champion of small government and free markets.

An advocate of pacifist policies, the SDP calls for cutting back U.S. military bases in Japan, while Koizumi was an earnest supporter of the Japan-U.S. security alliance.

"Nobody believes the SDP and Mr. Koizumi agree on (various policy issues.) They never agree on security issues, either," LDP Secretary-General Shigeru Ishiba said Tuesday.

Still, officials at the prime minister's office appear worried about Koizumi's potential to sway the public.

Many LDP lawmakers have pushed long and hard for nuclear power plants to be built in their constituencies. And Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has pledged to restart any of the 50 reactors that pass Nuclear Regulation Authority safety tests.

At the end of last month, Abe's Cabinet appointed Shinjiro Koizumi, a son of the former prime minister, as parliamentary secretary at the Reconstruction Agency.

This appointment was widely seen as an attempt to keep the young Koizumi, who is also popular with voters, under control, to prevent him from emerging, like his father, as a rising star of the anti-nuclear movement.

As a senior official at the Reconstruction Agency, the son is now obliged to toe the government line, including its energy policies.

On Wednesday, facing an opposition lawmaker during a Diet session for the first time, he was asked to explain his nuclear stance.

He simply responded that he would concentrate on urgent issues related to the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, such as the problems of radioactive water and compensating local residents.

“I’m a parliamentary secretary and a member of the government,” he reportedly told the Diet session.

Nuclear not just a method of producing electricity

October 31, 2013

EDITORIAL: Industry ministry wrong body to control nuclear policy

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201310310048>

Broad national debate is essential in charting the overall direction of nuclear energy policy because the disaster that occurred in Fukushima Prefecture proved that nuclear energy poses a huge risk to the entire nation.

The policymaking process requires wide-ranging input from all sorts of experts, including scientists and humanities scholars who are not proponents of nuclear power generation.

But there are troubling signs that the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which is a strong supporter of nuclear power, could gain even greater influence over policymaking on this issue.

If nothing is done, nuclear power policy could fall under the control of the so-called nuclear power village, a close-knit community of experts who are bent on continuing to promote nuclear energy.

This concern was sparked by an outline of proposals released last week by a panel of experts tasked with reviewing the role and mission of the Atomic Energy Commission.

The advisory panel called for scrapping the “nuclear energy policy guidelines,” which have been crafted by the AEC. The panel proposed that nuclear energy policy should instead come under the purview of the Basic Energy Plan, which was mapped out by the industry ministry.

The nuclear energy policy guidelines generally are updated every five years or so, but the programs laid out in the document often failed to go as planned.

It certainly makes sense for the Basic Energy Plan to contain programs concerning nuclear power generation.

But debate from a purely energy policy perspective is hardly sufficient for making decisions with regard to fundamental issues like the appropriateness of using atomic energy, the scale of nuclear power generation and the nation’s nuclear future.

Nuclear power generation, as we have learned, can have catastrophic results. It cannot simply be viewed as a method of generating electricity.

Nuclear power generation is also different in nature from other power generation systems because its technology carries the risk of being used to develop nuclear weapons.

The Japanese archipelago is prone to frequent natural disasters. Are the people of this country really willing to accept nuclear power? What kind of policy is desirable from the viewpoint of nuclear nonproliferation?

All these questions require not just opinions of nuclear experts, but debate from all sorts of perspectives, which was precisely the AEC's original mandate.

The AEC was established in 1956. Its original members included some prominent figures, such as Nobel-winning physicist Hideki Yukawa and Ichiro Ishikawa, the first chairman of Keidanren, which is today's Japan Business Federation.

But the AEC became nothing more than a rubber-stamp body when the promotion of nuclear power generation was adopted as official policy of the government.

As a result, the commission has been failing to perform its core function of critically reviewing the government's nuclear energy policy. It is hardly surprising that the AEC's reason for being has been called into question.

Even so, entrusting the industry ministry with the development of nuclear energy policy would be a risky and simplistic response to the problem.

Where in this attitude can we see lessons gleaned from the Fukushima nuclear disaster?

After the Fukushima nuclear crisis unfolded, German Chancellor Angela Merkel set up an ethics committee comprising advisers who are not nuclear power experts. Sociologists were part of the group. The committee discussed topics independently of nuclear experts who considered technical issues. Based on the discussions at the ethics committee, Merkel made the landmark decision to phase out nuclear power generation in Germany.

Japan has every reason to establish a similar committee to undertake a fundamental review of its nuclear energy policy.

The way the government has been preoccupied with responding to individual problems is now in serious doubt.

Split TEPCO: a "bad" company + a "good" company

November 1, 2013

INTERVIEW/ Shuya Nomura: Avoiding TEPCO's bankruptcy exacerbated Fukushima crisis

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/opinion/AJ201311010009>

SPECIAL TO THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The words from Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's mouth were clear: "The situation is under control." But radioactive water continues to leak from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co.

The cleanup has remained in disarray since the accident started to unfold on March 11, 2011, and contaminated water spills have exposed structural problems.

The root cause of the Fukushima mess is the government's decision to avoid a TEPCO bankruptcy, according to Shuya Nomura, a member of the former National Diet of Japan Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission.

When the commission looked into the Fukushima nuclear disaster, Nomura said he saw measures being taken for the radioactive water that could only be described as stopgap.

In an interview with The Asahi Shimbun, Nomura also said bureaucrats should get off their "lazy butts" and stop acting like innocent bystanders.

Excerpts from the interview follow:

The misery began soon after the nuclear disaster, when the government opted to prevent TEPCO from going bankrupt.

Another idea floated at the time was to allow the utility to go through bankruptcy proceedings and have the government take over the job of cleaning up the site. However, the Finance Ministry, which did not want to throw away taxpayer money, apparently agreed with the opinion that failure to repay the company's debts to the banks would cause problems, and that the government needed to make sure that TEPCO honored the corporate bonds it had issued.

When TEPCO needed money, the government ended up giving loans to the company in the form of "government compensation bonds."

Officially, TEPCO took responsibility. But behind the scenes, the government exerted awkward control, like a "helping hands" comedy (in which one performer provides the arms for the performer in front, but without being able to see what is happening).

This, naturally, does not allow for a flexible response to the disaster. Additionally, TEPCO fell into a situation that made it difficult to prioritize the cleanup because the company became worried about how bankruptcy concerns would affect its stock price.

I toured the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in December 2011. This was when they began adding more tanks for storing contaminated water. Following harsh criticism for dumping the water into the

ocean soon after the earthquake without notifying nearby countries, a decision was made to just store it in the tanks.

But it was obvious to anyone who took a look that this would not bring the problem under control. If effective measures had been taken at this time, the crisis would not have grown so grave.

The public sees the problem as stemming from leaving the cleanup to TEPCO, but I don't think so. That's because after the disaster, TEPCO was not in a position to make independent decisions.

The public image we see is only TEPCO's, while the bureaucracy, the helping hands behind the scenes, acts like an innocent bystander. This is the problem.

The government, in an attempt to prevent disorder, makes itself out to be the hero, daringly rescuing us from the radioactive water. But I feel the government should first reconsider the lack of expertise and irresponsible handling by the bureaucracy, which has tolerated TEPCO's sloppy cleanup.

My greatest fears concern the 350,000 tons of radioactive water stored in the tanks. Even though, as Prime Minister Abe tells us, the effects of contaminated water runoff into the ocean have been blocked off in a contained area, we do not know whether the tanks on land could tip over and cause a massive spill.

What the government should now do is control the radioactive water stored in the tanks and put it through final disposal as soon as possible. Most of the funds the government has set aside will be used to stanch the further release of contaminated water, and there is no outlook for what to do with the water already in storage.

Discussion is fixated on whether to release filtrated water that still contains tritium, a radioactive isotope of hydrogen, into the sea, but no one has even spelled out how to dispose of the highly concentrated waste matter removed in the process.

SPLIT UP AND NATIONALIZE

I was involved in writing off bad debts under the minister in charge of financial affairs during the early 2000s, and I can't help but recall a lesson I learned during that time. **Throwing taxpayer money at a problem in piecemeal fashion has little effect.**

Unlike financial reconstruction, we cannot recover the taxpayer money we throw at the contaminated water problem. But now is the time for the political will to get the bureaucrats off their lazy butts. To do this, I think arrangements to bring in outside experts will be important.

The government has created response teams to deal with the contaminated water issues--one led by the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry and another led by Cabinet ministers--but has left liaising with TEPCO up to the bureaucrats. What the government should do is promptly set up a task force of technical and management experts under the appropriate Cabinet ministers and dispatch it to TEPCO.

The government will have to invest a heavy dose of taxpayer money to take aggressive measures dealing with the radioactive water.

To win over the people's understanding, there must be another debate over what is to become of TEPCO, but this time without skirting the issue of responsibility for TEPCO shareholders and the financial institutions that lent money to the utility.

I believe the only solution is to split TEPCO into a company for decommissioning and disaster cleanup (a "bad" company) and a company for supplying electricity (a "good" company), force responsibility on banks and other investors by liquidating the former, followed by a complete nationalization, and then hand responsibility for decommissioning and the like to the government.

One more important perspective to consider is the global governance of nuclear power. Due to the risk that the effects of accidents can spill over borders, **we need to start thinking right away about nuclear power as part of the collective wisdom of humankind, to be governed by us all.**

An example we could learn from is the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), the institute that discovered the Higgs boson and is jointly managed by its member states.

Japan should be proactive in using the world's knowledge during decommissioning and disaster response, and lead a movement to build a global cooperative framework.

(This article is based on an interview by Tsuyoshi Komano, staff writer.)

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Shuya Nomura, born in 1962, is a professor at the Chuo University Law School and a lawyer. He has served as an adviser to the Financial Supervisory Agency (now the Financial Services Agency) and was a member of the commission that investigated the scandal over missing national pension records.

International compensation pact & US help

November 1, 2013

Japan to join nuclear compensation pact

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131101_16.html

A Japanese Cabinet minister has notified the United States of Japan's intention to join an international treaty on compensation for nuclear accidents.

Economy and industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi conveyed the message to visiting US Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz in Tokyo on Thursday.

The US government has been asking Japan to ratify the treaty, which is aimed at helping participating countries pay compensation for damage from nuclear accidents with funds contributed by member nations.

Moniz welcomed Japan's decision.

The ministers agreed to coordinate closely toward the conclusion of the pact.

Moniz expressed the US's willingness to continue to help Japan decommission the Fukushima Daiichi plant and stem leaks of contaminated water at the facility.

See also :

US, TEPCO to work together on Fukushima plant

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131101_35.html

The US Energy Secretary and the president of Tokyo Electric Power Company have agreed to enhance technical cooperation to better deal with problems at the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Secretary Ernest Moniz toured the plant on Friday accompanied by TEPCO President Naomi Hirose.

Moniz inspected wells to monitor the spread of underground radioactive contamination and equipment to pump up radioactive water close to the ocean.

Groundwater flows from nearby mountains into the plant compound, absorbs radioactive substances there and then leaks into the ocean. TEPCO is still unable either to identify exactly where radioactive

water is leaking or to keep track of the movement of groundwater.

Moniz reportedly said Energy Department researchers are currently working on technologies to contain contaminated water and they can be of help.

A radiation leak at the Hartford nuclear site in the state of Washington earlier this year prompted the US Energy Department to set up a research institute to develop technologies to handle such accidents.

Moniz and Hirose agreed to strengthen technical cooperation in 5 fields. These include disposal of radioactive water, preventing the contamination of underground water and the removal of melted nuclear fuel.

US ready to help decommission reactors in Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131101_05.html

TEPCO reports first profit since 3/11

TEPCO reports 1st profit since Fukushima nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201311010060>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tokyo Electric Power Co. posted its first profit since the Fukushima nuclear crisis started in March 2011, but the utility gave a dreary forecast as disaster-related costs continue to pile up.

TEPCO said Oct. 31 it secured a pretax profit of 141.6 billion yen (\$1.44 billion) for the April-September period, a sharp reversal from a loss of 166.2 billion yen a year earlier.

The company's household electricity rate hike from September 2012 pushed up revenue by 177 billion yen from a year earlier. The utility also cut 55 billion yen in spending by squeezing personnel costs and deferring repair work.

Those measures more than offset the increased fuel costs for thermal power generation to make up for lost capacity at its destroyed or idle nuclear reactors.

Nine of the 10 regional utilities either turned profits or cut losses in the half-year period, although the nation's 50 nuclear reactors will remain shut down until their safety is confirmed.

But industry executives said reactors must be brought back online as soon as possible to ensure a stable electricity supply.

TEPCO President Naomi Hirose, who is desperately seeking to restart reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture, voiced pessimism about the company's finances for the latter half of the current fiscal year.

"We are bracing for extremely grim earnings," he said, citing payments due to contractors toward the fiscal-year end in March.

TEPCO says the reactivation of one Kashiwazaki-Kariwa reactor will improve its earnings by more than 100 billion yen.

The utility submitted applications to the Nuclear Regulation Authority for safety screenings for two of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant's seven reactors at the end of September.

An NRA screening to confirm whether a reactor complies with new nuclear safety standards that took effect in July is a prerequisite for a restart.

However, even if TEPCO ekes out a single-year profit, the long-term outlook remains bleak as costs for compensation, decontamination and decommissioning pummel the company's bottom line.

TEPCO has posted an extraordinary loss of about 3 trillion yen for compensation paid to those affected by the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. But government assistance has allowed the company to cancel out the deficit with an extraordinary profit of the same amount.

TEPCO has also avoided booking costs for decontamination work in areas around the Fukushima plant that will likely exceed 3 trillion yen. The utility refuses to pay much of the amount as required under law.

Government assistance to TEPCO is expected to reach its limit of 5 trillion yen in the near future.

The government has started talks with the ruling coalition about sharing the burden of the Fukushima decontamination costs.

PUSH CONTINUES FOR REACTOR RESTARTS

Kansai Electric Power Co. posted a pretax profit of 31.5 billion yen for the April-September period, compared with a loss of 171.9 billion yen a year earlier.

Electricity rate hikes from spring increased revenue by 120 billion yen, while costs were slashed by 77 billion yen.

But a senior company official said red ink would have been inevitable if two reactors at the Oi nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture had not been operational.

All nuclear reactors in Japan were taken offline by May 2012 following the Fukushima nuclear accident, but the two Oi reactors were able to operate from August 2012 to September this year.

"Only temporary factors allowed us to secure profits," Kansai Electric President Makoto Yagi said. "We continue to face harsh business conditions."

Six regional utilities including TEPCO and Kansai Electric have raised electricity rates since the Fukushima nuclear accident. A seventh, Chubu Electric Power Co., applied for a rate hike on Oct. 29.

Hokkaido Electric Power Co. reported a pretax loss of 37.6 billion yen for the six-month period.

"We have been unable to negate the impact of reactors being suspended, and it remains difficult to make profits," said Katsuhiko Kawai, president of Hokkaido Electric.

Hokkaido Electric, TEPCO, Kansai Electric, Shikoku Electric Power Co. and Kyushu Electric Power Co. have all applied for NRA safety screenings for their reactors.

But the nuclear watchdog appears unable to complete the screening for a single reactor by the end of the year.

According to the NRA, Shikoku Electric and Hokkaido Electric are expected to be the first applicants to submit all documents required for screenings. Even then, the full set of their documents is not expected until late November.

"It is extremely difficult to tell when the screening (for our reactor) will be completed," Shikoku Electric President Akira Chiba said.

TEPCO posts 1st half-year profit since 2011 crisis

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131031_45.html

Tokyo Electric Power Company has reported its first mid-term profit since the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in 2011.

TEPCO posted on Thursday about 1.14 billion dollars in profits for the April-September period.

Sales for the period were nearly 32 billion dollars, up more than 12 percent from a year earlier, due to cost-cutting efforts as well as a rise in electricity rates.

Profits rose despite record fuel costs of about 14 billion dollars for thermal power generation due to the weaker yen and suspended operations at all its nuclear power plants.

The company put off repair work at other power plants and transmission facilities to cut spending by 3.7 million dollars. It also reduced labor costs by 1.8 million dollars from a year earlier.

TEPCO president Naomi Hirose told reporters the company still faces an uphill battle in its struggle with contaminated wastewater at the Fukushima plant.

But Hirose said the utility aims to post a profit for the full business year next March by further streamlining operations and postponing repair works until the next fiscal year.

Over a trillion yens (disaster relief) diverted

November 1, 2013

Audit Board: 1.3 trillion yen in post-quake recovery funds diverted elsewhere

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201311010069>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

More than a trillion yen earmarked for disaster relief in areas affected by the March 11, 2011, disaster went to projects other than those the money was intended for, including Japan's so-called scientific whaling program, according to a new Board of Audit report.

"The rebuilding budget was financed through tax hikes on taxpayers," the Board of Audit report said. "The government agencies involved should therefore give appropriate consideration to disaster priorities. They must be held accountable and explain themselves."

The board examined government relief expenditures for fiscal 2011-2012. It said Oct. 31 that 23 percent of the projects audited, totaling 11 percent of the budget already spent, or 1.3 trillion yen (\$13.2 billion), had nothing to do directly with the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami or the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The most recent revelations are not the first time news of wasteful spending has been made public.

In response to revelations that some post-quake relief funds were diverted, the government issued new guidelines in November 2012 that stipulated projects not directly linked to the reconstruction effort, or in disaster-hit areas, are not eligible for the funding.

The government at the time halted 35 such projects totaling 16.8 billion yen. One of the projects halted included the anti-seismic retrofitting of government buildings outside the disaster area.

According to the board's latest audit, a total of 19.9 trillion yen in fiscal 2011 and 2012 was allocated for disaster recovery. Using the new government guidelines, the board screened 1,401 rebuilding projects, totaling 15.2 trillion yen.

The results of the Board of Audit's inspection showed 912 projects were directly linked to rebuilding efforts in disaster-hit areas. Another 163 projects fell partially within the government guidelines, including tsunami countermeasures and anti-seismic retrofitting of school buildings outside disaster areas.

The remaining 326 projects had no direct correlation to the affected communities, even if their objective was disaster mitigation, the Board of Audit said.

The 15.2 trillion yen covered by the audit did not include special tax allocations to local governments. And of that amount, 11.4 trillion yen had been spent by the end of fiscal 2012.

Among the most notable projects deemed "irrelevant" was the partial funding of the Institute of Cetacean Research, which engages in so-called scientific whaling. The farm ministry spent 2.19 billion yen in fiscal 2011, partly to subsidize the institute. Most of that money was used to offset a deficit at the ICR and to guard Japan's whaling vessels.

The ICR was struggling financially due to a drop in the whale harvest and partly from the need to hire patrol vessels to counter sabotage efforts by the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, an anti-whaling group.

The Board of Audit dismissed the farm ministry's argument that the payments benefited the rebuilding efforts in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, which hosts an ICR facility.

Another project flagged was a labor ministry program to assist job seekers. It provided a 100,000 yen monthly allowance to people looking for jobs while receiving vocational training. It also subsidized private vocational schools and other institutions that train job seekers.

Of the total 1.23 billion yen spent in fiscal 2011 under that program, 970 million yen was used in 44 of Japan's 47 prefectures outside the hardest-hit prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima. The labor bureaus across Japan overseeing the program didn't even ask the job seekers receiving the funds and training if they were survivors of the 2011 disaster.

Following the advisory from the Board of Audit, the labor ministry the last fiscal year stopped trying to tap into the rebuilding budget for funds.

(This article was compiled from reports by Motoki Kaneko and Takuya Kitazawa.)

US will cooperate with Japan on cleanup and dismantling

November 2, 2013

TEPCO, U.S. to cooperate in Fukushima nuke plant cleanup

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201311020026>

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The utility operating Japan's crippled nuclear power plant said Nov. 1 that it will work with the U.S. Department of Energy in decommissioning the site and in dealing with radioactive water problems.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. President Naomi Hirose said he agreed to accept U.S. help in discussions with U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz as they visited the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on Nov. 1 to inspect preparations to remove fuel rods from a storage pool.

The plant has recently had a series of mishaps, including leaks of radioactive water from storage tanks. The incidents, many of them caused by human error, have added to concerns about TEPCO's ability to safely close down the plant, which suffered multiple meltdowns after being hit by a March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Following criticism of its perceived reluctance to accept foreign help, Japan has recently begun to show more willingness to do so.

Operators of the plant are currently making final preparations to remove fuel rods from an uncovered cooling pool at Unit 4--one of four reactor buildings damaged in the crisis, and the one considered at highest risk. Removing the fuel rods from the cooling pool is the first major step in a decommissioning process at the plant that is expected to take decades.

The fuel removal at Unit 4 was given preliminary approval by Japanese regulators on Oct. 30 and is to start by mid-November following a final go-ahead.

"As Japan continues to chart its sovereign path forward on the cleanup at the Fukushima site and works to determine the future of their energy economy, the United States stands ready to continue assisting our partners in this daunting yet indispensable task," Moniz said in a statement on Nov. 1. He said a U.S.-Japan commission to strengthen cooperation in civil nuclear research and development, as well as Fukushima cleanup, emergency response, and regulatory issues, will meet in Washington next week.

Despite public concerns over potential risks of radiation from the plant, Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party has pushed for a restart of the country's nuclear reactors, which are currently all offline for safety checks. Moniz said he expects nuclear power will remain a crucial part of the energy mix as the world tries to mitigate global warming.

"We will work together to tackle many challenges toward decommissioning," Hirose said in an interview with Japanese media. "I have high hopes that we will be able to benefit from U.S. experience and expertise at the Fukushima plant."

The two sides hope to contribute to global nuclear power by sharing technology in stabilizing and decommissioning the plant, Hirose said.

"The success of the cleanup also has global significance. So we all have a direct interest in seeing that the next steps are taken well, efficiently and safely," Moniz said in a speech on Oct. 31 in Tokyo.

Moniz, escorted by Hirose, inspected the Unit 4 pool area, as well as storage tanks for contaminated water, radioactive water treatment units and other facilities at the plant.

The reactor building was damaged by hydrogen explosions, and remains a source of international concern about a catastrophic open-air meltdown in case of a pool collapse, despite TEPCO's repeated reassurance that it has reinforced the pool and that the building can withstand another major earthquake.

TEPCO also has appointed a former U.S. regulator who led the cleanup of the 1979 Three Mile Island nuclear accident in the United States as an adviser.

Tepco confirms U.S. will help with Fukushima No. 1 dismantling, cleanup

by Mari Yamaguchi

AP

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/11/02/national/tepcu-confirms-u-s-will-help-with-fukushima-no-1-dismantling-cleanup/#.UnSk_VOwT9k

Tokyo Electric Power Co. President Naomi Hirose said the utility will work with the U.S. Department of Energy in decommissioning the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and in dealing with radioactive water amassing at the site.

Hirose said he agreed to accept the offer of help in discussions with U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz as they visited Fukushima No. 1 on Friday to inspect preparations to remove spent fuel rods from the storage pool of reactor 4.

The plant has recently seen a series of setbacks, including radioactive water gushing from storage tanks into the Pacific. The incidents, many of them caused by human error, have added to concerns about Tepco's ability to safely dismantle the complex, which suffered multiple meltdowns after being hit by the March 2011 quake and tsunami.

Following criticism of its perceived reluctance to accept foreign help, Japan has recently begun to show more willingness to do so.

Final preparations are currently being made to remove fuel rods from the uncovered cooling pool of unit 4 — one of four reactor buildings damaged in the crisis, and the one considered at highest risk. Removing the fuel rods from the cooling pool is the first major step in a decommissioning process that is expected to take decades.

The fuel removal at reactor 4 was given preliminary approval by regulators Wednesday and is set to start by the middle of the month following a final go-ahead.

“As Japan continues to chart its sovereign path forward on the cleanup at the Fukushima site and works to determine the future of their energy economy, the United States stands ready to continue assisting our partners in this daunting yet indispensable task,” Moniz said in a statement late Friday.

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Despite public concerns over potential radiation risks from the No. 1 plant, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party has pushed for a restart of the country’s other nuclear reactors, which are currently all offline for safety checks. Moniz said he expects atomic power will remain a crucial part of the global energy mix as nations try to mitigate global warming.

“We will work together to tackle many challenges toward decommissioning,” Hirose said in an interview with public broadcaster NHK. “I have high hopes that we will be able to benefit from U.S. experience and expertise at Fukushima No. 1.”

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In a speech Thursday in Tokyo, Moniz said: “The success of the cleanup also has global significance. So we all have a direct interest in seeing that the next steps are taken well, efficiently and safely.”

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The reactor 4 building, damaged by hydrogen explosions in March 2011, remains a source of international concern about a catastrophic open-air meltdown in case of a pool collapse, despite Tepco’s

repeated reassurances that it has reinforced the pool and that the building can withstand another major earthquake.

Tepco also has appointed as an adviser a former U.S. regulator who led the cleanup of the 1979 Three Mile Island nuclear disaster in Pennsylvania.

November 1, 2013

US, TEPCO to work together on Fukushima plant

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131101_35.html

The US Energy Secretary and the president of Tokyo Electric Power Company have agreed to enhance technical cooperation to better deal with problems at the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Secretary Ernest Moniz toured the plant on Friday accompanied by TEPCO President Naomi Hirose.

Moniz inspected wells to monitor the spread of underground radioactive contamination and equipment to pump up radioactive water close to the ocean.

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Moniz reportedly said Energy Department researchers are currently working on technologies to contain contaminated water and they can be of help.

A radiation leak at the Hartford nuclear site in the state of Washington earlier this year prompted the US Energy Department to set up a research institute to develop technologies to handle such accidents.

Moniz and Hirose agreed to strengthen technical cooperation in 5 fields. These include disposal of radioactive water, preventing the contamination of underground water and the removal of melted nuclear fuel.

1 trillion yen of taxpayer money for decontamination

November 2, 2013

Gov't to spend 1 trillion yen in public funds for Fukushima decontamination

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131102p2g00m0dm065000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The government plans to use public funds for part of the activities to clean up the radiation-contaminated areas outside the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in a major policy shift, with the total sum likely to top 1 trillion yen, sources close to the matter said Friday.

The plan to alleviate the financial burden Tokyo Electric Power Co. was supposed to face is in line with a ruling Liberal Democratic Party proposal compiled a day before on ways to accelerate the sluggish recovery from one of the world's worst nuclear crises.

Plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. is still expected to pay up to some 3 trillion yen because the government has no intention to exempt the utility from decontamination cost payments the state and local governments have already planned.

The state, for its part, plans to use public funds to respond to additional decontamination needs for infrastructure restoration, such as cleaning schools, parks and other public facilities that have been left without maintenance after residents fled from their homes.

It will also use funds to build interim storage facilities to keep radioactive soil and other waste created in the cleanup efforts.

The Environment Ministry has earmarked a total of 1.5 trillion yen for costs related to decontamination activities through fiscal 2013 ending next March and asked TEPCO to pay 40 billion yen of the funds it has so far used.

But the utility has only paid back 6.7 billion yen, citing delays in clerical work and the utility's tough business conditions.

TEPCO is struggling due to increase in fuel imports for boosting thermal power generation to make up for the loss of nuclear power. It also needs funds to compensate people and companies affected by the crisis as well as to scrap the crippled reactors at the Fukushima plant.

State to spend over ¥1 trillion of taxpayer money for Fukushima decontamination work

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/11/02/national/state-to-spend-over-%C2%A51-trillion-of-taxpayer-money-for-fukushima-decontamination-work/#.UnVOY1OwT9k>

Kyodo

In a major policy shift, the government will use more than ¥1 trillion in public funds to clean up contaminated areas around the Fukushima No. 1 plant, according to sources[....]

Taxpayer money yes but on certain conditions

EDITORIAL: No-nukes road map needed before taxpayers made to pay for cleaning up TEPCO's mess

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201311020038>

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party has thrashed out plans to deal with the consequences of the Fukushima nuclear disaster and take care of affected areas, but many questions remain unanswered.

The most important feature of the LDP proposal calls for using money in state coffers to finance future decontamination work and the construction of interim storage facilities for contaminated soil and other radioactive materials.

The Abe administration is set to take responsibility for meeting this formidable challenge.

DON'T USE TAXPAYER MONEY TO BAIL OUT TEPCO

In our editorials, we have consistently pointed out that Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, cannot be expected to fully bear the costs of cleaning up the mess. Public funds will have to be used.

But the government's financial commitment is not sufficient to ensure that the work to decommission the reactors at the plant will go smoothly. We cannot be optimistic, especially considering how the government has been responding to the leaks of contaminated water at the plant on an ad hoc basis.

The government should unveil, as soon as possible, a clear and convincing road map toward phasing out nuclear power generation, showing details about systems and procedures for decommissioning all nuclear reactors in Japan. This is vital for making sure that taxpayer money will not be used simply for bailing out TEPCO.

Under the LDP's proposals, TEPCO will pay for the cost of decontamination work that has been done so far, estimated at between 1.3 trillion yen (\$13.2 billion) and 1.5 trillion yen. The government will bear the cost of future decontamination work. The utility has also agreed to use its own money to pay compensation to victims.

The Fukushima meltdowns were a man-made disaster. The primary blame should be placed on TEPCO, which failed to implement the appropriate safety investments to make the plant less vulnerable to natural disasters. From this point of view, there is a compelling case for requiring the utility to bear all the costs of dealing with the consequences of the accident triggered by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

But the amount needed to pay compensation, decontaminate polluted areas and decommission the reactors is simply too huge--more than 10 trillion yen according to one estimate--for a single company to cover. If TEPCO is required to pick up the entire tab, the utility could be tempted to take a reckless

approach to its business operations in a bid to secure profits. By that, we mean that it must not cut corners on the issue of paying adequate compensation to victims and making the necessary capital investment for stable electricity supply.

TEPCO recently reported its first half-year profit since the accident flared. But the black ink figure is a product of accounting gimmicks to prevent compensation expenses from depressing the bottom line. The company also went to considerable lengths to put off booking repair expenses. The earnings results were engineered through creative accounting, so to speak.

TEPCO is eager to restart the idled reactors at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture, even though it is still struggling with the Fukushima cleanup. That is because it is under strong pressure to notch up profits.

If TEPCO bears all the cleanup costs, the money will have to come from higher electricity charges imposed on consumers in the Tokyo metropolitan area, which the utility serves.

The government is also partly responsible for the Fukushima accident because it has promoted nuclear power generation as a national policy and failed to tighten lax nuclear safety regulations.

For these reasons, we have been calling on the government to use tax money to deal with the consequences of the nuclear disaster.

LAY OUT A NUCLEAR-FREE FUTURE

But there are certain conditions that must be met before using the tax money.

For one thing, it must be made clear that TEPCO is effectively bankrupt. That is the only way to minimize the financial burden on taxpayers.

Under current law, there are some potential problems with TEPCO filing for bankruptcy, which requires that priority be placed on paying back the huge amount of debt the company owes to investors who bought its corporate bonds. That means financial relief to victims could be put on the back burner.

The overall cost of decontamination is estimated to be around 5 trillion yen. Any plan to put a financial burden of trillions of yen on taxpayers will not win public support unless TEPCO stakeholders, especially its creditor banks, are held strictly accountable for the problem.

The most important condition for using taxpayer money to sort out the situation, however, is that the government should take responsibility and announce a plan to wean the nation from its dependency on nuclear power.

The government must not be allowed to permit the restart of one offline reactor after another after establishing a precedent for tax financing of part of the cost of dealing with the aftermath of the nuclear accident.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe himself has pledged to reduce Japan's dependence on nuclear power generation.

The government should start the process by announcing that older reactors and those that are unable to pass the safety inspections by the Nuclear Regulation Authority will be decommissioned as quickly as possible. The government should also promise not to permit the construction of any new nuclear power plant or the reconstruction of a reactor within an existing plant.

CREATE EFFECTIVE SYSTEM FOR DECOMMISSIONING REACTORS

The government should also pull the plug on the long-standing program to establish a nuclear fuel recycling system and scrap the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor and the Rokkasho fuel reprocessing plant in Aomori Prefecture. That would free up the budgets for these projects as well as reserves set aside by electric utilities for them and allow the money to be used to finance measures to be taken at the Fukushima plant.

After that, the government should swiftly work out specific plans to build facilities for the final disposal of radioactive waste, and deal with the stockpiles of plutonium stored both in and outside Japan.

Another urgent task is the establishment of a dependable system to decommission reactors. The LDP's proposals offer no decisive plan for decommissioning the reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 plant and tackling the problem of radioactive water, although the party mentioned some proposed ideas. These included setting up a special unit for these tasks within TEPCO, spinning off such a unit from the utility and turning the company into an independent administrative agency.

It is clearly necessary to consider creating an independent entity responsible for decommissioning reactors for all nuclear plant operators, including TEPCO. At the very least, the current situation in which TEPCO is seeking to restart the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant while grappling with the Fukushima cleanup must not be allowed to continue.

Trying to bring the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant back online to ease the financial burden on the public would be putting the cart before the horse.

Another priority task is to secure a safe working environment for workers at the Fukushima plant. With TEPCO's ability to perform the necessary tasks on its own in doubt, the government should take responsibility for protecting the health and welfare of Fukushima workers and establish a system to provide necessary human and other resources for the tasks that need to be carried out at the plant.

There will be no true improvement in the situation if the government decides to dip into state coffers to cover the costs without making serious efforts to solve all these challenges

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Japanese taxpayers are completely unwilling to pay for cleaning up TEPCO's mess.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Nov. 2

Increase Gov't involvement

November 4, 2013

Govt. to be more involved in Fukushima cleanup

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131104_18.html

The Japanese government plans to increase its involvement in recovery efforts from the Fukushima nuclear accident. Efforts include financing work to remove radioactive material from soil and decommission reactors at the Fukushima plant.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said in a speech in Tokyo on Monday that it's high time to review the policy for recovery efforts.

Suga said the previous government, led by the Democratic Party, chose to have Tokyo Electric Power Company respond to the accident on its own, even though the government could have taken charge of some of the work.

Suga said the government will coordinate its policy with proposals from the main governing Liberal Democratic Party.

An LDP taskforce came up with proposals last week, suggesting that after current decontamination plans are carried out, the government could finance further cleanup efforts as a public works project.

It also called for a greater government role in decommissioning damaged reactors, building and managing

facilities for storing soil removed in the decontamination process, and addressing the problem of tainted water leaks.

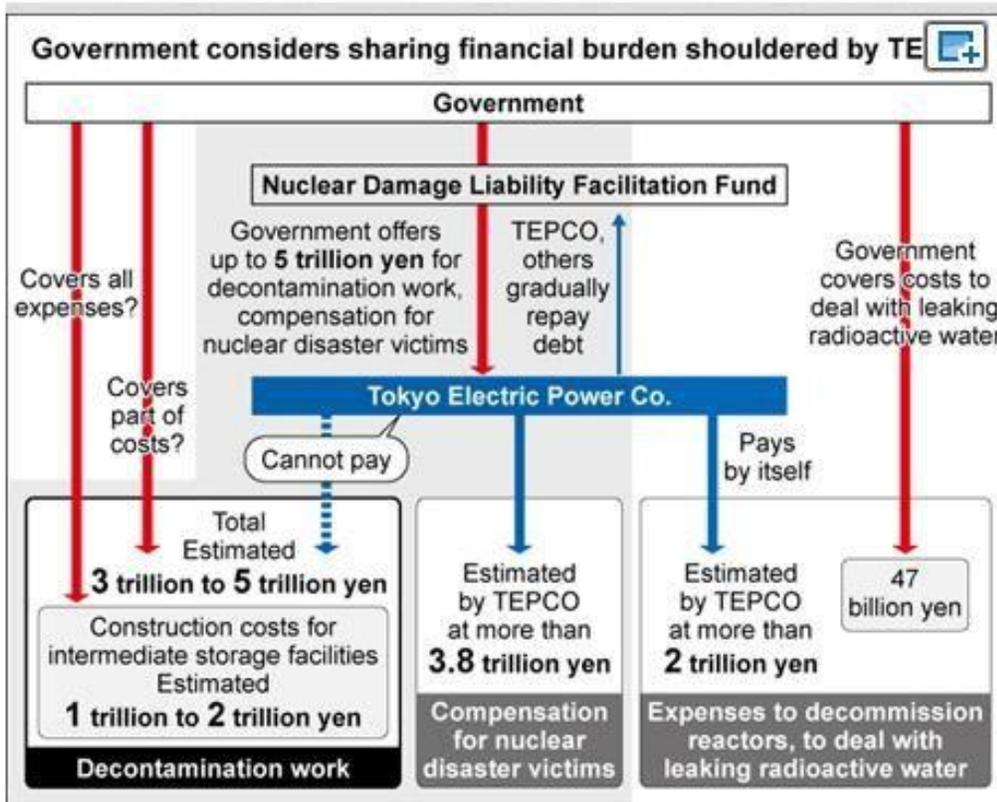
On Friday, Finance Minister Taro Aso said he respects and will carefully study the proposal

More money for TEPCO

November 5, 2013

Government considers additional funds for Fukushima measures, blames DPJ

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201311050066>



THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The government is considering shouldering a larger financial burden in dealing with the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant accident, a mess the top government spokesman blamed on the previous administration.

The Abe administration has apparently decided that Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the plant, cannot afford to cover all the costs related to the nuclear disaster that started in March 2011.

Based on a proposal that the ruling Liberal Democratic Party will submit to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga indicated the government would bear part of the costs for future decontamination work around the plant and to build intermediate storage facilities for radioactive debris.

The government is also expected to provide funds for decommissioning the plant's reactors and dealing with the radioactive water leaks that continue to plague work around the site.

Suga also said the government plans to review related laws on nuclear damage compensation and the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund during the regular Diet session next year.

He said the ongoing problems related to the Fukushima disaster stem from a decision by the Democratic Party of Japan-led government.

"The previous administration wrongly took a course of having TEPCO (deal with the accident) without the involvement of the government," Suga said in a speech in Tokyo on Nov. 4. "It's time to review the way."

He said the government could have been involved in certain things to alleviate the damage.

The DPJ-led government last year put the utility under virtual state control and provided loans to TEPCO via the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund. The funds are intended to pay compensation to nuclear disaster victims as well as expenses for decontamination work in the surrounding communities.

More than 10 trillion yen (\$101 billion) is needed to deal with all of the Fukushima plant problems, according to estimates. But the ceiling of government loans to TEPCO under the framework is 5 trillion yen.

Under the LDP's proposal, TEPCO will have to pay for the estimated 2 trillion yen in costs for already planned decontamination work.

The Abe administration will review the division of roles between the government and the utility based on the LDP's proposal.

But criticism remains in both the ruling and opposition camps because the current plan means taxpayer money will be used without seeking the responsibility of TEPCO's shareholders and creditor banks.

One LDP member said, "To gain the support of taxpayers, our priority should be to lead TEPCO into bankruptcy to take responsibility for the accident."

New report by TEPCO on the causes of the nuclear disaster

TEPCO preparing new report on Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131106_27.html

The head of Tokyo Electric Power Company says the utility is preparing a new report on what caused the crisis at its Fukushima plant.

The step is seen as part of the company's efforts to gain understanding for restarting 2 reactors in Niigata Prefecture, central Japan.

TEPCO President Naomi Hirose told a Lower House panel on Wednesday that the company plans to shortly release its findings on Fukushima.

Hirose said TEPCO has continued to examine the cause of the March 2011 disaster through an expert panel. Members include US and British nuclear power experts.

The new report follows one released in June 2012 on the results of the company's own investigations. But the first report left many questions unanswered.

Hirose said TEPCO will also present the report to Niigata Prefecture for review.

A prefectural technical panel is examining safety features of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, where the utility hopes to restart 2 reactors.

TEPCO apparently decided a further probe into Fukushima was needed to gain the prefecture's approval.

China demands "accurate" information on Fukushima crisis

November 6, 2013

China at U.N. demands 'accurate' nuclear account from Japan

AFP-JJI

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/11/06/national/china-at-u-n-demands-accurate-nuclear-account-from-japan/#.UnoezSewT9l>

UNITED NATIONS – China is demanding that Japan provide “accurate” information on how it is handling new fallout from the Fukushima nuclear disaster [...]

UN nuclear inspectors in Japan as China demands openness

IAEA has recommended Japan to establish an effective plan and mechanisms for the long-term management of contaminated water

http://www.business-standard.com/article/international/un-nuclear-inspectors-in-japan-as-china-demands-openness-113110600257_1.html

Inspectors from the UN's nuclear watchdog arrived in Tokyo today to monitor marine pollution near Fukushima as China demanded Japan provide "accurate" information on how it is handling the crisis.

China told the UN General Assembly it was worried about radioactive water leaks from the Japanese plant, which went into meltdown after being hit by a tsunami in March 2011.

"China follows closely the countermeasures to be adopted by Japan," China's deputy UN ambassador Wang Min told a debate on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

"We urge the Japanese side to spare no effort in minimising the subsequent impact of the accident and provide timely, comprehensive and accurate information to the international community," Wang added.

China and Japan have a series of bilateral disputes, and the new comments are certain to annoy the Japanese government, which is already under major domestic pressure over Fukushima, diplomats in New York said.

Wang said the 2011 disaster had "sounded the alarm bell for nuclear safety" even though China "firmly" supports the use of nuclear power.

South Korea also said it was worried about the radioactive leaks but gave more support to Japan.

Fukushima "continues to be a source of serious concern, especially to adjacent countries, because of the spillage of contaminated water into the sea," said South Korea's deputy UN ambassador Sul Kyung-Hoon.

South Korea "appreciates the Japanese government's efforts to share relevant information with the international community," Sul added, while calling on the IAEA to strengthen assistance to Japan.

IAEA director general Yukiya Amano said the UN atomic watchdog "has recommended that Japan establish an effective plan and mechanisms for the long-term management of contaminated water.

"The announcement by the Japanese government of a basic policy for addressing this issue was an important step forward," Amano added.

The first batch of IAEA experts arrived in Japan today at the invitation of the Japanese government as it looks to bolster its credibility.

The two researchers from the Environment Laboratories in Monaco are planning to analyse sea water near Fukushima, the agency said.

NHK : Removing Spent Fuel (video)

November 6, 2013

No.4 reactor pool shown to media

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131106_35.html

The operator of the Fukushima Daiichi plant has shown the media the pool for nuclear fuel units at the No.4 reactor. Work to remove the units will begin this month.

The upper part of the No.4 reactor building was badly damaged in March 2011 just after the massive earthquake.

The pool on the upper floor of the building contains 1,533 units, the largest single set in a pool at the plant. The number includes 1,331 spent fuel units still emitting high radiation. The Tokyo Electric Power Company plans to move them all to a different location.

On Wednesday, TEPCO officials allowed the media to see the pool.

Most of the debris that filled the 10-meter-square pool after the explosion has been removed.

Workers will use a crane to transfer the units to a container designed to block radiation. It will be filled with 22 units before being lowered to the ground and transported to a storage facility.

TEPCO plans to remove all the units by the end of next year.

The work is said to be the first milestone in a decommissioning project that's estimated to take 40 years.

See video : Removing spent fuel <http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/newsline/201311062009.html>

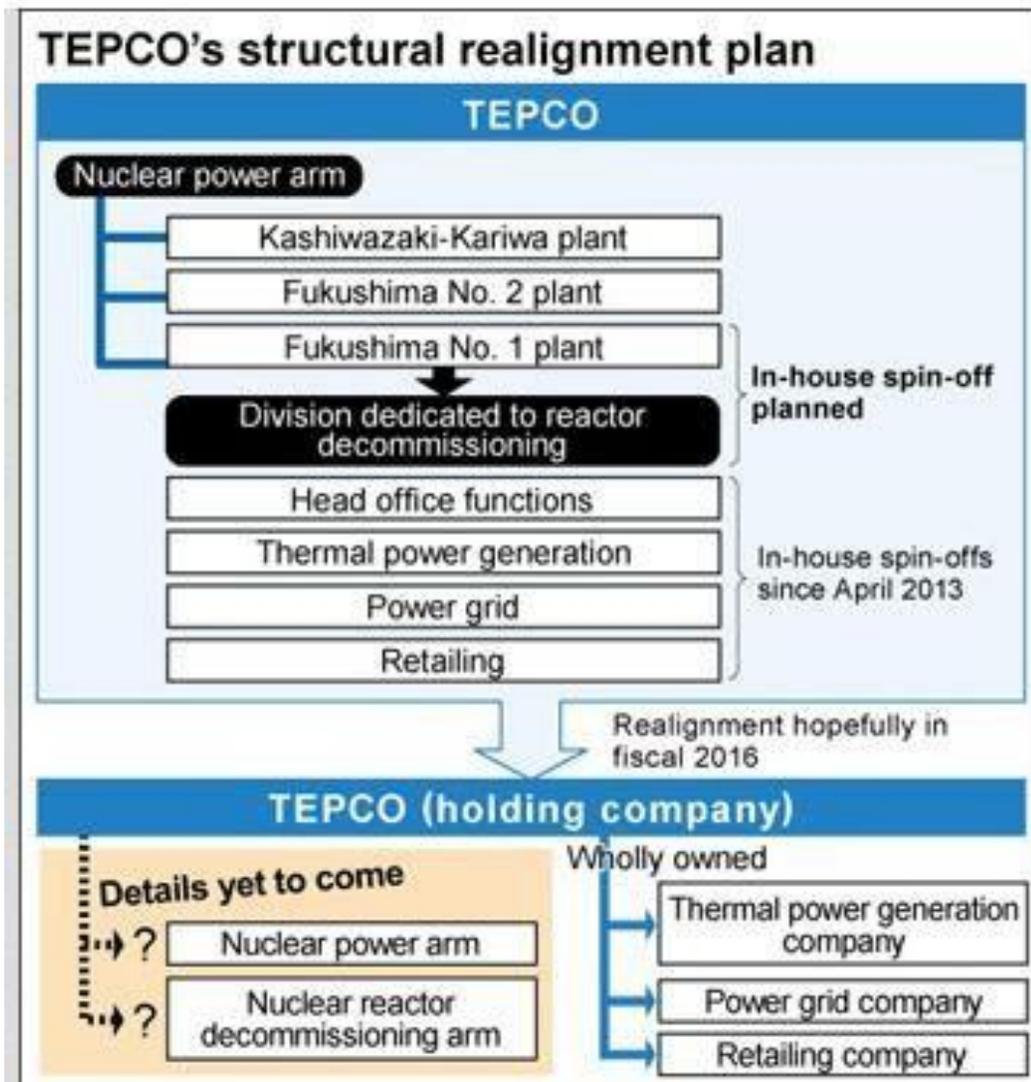
Nuclear Watch.

TEPCO planning holding company

November 9, 2013

TEPCO to introduce holding company structure in fiscal 2016

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201311090056



THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tokyo Electric Power Co. plans to introduce a holding company structure to enhance efficiency, help new entrants to the power industry and quell criticism over its handling of the Fukushima nuclear crisis, sources said.

TEPCO's plan, which could take effect as early as fiscal 2016, would put separate companies in charge of thermal power generation, the power grid and retailing under the umbrella of a holding company.

The realignment could help to push through government plans to separate power generation and transmission operations at electricity companies that currently hold virtual regional monopolies. Spin-offs of power transmission and distribution functions would facilitate the use of the power grid by new companies to the market.

The government hopes to realize these changes from fiscal 2018 to 2020 as a key component of power industry reforms.

TEPCO also plans to eliminate its 10 branch offices to streamline the current three-tier hierarchy comprising a head office, branch offices and service centers, the sources said.

Sections at the head office, including the corporate affairs, accounting and human resources departments, will be integrated and may be assigned to take orders from other companies, the sources said.

Further cost cuts will be pursued by keeping meticulous records of fuel and other expenses on a unit-by-unit basis at TEPCO's power stations.

TEPCO is rushing to realign itself because the radioactive water crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant has fueled calls for an overhaul of the utility's corporate structure.

Criticism is intensifying that TEPCO is banking on a government bailout. The government and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party are discussing plans to use public funds to shoulder part of the post-disaster cleanup expenses at and around the Fukushima nuclear plant.

The utility apparently hopes to win public understanding for receiving taxpayer money by touting its willingness to cooperate in power industry reforms.

TEPCO first announced plans to introduce a holding company structure in November 2012. The utility spun off three of its arms into financially autonomous "in-house companies" in April. It hopes to introduce the new corporate structure once the Electricity Business Law is amended next year at the earliest, the sources said.

An LDP panel recommended the use of government money to shoulder part of the enormous costs for the Fukushima cleanup, including decontamination and building intermediate storage facilities for radioactive debris. It also proposed that TEPCO's arm in charge of decommissioning nuclear reactors and dealing with radioactive water leaks be spun off either into an in-house company, separate company or government-affiliated institution.

For now, TEPCO plans to spin off its nuclear reactor decommissioning operations only into a dedicated in-house company.

“I doubt that a pared-down company would be able to keep doing such demanding work for the coming four decades,” TEPCO President Naomi Hirose said about the decommissioning process.

However, TEPCO has yet to decide what to do with its nuclear power arm and nuclear reactor decommissioning arm under the proposed holding company structure.

Separating the nuclear reactor decommissioning arm could lead to an easier government injection of public funds and a more radical overhaul of TEPCO’s corporate structure.

(This article was written by Takashi Ebuchi and Mari Fujisaki.)

November 8, 2013

TEPCO plans holding company system amid wariness from financial institutions

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131108p2a00m0na016000c.html>

To cut costs and boost its competitive edge, the stricken Fukushima nuclear plant's operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) has begun deliberations toward establishing a holding company system as early as fiscal 2016.

Subsidiary companies dedicated to fuel and thermal power generation, power distribution and transmission, and retail, respectively, will be established under the holding company, in alignment with plans to separate power production from power distribution and transmission as part of electricity system reforms.

The plans, to which financial institutions that have loaned funds to TEPCO have expressed caution, will be incorporated into the company's comprehensive special business plan set to be revised before the end of the year.

In preparation for the move, in April, TEPCO introduced an in-house company system to foster further independent decision-making by reorganizing the company into three separate divisions and an additional section dedicated to human resources and other head office functions.

Under the new proposed plan, the three divisions will become three separate subsidiaries under the umbrella of the head office section, which will become the holding company. The fuel and thermal power generation company will sell electricity to businesses that will buy it for high prices. Meanwhile, the retail

subsidiary will buy from power generation firms that offer low prices. Such measures carry the possibility of further streamlining TEPCO operations. The fate of a division dedicated to nuclear reactors and decommissioning will be deliberated at a later time.

Because the Electricity Business Act does not permit major utilities to split off into separate companies, TEPCO must wait for the passage and implementation of an electricity business law amendment in the ordinary session of the Diet next year. This would push back the company spin-offs to fiscal 2016 or 2017. If the plan pans out, it will precede the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry's plan to carry out the division of power generation and distribution between fiscal 2018 and 2020.

Even if TEPCO does separate its power generation functions from its power distribution and transmission functions, if they both remain under the umbrella of a TEPCO holding company, there is no guarantee that complete neutrality of the distribution and transmission subsidiary will be maintained. Financial institutions, in addition, are wary of TEPCO's plans to establish a holding company because of the chance that the treatment of collateral for loans to the company will change.

"We still can't predict if the loans will be repaid," said one executive of a financial firm.

There also remains the possibility that demands to change the company's reorganization method and timing will arise.

What's a few million yen between friends?

November 9, 2013

Experts commissioned by nuclear watchdog fail to report ¥40 million in funding

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/11/09/national/experts-commissioned-by-nuclear-watchdog-fail-to-report-%C2%A540-million-in-funding/#.Un9L2yewT9k>

JJI

At least 10 university experts commissioned by the Nuclear Regulation Authority to discuss safety rules failed to report over ¥40 million they received in donations and research funding from the atomic energy industry, sources said Saturday.

They received the undeclared money from power companies, nuclear plant makers and other related entities and had not declared this total as of late October, according to documents reviewed by Jiji Press based on the information disclosure law.

The NRA commissions experts to discuss nuclear safety standards and other regulations, and asks them to disclose the amount of money provided to them since fiscal 2009. The industry watchdog does not verify reports of such funds.

Of the experts who failed to report part of the funding they received, five took part in discussions about new safety measures, two participated in talks on regulatory systems and another two attended meetings on the Fukushima disaster.

According to materials provided by universities to which they belong, Yutaka Abe, a professor at the University of Tsukuba, had the highest unreported amount, at around ¥13.14 million.

That sum consisted of ¥2 million in donations from Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd., ¥3 million in research funding from Tokyo Electric Power Co. and ¥8.15 million in donations and research funding from JFE Engineering Corp., which makes coolant water storage facilities for nuclear plants.

Yosuke Katsumura, a professor at the University of Tokyo who was a member of a panel on seawater inflows for reactor 5 of Chubu Electric Power Co.'s Hamaoka plant, ranked second with ¥9.98 million.

The amount he received comprised ¥700,000 in donations from Hitachi Ltd., ¥3 million in research funding from Mitsubishi Heavy and ¥6.28 million in similar funding from the Central Research Institute of Electric Power Industry, a body set up by power companies.

In an interview, Abe said, "I think I reported only what fell under the categories set by the regulation authority." Katsumura claimed he failed to report some of the funding because it slipped his mind.

More money from Gov't for the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund (NDF)

November 9, 2013

Nuke crisis compensation fund to get capital boost, expanded responsibilities

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131109p2a00m0na009000c.html>

The government is planning to inject as much as 5 trillion yen in additional capital into the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund (NDF) and transforming the compensation body into a funding portal for a broad array of nuclear crisis-related costs, it was learned on Nov. 8.

Under the proposal, designed to increase the monies available for compensation and decontamination included in an "accelerated Fukushima disaster recovery" plan now under consideration by the government and ruling parties, the maximum public funding available to the NDF would jump from the present 5 trillion yen to 8-10 trillion yen.

Using 5 trillion yen worth of interest-free loans that the government issued to the NDF, the fund is currently loaning funds to Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), primarily as a capital base to pay disaster compensation. The NDF is supposed to ask the government to exchange bonds for cash to extend loans to TEPCO.

Both compensation payments and decontamination costs, however, are now expected to cost significantly more than had originally been estimated, and the government is set to allow TEPCO to broaden its use of NDF loans to cover cleanup and other disaster-related costs. In turn, the government plans to issue more interest-free bonds to the NDF to bring up its funding.

The government is furthermore considering including expanded compensation for Fukushima residents affected by the nuclear crisis in the accelerated recovery bill. The increase would be intended to guarantee sufficient support funding for both residents moving quickly back into areas evacuated in the wake of the plant meltdowns, and the relocation costs of residents of badly contaminated "difficult to return" areas. These compensation payments were originally expected to total some 3.8 trillion yen, but many expect that figure to rise to 5-6 trillion yen.

The government also plans to provide the estimated 2 trillion yen-plus for decontamination via the NDF. The government is covering the cleanup costs for the time being and will demand to be reimbursed by TEPCO later -- a setup designed to prevent the near-term concentration of the decontamination costs from plunging the utility in a state of capital deficit.

Related to the cleanup operations, the government is also considering channeling funds through the NDF to support creating mid-term storage sites for contaminated soil. Building the sites is expected to cost about 1 trillion yen, which would be drawn from proceeds of an increased "new power source development" tax levied on electricity bills.

Collecting the funds within a short period, however, could cause power bills to spike, prompting the move to use NDF capital to cover disposal site construction in the short-term. The funds would then be recovered over many years from power source development tax receipts.

All this extra capital for the NDF will require the government to issue 3-5 trillion yen more in interest-free bonds to the NDF, though this figure will remain uncertain as long as the total cost of decontamination is unknown. A concrete estimate of the cleanup costs is likely to be long in coming, and the government is considering boosting debt issuances in stages as required.

Broadly speaking, the nuclear disaster response policy funnels funds to TEPCO in the form of government loans via the NDF, which the government would then recover over the long-term -- ultimately placing the burden of cleanup and recovery on TEPCO and the electric power industry as a whole. In concrete terms, the NDF will repay the debts to the government using general contributions paid by the 11 nuclear power producers in Japan and special contributions extended by TEPCO.

Another 3 trillion yen for the NDF to provide bonds to TEPCO (2)

November 11, 2013

State considers loaning TEPCO additional 3 trillion yen

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/economy/business/AJ201311110038>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The government is weighing additional loans of 3 trillion yen (\$30.2 billion) to the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, sources said.

The excess funds would be intended to enable Tokyo Electric Power Co. to pay compensation to victims of the 2011 nuclear disaster and complete decontamination work around the facility quickly.

At present, the framework for government loans to TEPCO, as previously set by the Democratic Party of Japan-led government, limits loans to 5 trillion yen. TEPCO, along with other utilities, is obliged to repay the loans over time.

Under the existing system, the government first issues government bonds of 5 trillion yen. Then, the government-affiliated Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund gradually cashes the bonds to provide funds to TEPCO. Electric power companies, including TEPCO, have up to 30 years to pay off the debt.

As part of efforts to support the plant operator financially, the ruling coalition has recommended to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe that TEPCO cover the estimated 2 trillion yen in costs for already planned decontamination work. At the same time, it called on the government to bear expenses of an estimated 1 trillion yen to build intermediate storage facilities for radioactive debris, as well as part of the costs for future decontamination work.

If the proposal is accepted, the financial burden TEPCO has to shoulder will be eased drastically.

However, the utility has already spent 3.8 trillion of the 5 trillion yen on compensation for nuclear disaster victims.

Because the government is currently considering raising the amount of indemnity for those who will likely be unable to return home over their lifetime, the entire loan of 5 trillion yen almost certainly will be swallowed up in compensation payments.

In addition, as costs for decontamination work in the surrounding communities are estimated at between 3 trillion yen and 5 trillion yen, the government has decided that it is impossible for TEPCO to cover all the expenses related to the nuclear disaster under the current framework.

At issue now is how TEPCO and other electric power companies will repay the additional 3 trillion yen.

If the utilities try to pay off the loans over a short period, they will have to raise electricity rates significantly. Meanwhile, if they extend the payback period, the amount of interest payment, paid for with taxpayers' money, will rise.

Thus, the government will inevitably face a backlash from the electric power industry, which will probably make it difficult to provide additional loans quickly.

Secrecy & nuclear security

November 12, 2013

EDITORIAL: Secrecy supported nuclear safety myth

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201311120026>

In 1997, the government produced a secret document describing measures to be taken to protect nuclear power plants from terrorist attacks.

It listed security measures, such as the installation of intrusion detection sensors, as well as steps that would be taken by the Self-Defense Forces, police and the Maritime Safety Agency, now called Japan Coast Guard.

The Asahi Shimbun later obtained a copy of the confidential document and reported on its content in September 2011.

If a current version of the document with the same content exists, would it be designated as a “specific secret” for protection under the proposed new state secrets legislation?

One key question with regard to continuing Diet debate on the bill to protect state secrets is how information concerning nuclear power plants should be treated.

As an example of what kind of information concerning nuclear safety would be designated as a state secret under the envisioned law, Masako Mori, minister in charge of the bill, cited “the situation of the implementation of security measures by police to protect nuclear plants.”

But the scope of information that would be withheld is not clear.

Mori also said the design drawings of nuclear power plants would not be subject to confidentiality. Then, how about other related information? A wide range of information concerning nuclear safety could be designated as confidential information.

Independent experts would be involved in the development of the criteria for designating information as a specific secret to be protected. But they would not have the power to check the appropriateness of individual cases of designation.

It is understandable that certain pieces of information concerning safeguard measures at nuclear plants would be designated as secrets. But once the law is enforced, it would be extremely difficult for any third party, including the Diet and courts, to examine and judge the legitimacy of the designation.

Under the proposed law, bureaucrats would be effectively allowed to decide what information should be designated as a state secret. We fear that such decisions could be made in an arbitrary manner.

Let us think about one case in point.

In 1984, the Foreign Ministry secretly made estimates of casualties that could result from an attack against a nuclear power plant. The simulations showed that the number of acute deaths could reach up to 18,000 unless mass emergency evacuation was carried out.

The ministry, however, classified the estimates as “for internal use only” because of concerns about the impact of the information on the anti-nuclear movement.

The simulations covered cases of a so-called station blackout--the total loss of power sources for a nuclear plant--due to the destruction of power transmission lines and the electric supply system within a given plant. That’s the situation that developed at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami hit on March 11, 2011.

If the results of the ministry’s estimation had been published, more effective safety measures might have been taken at the Fukushima plant. But the information was actually classified as confidential and not shared even within the government.

As a result, a serious nuclear security flaw was overlooked. The “safety myth” concerning nuclear power generation was apparently supported by the bureaucratic penchant for secrecy and the inaction of politicians who allowed the problem to remain untouched for so long.

It was not until September 2011, six months after the disaster unfolded at the Fukushima plant, that an expert panel of the government’s Atomic Energy Commission published a report on measures for greater nuclear security, such as steps to enhance protection against terrorist attacks on nuclear power plants. It was the first report from the expert group in three decades or so.

The government has a history of covering up vital information and postponing crucial decisions. Things will only become worse if the proposed legislation is enacted.

Will protecting “specific secrets” really make this nation safer? We should re-examine this question thoroughly.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Nov. 12

Three assemblies - previously damaged - cannot be transported by cask

Source : Reuters

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/14/japan-fukushima-removal-idUSL4N0IZ0TR20131114>

Some spent fuel rods at Fukushima were damaged before 2011 disaster

By Aaron Sheldrick

TOKYO Thu Nov 14, 2013 6:20am EST

Nov 14 (Reuters) - Three of the spent fuel assemblies due to be carefully plucked from the crippled Japanese nuclear plant at Fukushima in a hazardous year-long operation were damaged even before the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that knocked out the facility.

The plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co, or Tepco, said the damaged assemblies - 4.5 metre high racks containing 50-70 thin rods of highly irradiated used fuel - can't be removed from Fukushima's Reactor No. 4 using the large cask assigned to taking out more than 1,500 of the assemblies.

One of the assemblies was damaged as far back as 1982, when it was mishandled during a transfer, and is bent out of shape, Tepco said in a brief note at the bottom of an 11-page information sheet in August.

In a statement from April 2010, Tepco said it found **two other spent fuel racks in the reactor's cooling pool had what appeared to be wire trapped in them. Rods in those assemblies have pin-hole cracks and are leaking low-level radioactive gases,** Tepco spokesman Yoshikazu Nagai told Reuters on Thursday.

The existence of the damaged racks, reported in a Fukushima regional newspaper on Wednesday, came to light as Tepco prepares to begin decommissioning the plant by removing all the spent fuel assemblies from Reactor No. 4.

"The three fuel assemblies ... cannot be transported by cask," Tepco spokeswoman Mayumi Yoshida said in an emailed response to queries on Thursday, referring to the large steel chamber that will be used to shift the fuel assemblies from the pool high up in the damaged reactor building to safe storage.

"We are currently reviewing how to transport these fuel assemblies to the common spent fuel pool," she said.

Tepco is due within days to begin removing 400 tonnes of the dangerous spent fuel in a hugely delicate and unprecedented operation fraught with risk. Each assembly contains radiation equivalent to around 10 times that of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945.

Having to deal with the damaged assemblies is likely to make that task more difficult and could jeopardise a 12-month timeframe to complete the removal that many have already called ambitious.

RISKY, COMPLEX OPERATION

Three reactors suffered core meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi plant north of Tokyo after the March 2011 disaster that triggered explosions and forced the evacuation of 160,000 people from nearby towns and villages.

Tepco, which has floundered in trying to bring the plant under control in the two and a half years since the disaster, is now moving to full decommissioning at the six-reactor facility.

The most urgent task is to remove the fuel assemblies from the unstable Reactor No. 4, which due to their height - about 18 metres above ground level - are more vulnerable to any new earthquake. The operation is seen as a test of Tepco's ability to move ahead with decommissioning the whole facility - a task likely to take decades and cost tens of billions of dollars.

Lake Barrett, a former U.S. nuclear regulator who is advising Tepco, visited the Fukushima site on Wednesday and endorsed preparations for the removal of the assemblies.

"While removal of the fuel is usually a routine procedure in operating a power plant, the damage to the reactor building has made the job more complex," he said, adding he was "genuinely impressed by the thoroughness of the effort and Tepco's contingency planning."

Tepeco has said the assembly removal process will begin around mid-November, but has not given an exact date, citing what it says are security reasons.

The assemblies must first be lifted from their storage frames in the pool and individually placed in a steel cask - kept all the while under water to prevent overheating. The cask, weighing around 90 tonnes when filled, will then be hoisted by crane from the pool, lowered to ground level and transported by trailer to a common storage pool about 100 metres away.

TEPCO: Cutting jobs to cut costs

November 17, 2013

TEPCO considering early retirement plan to cut costs

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201311170026>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tokyo Electric Power Co. plans to cut costs by offering early retirement packages for up to 1,000 employees, but some executives say a reduction in manpower could exacerbate the problems the utility faces.

TEPCO is now discussing whether to include the early retirement program in its rebuilding plan that will be revised before the end of the year, sources said.

One purpose of the proposed cost-cutting measure is to quell criticism against TEPCO--and calls for its bankruptcy--as the government moves toward using public funds to help the utility deal with the crisis at its stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The company is thinking of an early retirement program that would cover several hundred to about 1,000 employees, but the terms for those who agree to retire early have not been settled, sources said. If implemented, TEPCO will offer the package in the first half of the next fiscal year after reaching an agreement with the company labor union.

However, some TEPCO officials are hesitant about the plan, citing the enormous difficulties in decommissioning the reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 plant and ending the persistent problem of radioactive water leaks at the site.

“We are going ahead with compensation matters and power generation with the minimum number of workers so now is not the right time to be reducing the work force,” one TEPCO executive said.

The utility would also have to come up with additional funds to finance the early retirement program, which would be TEPCO’s first since the Fukushima nuclear accident started in March 2011.

As of March this year, TEPCO had about 37,000 employees, a decrease of about 2,400 from April 2011. The decline is due to a sharp increase in the number of workers who have left the company and the utility’s restrictions on new hires.

Under its current rebuilding plan, TEPCO set a goal of reducing its work force to 36,000 by the end of the current fiscal year. That target has nearly been reached, but implementing an early retirement program could show the public that it is serious about downsizing.

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party and coalition partner New Komeito have submitted a plan for the government to use public funds to cover some of the costs of decontaminating areas polluted by radiation.

The central government has already decided to use 47 billion yen (\$469 million) in public funds to build an underground wall of frozen soil to prevent groundwater from entering the Fukushima plant site and mixing with contaminated water.

These plans have sparked criticism that taxpayer money is being used to prop up TEPCO. Some members of the ruling and opposition parties have even called for the utility to undergo bankruptcy proceedings.

TEPCO’s revised rebuilding plan also includes: splitting off a separate company to handle the decommissioning of reactors and contaminated water problem; creating a holding company in fiscal 2016 or later; and eliminating all 10 branch offices of the company.

(This article was written by Takashi Ebuchi and Mari Fujisaki.)

November 16, 2013

Tepco aiming to cut 1,000 jobs via voluntary redundancy

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/11/16/national/tepcos-aiming-to-cut-1000-jobs-via-voluntary-redundancy/#.UoeUYOIo3BI>

JJI

Tokyo Electric Power Co. is looking to shed 1,000 jobs through a voluntary redundancy program to boost efficiency and improve earnings, sources revealed Saturday.

Aiming to invite applications by the autumn of 2014, Tepco will shortly propose the idea to its labor union, the sources said. It would be the first program of its kind implemented by the utility.

The operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power station will include the redundancy program in its comprehensive business plan to be revised possibly by the end of the year, according to the sources.

Tepco's existing business plan, which was approved by the government in May 2012, calls for slashing 3,600 jobs in its parent group to reduce the workforce to 36,000 by the end of March. **The utility is believed to have almost achieved this target by curbing employment of new graduates.**

But the company still needs to show it is stepping up streamlining efforts to gain financial support from the government for decontamination of areas polluted by the wrecked reactors of the Fukushima No. 1 plant, the sources said. The facility suffered three core meltdowns in March 2011.

By further cutting fixed costs, Tepco also hopes to smooth the way for additional loans totalling some ¥500 billion, including for refinancing purposes, that it hopes to receive next month from various financial institutions, the sources said.

Under the revised business plan, Tepco will pledge to abolish all of its 10 branches and shift to a holding company structure as early as fiscal 2016. In addition, it is expected to show readiness to lower electricity rates if reactors at Tepco's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture are reactivated, the sources said.

November 15, 2013

Why TEPCO cannot accept the quake caused 3/11 disaster

November 17, 2013

Cracks in Tepco's 3/11 narrative

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/11/17/commentary/cracks-in-tepcos-311-narrative/#.UokjnSewT9k>

Sentaku Magazine

"While I was with Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Tepco), a question was raised internally as to whether or not the measuring pipe installed at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the diameter of which is about the same as that of a human thumb, can withstand an earthquake. But Tepco has yet to make clear

whether or not the March 2011 earthquake damaged that pipe,” says Toshio Kimura, a former Tepco plant engineer.

Kimura, 49, who served the company for 17 years from 1983 to 2000 and worked at Fukushima No. 1 for 12 years, is strongly of the view that pipes in the plant were damaged seriously by the quake before a subsequent tsunami struck the plant.

He thus casts doubt on Tepco’s position that the tsunami caused loss of all the power sources, thus leading to the disaster. He says, “An effective means of determining the true cause of the accident would have been to analyze recorded data related to transient phenomena — data that show what happened near the reactor cores. Even though more than two years have passed since the disaster, however, **Tepco has only released partial data.**”

“So I demanded that Tepco release the relevant data. It made public the data on Aug. 19 for the first time.” But it was found later that the data did not represent the whole data.

In September, Kimura prepared a report titled “Leakage from the piping in the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant caused by vibrations from the earthquake.”

The transient phenomena recorder records various measurements in a nuclear power plant at every one-hundredth of one second. It accumulates such data as a reactor’s output, pressure and temperature and coolant’s flowing volume. Analysis of these data makes it possible to accurately identify “process behaviors” or what is happening in an nuclear reactor.

Specifically the analysis clarifies the time sequences of a process like, for example, a pump having stopped first, causing a coolant flow to decline, then lowering the water level and raising the reactor core temperature.

For Kimura, Tepco’s failure to release these data for such a long time looked only too unnatural.

In analyzing the data, Kimura took special note of the fact that natural circulation of coolant stopped. Along with an isolation condenser, natural circulation of coolant constitutes the “lifeline” in case loss of all the power sources occurs. Even if a primary loop recirculation pump, which pumps coolant water into the reactor core, stops functioning due to loss of all the power sources, natural circulation of coolant is supposed to maintain 10 percent of normal core flow of coolant.

Analysis of the data showed, however, that immediately after the earthquake hit, about 30 percent of coolant inside the core started flowing backwards and that after the coolant flow returned to the normal

flow direction, the core flow fluctuated and eventually became less than zero. All these occurred before the nuclear power plant was struck by the tsunami.

Why is it that cooling by natural circulation of coolant became dysfunctional along with the isolation condenser right after the earthquake? Kimura believes that piping rupture was the very cause of the loss of these two “lifelines”

There are a couple of phenomena that seem to correspond to what Kimura believes happened. One is that a pump designed to draw up water from the bottom of the containment vessel seems to have been activated frequently, indicating that damage to piping caused coolant to leak and accumulate at the bottom of the vessel.

The other is that radioactive contamination was taking place at a much faster rate than was estimated by Tepco. A Tepco report said that the reactor water level reached the top of nuclear fuel approximately three hours after the earthquake, i.e., at around 5:46 p.m. (on March 11, 2011) and that radioactive vapor leakage from the containment vessel due to damage to the reactor core started afterward.

But the same report contained a contradictory statement that when a plant operator tried to enter into the reactor building at 5:19 p.m. on the same day, he had to give up because the dose of radioactivity was too high. This shows that the meltdown was taking place earlier than Tepco estimated. This corroborates Kimura’s inference that immediately after the earthquake, piping was damaged and coolant started leaking, thus rapidly lowering the reactor water level and igniting the meltdown.

Behind Tepco’s continued refusal to release all the data and to admit that the earthquake damaged the piping is a fear that serious doubts will arise about the safety of its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture, which it hopes to restart as soon as possible. It has been known that at the time of the 2007 Chuetsu offshore earthquake, damage to piping due to the quake caused a fire at the nuclear power plant.

Niigata Gov. Hirohiko Izumida played a leading role in remedying the situation at the time. Because of this experience, he strongly demanded that Tepco construct pipes related to venting radioactive vapor underground to make it quake-proof.

Since the governor accepted Tepco’s proposal to build pipes for the second venting equipment underground in addition to the first venting equipment, whose pipes are built on the ground level, mass media reported that restart of the nuclear power plant is certain. But this is wrong. Izumida explained that Tepco’s proposal does not constitute a request for restart. The truth is that the hurdle for restart has been raised. **The Niigata prefectural government has created a technical committee on nuclear plant**

safety. Among the subjects of discussion at the committee is “the impact of an earthquake on important equipment.”

If a theory that the earthquake damaged piping in the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant gains credibility during the discussions, Tepco will have to build underground pipes for the second venting equipment. This means that restart will be impossible until the completion of the quake-proof second venting equipment and that Tepco will have to push new measures to make the nuclear power plant quake-proof. Then financial institution may refuse to give new loans to Tepco or call on it to revise its management plan or resume discussions on resolution of Tepco. This is why Tepco will never accept the theory that the quake, not the tsunami, caused the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Discussions at Niigata Prefecture’s technical committee on nuclear plant safety will have great impact on restart of not only the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant but also other nuclear power plants in Japan. It likely will not be long before “lies” by Tepco are brought to light.

This is an abridged translation of an article from the November issue of Sentaku, a monthly magazine covering Japanese political, social and economic scenes.

More money from 3 megabanks for TEPCO

November 19, 2013

TEPCO to seek additional loans from megabanks

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201311190045>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tokyo Electric Power Co. is asking three megabanks to extend it additional loans above and beyond the 500 billion yen (\$5 billion) already scheduled in late December.

TEPCO and the government's Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund put in the request at some time up to Nov. 18, sources said.

The size of the loan will be finalized following further discussions. The additional funds are set to be included into the utility's rehabilitation program that will be reviewed in December.

The rehabilitation program already incorporates 1 trillion yen in loans.

The three megabanks--Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group, Mizuho Financial Group and Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group, along with the Development Bank of Japan--extended a total of 700 billion yen in loans in summer 2012.

The remaining 300 billion yen in new loans is scheduled to be dispersed next month along with 200 billion yen in refinancing.

The new request for loans from TEPCO is expected to be used to cover costs for increased thermal power production following the 2011 nuclear disaster, and for making investments in overseas projects.

However, because the megabanks already have a huge amount of outstanding loans to TEPCO, bank officials are expected to move cautiously in meeting the latest request to raise the loan figure.

No on-site leaders & cost-cutting (Interview with "Happy")

November 19, 2013

Insider: Fukushima work slows by lack of on-site supervision, cost-cutting

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201311190075>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

He goes by the name "Happy" on Twitter, and he has more than 87,000 followers on the social networking site eager to know what is going on inside the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Happy has been working at nuclear plants for nearly 20 years. In October, he had a book published titled "Fukushima Daiichi Genpatsu Shusoku Nikki" that documents 700 days at the Fukushima plant since the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

With the decades-long decommissioning of the reactors getting under way, Happy spoke with The Asahi Shimbun about the radioactive water leaks and other problems plaguing plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co., and working conditions at the crippled facility. Following are excerpts of that interview:

* * *

Question: TEPCO has started removing fuel from the storage pool for the No. 4 reactor. What do you think?

Answer: We have come all this way since the No. 4 reactor building was reduced to a wretched state (due to a hydrogen explosion). It is because of the workers who have put in strenuous efforts, despite being exposed to radiation.

Q: Why did you decide to tweet on conditions at the plant?

A: When the accident first occurred, media reports were not accurate and contained much speculation. I thought, "I must send out correct information as much as I can."

Q: What is behind the string of problems, such as the radioactive water leaks?

A: At the nuclear plant, we usually work in teams of five to 10. A team leader cannot stay at the site for a long time because his accumulated radiation dose is already high. For that reason, he sometimes gives instructions, writing memos and drawing charts, without going to the site. I suspect that workers have misunderstood instructions and made mistakes in the absence of the leader.

Q: What do you think of TEPCO's efforts to contain the crisis?

A: Immediately after the accident, the head office provided what is needed at the site, taking no account of cost. Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda declared at the end of 2011 that the accident had been brought under control. I began to hear more often than before that spending requests (from plant officials) were denied by the head office.

We are using polyethylene pipes, a type we find at home centers, around the radioactive water storage tanks where metal pipes are required. The idea was to save time and money.

Q: What needs to be done to ensure there are enough skilled workers for the next 30 to 40 years, which will be required for the decommissioning?

A: **It is necessary to guarantee long-term employment.** Workers are only allowed to be exposed to up to 100 millisieverts of radiation over five years. Subcontractors pull workers from the site if they are exposed to 20 millisieverts in one year.

For example, we are exposed to about 20 millisieverts in just three months if we remove debris around a reactor building. Workers at subcontractors, who work only at nuclear plants, will have no jobs for the remaining nine months.

Yearlong employment must be secured by providing them with other tasks, such as decontamination work in low-radiation areas or jobs at thermal power plants.

(This article is based on an interview by Tetsuya Kasai.)

IAEA to keep an eye on fuel removal

November 20, 2013

IAEA experts to observe decommissioning

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131120_13.html

The global nuclear watchdog says it will send a team of experts to Japan this month to inspect decommissioning work at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The International Atomic Energy Agency team will visit from November 25th to December 4th at the request of the Japanese government. The team includes 19 IAEA and international experts.

They'll travel to the plant to observe work to remove fuel assemblies from the storage pool in the No. 4 reactor building.

They'll also conduct hearings with officials of the Japanese government and the Tokyo Electric Power Company.

The team plans to examine how TEPCO is managing radioactive wastewater at the plant.

The IAEA sent analysts to monitor marine pollution around Fukushima from November 6th to 12th. Based on a report by the analysts, the 19 inspectors arriving later this month will also review marine monitoring activities around the Fukushima plant.

They'll submit a report to the Japanese government based on their findings.

November 19, 2013

IAEA to review fuel removal work at Fukushima No. 4 reactor this month

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/11/19/national/iaea-to-review-fuel-removal-work-at-fukushima-no-4-reactor-this-month/#.UougNCewT9k>

The government said Tuesday that International Atomic Energy Agency experts will visit Japan later this month to study such issues as the just-started fuel removal work at a pool inside a damaged reactor building at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear complex.

The IAEA mission, to be led by Juan Carlos Lentijo, director of the IAEA Division of Nuclear Fuel Cycle and Waste Technology, will be in Japan from Nov. 25 to Dec. 4. The team will release a summary of its review on the final day, a government official said.

The announcement was made as delicate work by Tokyo Electric Power Co. to eventually remove more than 1,000 fuel assemblies from the spent fuel pool in the No. 4 reactor building entered its second day.

On Monday, workers successfully extracted four unused fuel assemblies from the fuel rack and placed them in a transportation cask also inside the spent fuel pool, filled with water around 12 meters deep.

Once the cask is filled with 22 fuel assemblies, workers will lower it to a trailer and take it to another pool around 100 meters away, which will provide more stable conditions for keeping the fuel cool. It is expected to take about a week to complete the work cycle for the first cask.

Tepeco will review the work flow after it finishes one cycle. It has not yet decided when it will start taking out the spent fuel, which is more difficult to handle than unused fuel because it is highly radioactive and emits heat as radioactive elements in the fuel decay.

The pool, located on the top floor of the reactor building, holds 1,533 fuel assemblies, including 202 unused ones. Tepeco plans to finish the removal work by the end of 2014.

A fuel assembly is a bundle of fuel rods comprised of zirconium metal tubes with pellets inside. The pellets, made of uranium, serve as the actual fuel for nuclear reactors.

The operation requires extreme prudence, as it is an unprecedented attempt to remove fuel from a building that saw its roof and walls blown up by a hydrogen explosion in 2011 when the nuclear crisis began.

Tepeco has cleared away large pieces of rubble that fell onto the upper floor of the reactor building as a result of the explosion and created a huge steel-framed cover to blanket the reactor building.

During the crisis immediately after the earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011, reactors 1, 2 and 3 experienced core meltdowns.

The No. 4 reactor only suffered a hydrogen explosion as all of its fuel was stored in the spent fuel pool because it was undergoing periodic maintenance work at the time.

The IAEA team will consist of 19 experts, some of whom have knowledge of how the plant should deal with the buildup of massive amounts of radioactive water, according to the government official.

It will be the second time that Japan has accepted an IAEA review mission on work toward decommissioning the four stricken reactors at Fukushima No. 1.

Too "perilous" a task for TEPCO

November 19, 2013

Fukushima job feared too perilous for Tepco

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/11/19/national/fukushima-job-feared-too-perilous-for-tepco/#.Uouz1yewT9k>

by Miya Tanaka

Kyodo

Tokyo Electric Power Co. has finally moved into the decommissioning process at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, **despite doubt over its ability to manage a highly dangerous effort that will take decades.**

The start Monday of removing fuel from the cooling pool high up in the damaged reactor 4 building was one of the few bright pieces of news to come out recently from the plant, which has been plagued with frequent radioactive water leaks and other troubles over the past year.

But the work poses another challenge to the utility, with its success or failure expected to affect the following process of retrieving the fuel from the pools for reactors 1, 2 and 3, as well as the melted fuel inside the damaged cores.

"Spent fuel has potentially a very large risk. . . . I am personally more worried about (handling) it than the radioactive water problem," Nuclear Regulation Authority Chairman Shunichi Tanaka said in late October.

Tepco President Naomi Hirose has vowed to take "all possible measures" to ensure safety, while another senior official said it is "very unlikely" that an incident will occur that could rekindle a sustained nuclear chain reaction, or criticality.

But some experts don't feel reassured.

"It is quite certain that various kinds of troubles will occur, but I don't think Tepco has prepared enough safety measures," said Hideyuki Ban, co-director of the Citizens' Nuclear Information Center, a group against nuclear power.

Among his concerns is an accident occurring after workers place fuel assemblies into transport casks inside the spent fuel pool on the shattered building's fifth floor. As each of these 90-ton containers are filled, they will be lowered about 32 meters to the floor below so they can be trucked to another building.

Tepco claims its analyses show that the impact on the radiation level at the complex's perimeter would be small even if a container were to be dropped and broken open.

Ban, however, said Tepco should look for options other than lowering the containers directly to the first floor, and that he is worried workers wouldn't even be able to approach a container that has been damaged to the point where it is releasing high levels of radiation.

In addition to the decommissioning work, Tepco's fight to manage the massive amount of radioactive water accumulating at the plant continues, with no quick remedy in sight.

Tepco has set up some 1,000 tanks to store the toxic water, which is increasing at a rate of about 400 tons a day as groundwater seeps into the basements of the reactor buildings and mixes with the water used to cool the three crippled units.

Its plans for water storage have turned out to be poor, with a series of leaks afflicting tanks that were quickly put together by bolting steel plates together amid the urgent need to expand capacity.

The structural weakness of these tanks is not the only flaw. A string of human errors that led some tanks to overflow and workers to be splashed with radioactive water alarmed regulators who saw it as a sign that Tepco's ability to manage on-site activities was deteriorating and that morale was weakening.

With the utility apparently overwhelmed by the huge workload, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's administration has been stepping up its involvement in the cleanup activities, saying the matter "should not be left up to Tepco alone."

The Abe team's first move was to set aside ¥47 billion in public funds for projects to lessen the "technically challenging" radioactive water problem, including an unprecedented attempt to build a huge sunken ice wall to stop the groundwater from reaching the reactor buildings.

Based on a key proposal endorsed by the ruling parties earlier this month, the government is also considering shouldering some of the costs for decontaminating areas outside the plant, which could reach ¥5 trillion and is to be paid by Tepco.

The move would be a relief to the utility, which is in need of massive piles of cash to deal with compensation payments, the plant decommissioning and decontaminating off-site areas.

The utility has barely been kept afloat under a financial assistance scheme involving a government-backed fund created since the March 2011 start of the nuclear crisis. It also received a ¥1 trillion capital injection from the fund last year.

But in return for what could be seen as another bailout, pressure is growing on Tepco to revise its organizational structure so it can better manage the radioactive water and decommissioning operations.

“We can’t ask the public to shoulder the financial burden without securing public support. So we want Tepco to substantially reform itself,” said Tadamori Oshima, a lawmaker in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party who was involved in devising the proposal.

Sources have said Tepco is considering creating an in-house company to take charge of the decommissioning, but some experts speculate the utility’s true intention is to stave off possible calls for more drastic steps that could even threaten its existence.

While the government has been against forcing Tepco to declare bankruptcy because it would disrupt the compensation payments and cleanup missions, some ruling and opposition camp lawmakers continue to insist that stakeholders and creditor banks be held liable before using public funds to settle the crisis.

Tetsunari Iida, head of the Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies, said, “In my view, plans that do not involve legal liquidation are nothing more than a deception.”

Secrets bill and nukes

November 24, 2013

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Spelling it out: People opposed to the state secrets bill hold a protest banner at a rally in Tokyo's Yurakucho district Tuesday. | KYODO

NATIONAL | KANSAI PERSPECTIVE

Secrets bill raises fears among nuclear foes

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/11/24/national/secrets-bill-raises-fears-among-nuclear-foes/#.UpJhuiewT9n>

BY ERIC JOHNSTON

STAFF WRITER

OSAKA – In late 2005, U.S. government officials, invited by Japan, observed a counterterrorism drill at the Mihama nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture and came away worried about the security situation at the complex.

Some 2,000 police officers, firefighters, nuclear power officials, local authorities and residents were involved in the exercise, in which the plant comes under attack by foreign terrorists who entered the harbor by boat.

The focus of much of the drill was on evacuating residents, but the U.S. officials were more concerned about what they felt were security gaps. This led Washington to push Tokyo to pay more attention to physically protecting the facilities.

Today, as the Liberal Democratic Party-New Komeito ruling bloc prepares to enact a new state secrets law, the question of what happens to information about nuclear plant security is being batted about, especially in Kansai.

Fukui Prefecture is home to 13 commercial reactors, all of which, before the recent shutdown, provided power to distant Osaka and Hyogo prefectures, as well as neighboring Kyoto and Shiga.

It is also home to the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor. Originally designed to burn plutonium, Monju has been idle for nearly two decades after a sodium leak from a cooling unit and the resulting fire on Dec. 8, 1995, made headlines, along with the attempt to cover it up.

Video shot inside the plant by the operator showing the extent of the damage was initially hidden, leaving it to the prefecture to uncover the truth.

“In 1995, Fukui Prefecture courageously entered the Monju fast-breeder reactor accident site and videotaped the damage, thus revealing the coverup undertaken by the owner/operator. Passage of the state secrets bill would inhibit or prevent local authorities from taking such action again,” said Kyoto-based anti-nuclear activist Aileen Mioko Smith.

The government says the purpose of the secrets bill is to prevent damaging leaks of information vital to national defense and diplomacy, and to prevent spies and terrorists from acquiring such sensitive information. In a blog, Upper House Councilor Yosuke Isozaki of the LDP recently took a jab at people who are concerned that information related to nuclear power plants would be classified.

“Under the basic law, information can be classified to prevent terrorism. This means information related to the investigation of terrorist activities. Even people who have just a little bit of knowledge about the law should instantly understand when they read the (secrets bill) that it doesn’t apply to nuclear power information,” Isozaki wrote.

But that raises the fundamental question of who, exactly, gets to judge what constitutes a terrorist activity at a nuclear plant and how they would make decisions about classifying information based on that judgment.

In late October, at a meeting of opposition lawmakers, Ken Hashiba of the Cabinet Office said at a public hearing on the bill that it was possible information related to the security of nuclear power facilities could become classified. This appeared to be a more general statement than Isozaki’s.

For their part, many in the Kansai region and elsewhere remain concerned.

“There have already been 359 instances where the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has used the excuse of protecting nuclear materials (to not release information) and 449 cases where the Nuclear Regulation Authority has designated documents as secret,” the daily Kyoto Shimbun said in a recent editorial.

The paper warned there was lots of room for the government to expand the “terrorism-related” category to things like evacuation plans or the routes to be used when nuclear fuel is transported by land or sea, often through crowded municipalities. Anti-nuclear activists often keep track of fuel shipments to and from the Fukui plants.

The worries in Kansai were heightened in early October when the Fukushima Prefectural Assembly warned it was possible that, under the guise of preventing terrorism, the government would use the new law to designate atomic plant problems or information that could protect residents as classified, especially in an emergency.

“Because information from the System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information (SPEEDI) network was not appropriately disclosed (after the 3/11 quake), some of the residents in Namie were evacuated to an area with high radiation,” the assembly said in a statement, referring to one of the Fukushima Prefecture towns contaminated by radioactive fallout from the March 2011 core meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

The SPEEDI network is a series of monitoring stations around the country that sound the alarm when large amounts of radioactive material are emitted by power plants or other atomic facilities. In an emergency, METI, the NRA and local governments would be responsible for warning residents about dosage levels.

Officially, however, local government heads in the Kansai region have yet to address the issue. Most remain focused not on the secrets bill or nuclear power itself, but on what they will have to do to deal with an emergency involving Fukui’s reactors.

Shiga Prefecture recently simulated a nuclear accident at one of the Fukui plants and learned that there might not be enough fresh water in storage to cope with the loss of a fallout-tainted Lake Biwa, which provides drinking water for 14.5 million people.

Other Kansai governments, however, are more concerned about a bigger question: how to coordinate a widespread evacuation.

While the apparent lack of transparency on nuclear safety measures under the secrets bill has been widely discussed, receiving less attention is the question of whether ordinary citizens who are involved in anti-nuclear protests might be targeted and investigated under the new law, or whether the heads of local government that host reactors will find their demands for data on plant operations or costs blocked in the name of “terrorism.”

“In the past, Japanese utilities cooperated with the police to identify, isolate and observe members of the Japanese Communist Party and their supporters. But most of these efforts at ideological discrimination were ruled to be in violation of the Constitution,” Fukui Prefectural Assemblyman Masao Sato of the JCP wrote on his official blog.

Many nuclear power employees either belong to, or support, the JCP. They have often helped bring to light information about problems at the plants. Saito fears the new secrets bill will empower the police to crack down further on their efforts.

“It’s clear that security information at nuclear power plant facilities will be classified as secret. But it’s also possible that under the pretext of doing a background check, the families and friends of nuclear plant workers will be tracked and the information gathered on them will be kept secret,” he said.

Kansai Perspective appears on the fourth Monday of each month, focusing on Kansai-area developments and events of national importance with a Kansai connection.

Vigilance necessary on power industry reform

November 24, 2013

Monitor power industry reform

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/11/24/editorials/monitor-power-industry-reform/#.UpJVKSewT9k>

The recent revision to the law on electricity business marks only the first step in a three-stage reform of Japan’s power utility industry that will take years to complete. Continued vigilance is needed to make sure that the reform will not be watered down in the subsequent process and will achieve greater competition by facilitating entry of new suppliers to the market, thereby offering consumers more choice in services at lower costs.

The revised law enacted by the Diet on Oct. 13 set in motion a long process of freeing up the nation’s electricity sector from the regionally monopolized supply system, which dates back to 1951. An independent body will be created by around 2015 to coordinate power supply by observing demand

nationwide. When a power shortage is feared in one region, the entity will have the authority to order utilities in other regions to share electricity with it, by boosting their own power generation if necessary.

The subsequent process of reform is set in the supplementary provisions of the law. According to the timeline, the government will submit separate legislation to the Diet in 2014 to fully liberalize the retail electricity market by around 2016, allowing new entrants to sell electricity to households — business that has been monopolized by the existing 10 major regional power companies.

Another bill to be submitted to the Diet in 2015 will separate these utilities' power generation and distribution business by around 2020, thereby making the transmission and distribution networks — currently controlled by the regional utilities — accessible to new entrants on equal conditions.

This third stage of reform is expected to usher in full-scale competition in the power industry — and therefore it is feared that there will be lingering resistance not only among the existing utilities but also in some political circles. Makoto Yagi, chairman of the Federation of Electric Power Companies, said stable supply of electricity has been maintained as the major utilities controlled both power generation and transmission, and called for a “flexible review” of the reform if problems emerge in working out more details of the process.

The government has explained that the lengthy, multi-staged reform process has been set so that the changes will not disrupt the stable supply of power. Close monitoring is necessary to ensure the subsequent process of reform does not deviate from its objective.

The nation's electricity business has been gradually liberalized since the 1990s, but power supply to households, which accounts for about 40 percent of the electricity market, has remained the monopoly of the 10 big regional utilities. In the business of selling electricity to large-lot users, new entrants accounted for a mere 3.5 percent of the total supply in fiscal 2012, due to the high costs to access the transmission and distribution networks of the major utilities.

It was the disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011 and subsequent power shortages that prompted the government to seek the overhaul of the regional monopoly in the power supply system.

The launch of the new independent body to coordinate power supply should help fill regional gaps in supply capacity in cases of natural disasters, and rolling blackouts like the one introduced after the nuclear disaster will be less likely if power supply across regional blocs is facilitated by the entry of new suppliers. The success of the reform will depend on whether it will bring more competition to the power industry, thus benefiting users.

Please extend money for compensation

November 25, 2013

Nuclear damage compensation fund asks assistance

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131125_29.html

A Japanese fund is asking the government and financial institutions to extend money to help Tokyo Electric Power Company compensate local people affected by Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant accident.

The steering committee of the state-backed nuclear compensation fund made the proposal on Monday. They have reviewed the utility's comprehensive business plan that aims to improve its operation.

The committee members say TEPCO should make the utmost effort to deal with contaminated water and decommissioning the damaged nuclear plant. It also asks the utility to lead efforts to reform Japan's electric power system.

The committee says it would be difficult for TEPCO alone to shoulder the costs of the accident.

It says when the compensation fund writes a new business plan for TEPCO, it should ask the government and financial institutions to make appropriate contributions for sharing the costs.

The nuclear compensation fund is expected to come up with the business plan by the end of this year.

How independent is the JAEA?

November 24, 2013

Four NRA advisers get funds from Monju operator

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/11/24/national/four-nra-advisers-get-funds-from-monju-operator/#.UpJUUiewT9k>

JJI

Four outside experts in panels set up by the Nuclear Regulation Authority said they have together received more than ¥33 million in research funds from the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, which runs the experimental Monju fast-breeder reactor prototype.

The NRA requires its advisers to report any funds received from power companies and discloses those reported on its website. **But the disclosure rule does not apply to money from the JAEA because it is not a power company.**

The four professors are Yutaka Abe at the University of Tsukuba, Akira Yamaguchi at Osaka University, and Seiichi Koshizuka and Yosuke Katsumura at the University of Tokyo.

The four said that they just followed the NRA's rules and that they did not find it necessary to report the funds.

Documents obtained by Jiji Press show that since fiscal 2009, the JAEA has given Abe more than ¥19.4 million for seven research projects, Yamaguchi ¥8.9 million for three projects, and Koshizuka nearly ¥4 million and Katsumura some ¥900,000 for one project each.

Abe and Yamaguchi are members of a panel that drafted new nuclear plant regulatory standards. Koshizuka participated in a regulatory system panel, and Katsumura was a member of a panel on the seawater problem at Chubu Electric Power Co.'s Hamaoka nuclear plant.

The JAEA is an independent administrative agency and, at the same time, a member of the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum, consisting of power companies and nuclear plant-related firms.

"Troika of irresponsibility" bickering over cleanup

November 25, 2013

INSIGHT: 'Troika of irresponsibility' behind Fukushima water crisis

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201311250074>

By YASUAKI OSHIKA/ Staff Writer

Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s shortcomings, the Finance Ministry's stubbornness and the industry ministry's need for a scapegoat combined to create the radioactive water crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

And while the three key players refuse to be held accountable for Japan's worst nuclear disaster, this "troika of irresponsibility" is still bickering over the cleanup process as contaminated water continues to leak into the plant ground and the ocean.

The risks of radioactive water leaks were known months after the plant was rocked by the Great East Japan Earthquake and swamped by the ensuing tsunami on March 11, 2011.

Plans to contain the potential water problem were drawn up at the time. But TEPCO was unwilling to spend money on such measures, some of which were adopted two years later by the government.

The utility has, in fact, shown little sense that the Fukushima accident is its problem.

The Finance Ministry and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, meanwhile, have been busy fighting over who should pay for cleaning up communities contaminated by radioactive fallout from the Fukushima nuclear plant.

Five months after the triple meltdown at the plant, ruling and opposition lawmakers in August 2011 enacted a special measures law on decontamination, authorizing the government to seek payments for such work from TEPCO.

According to Yoshimi Okunushi, a senior Environment Ministry official familiar with the discussions, the Finance Ministry guarded against committing taxpayer money and maintained that "the polluter-pays principle" must apply.

Issei Tajima, a former Lower House member of the Democratic Party of Japan who was involved in drafting the bill, said the Finance Ministry had some "harsh talk" on expenses.

The industry ministry, left out of the loop in the process, lobbied the ruling Liberal Democratic Party this year to revise the law and inject taxpayer money into the decontamination efforts, saying such work should be implemented as public-works projects.

A task force of the ruling coalition submitted a package of proposals to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Nov. 11, calling for greater government involvement in decontamination, decommissioning and the radioactive water problem.

On the surface, the industry ministry appears to have gotten its way, but the language in the proposal reflects the Finance Ministry's fierce opposition to such an attempt.

The proposal said costs for decontamination work already planned should be borne by TEPCO, but that "further efforts" should be made "from the standpoint of public works."

"Further efforts' do not mean decontamination," a senior Finance Ministry official said. "We will continue to seek payments for decontamination work from TEPCO."

A senior industry ministry official admitted that it failed to influence the coalition task force as it had hoped.

"The Finance Ministry mounted a sweeping offensive to (tone down) the language," the official said. "We suffered one setback after another."

But the industry ministry has never stepped forward to take control of the Fukushima situation, especially in talks about the huge task of decommissioning the crippled reactors, which is expected to take more than 30 years.

Soon after the Fukushima nuclear disaster started, many officials proposed setting up a government agency in charge of decommissioning, saying the unprecedented task cannot be entirely left in TEPCO's hands.

But it wasn't until Nov. 11 this year when the coalition task force called on the government to act as a command center for dealing with decommissioning and the radioactive water problem.

The proposal suggested that TEPCO's division in charge of decommissioning be reorganized into an in-house company, spun out as a separate company or turned into a government-affiliated independent administrative agency.

Industry ministry bureaucrats oppose state involvement, saying the government cannot handle the decommissioning process. They point to the scandal-ridden Japan Atomic Energy Agency, an independent administrative agency that operates the problem-plagued Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor.

A midlevel official indicated that the industry ministry does not want to take responsibility.

“The ministry hates to lose a scapegoat,” the official said, alluding to TEPCO.

The industry ministry has called for taxpayer money to fund the decontamination work partly because TEPCO will be unable to draw up a viable rehabilitation program if it is required to cover the enormous costs, estimated at 5 trillion yen (\$49 billion) or more.

Also in the months after the nuclear disaster started, a plan was drawn up to build walls to prevent groundwater from flowing into the reactor buildings. But that idea never materialized due to TEPCO’s opposition to spending.

Only in August this year did the government decide to install frozen soil walls partly with public funds after radioactive water found its way into the ocean.

A government committee on measures to deal with radioactive water noted that this method has never been used for a large-scale project spanning more than 10 years.

“People say TEPCO can (build walls) on its own if common technology is used,” committee chairman Yuzo Onishi, a professor emeritus at Kyoto University, said. “A national budget can be obtained only for incomplete, advanced technology.”

The government plans to spend only 47 billion yen on the radioactive water problem, including the frozen soil walls.

Onishi is critical of the approach.

“They are mobilizing resources step by step, much like the wartime Japanese military,” he said.

The Fukushima nuclear crisis may also have something in common with the nation’s “lost two decades,” the economic stagnation caused largely by the government’s reluctance to inject public funds into disposal of bad bank loans.

Majority worried about secrets bill

November 26, 2013

At Fukushima hearing, all speakers criticize state secrets bill

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201311260068

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUKUSHIMA--The ruling Liberal Democratic Party invited Namie Mayor Tamotsu Baba to speak about the state secrets protection bill, expecting support by a leader near the Fukushima nuclear disaster site to quell criticism against the legislation.

The party's plan, however, backfired.

"I am afraid no clear bounds were established about what should be designated a state secret," Baba told a hearing on the bill here on Nov. 25. He also said he cannot trust a government that tends to keep information under wraps.

In fact, all seven speakers at the hearing criticized the bill, saying its ambiguous wording leaves open the possibility of abuse and its harsh penalties could keep citizens in the dark about matters that directly affect their lives.

The ruling coalition, which railroaded the bill through a Lower House committee on Nov. 26, organized the hearing in the prefectural capital. Apart from speakers and politicians, only 50 members of the public could attend after obtaining admission tickets from Diet members.

Since the bill was submitted to the Lower House late last month, calls have grown for specific guidelines on what constitutes a state secret under the legislation.

But the ruling coalition and opposition parties failed to clearly define such state secrets in closed-door meetings and the debate at the Lower House's special committee on national security.

The administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe tried to reassure leaders of Fukushima Prefecture that the designation of state secrets will not concern information about nuclear power plants.

But experts at the hearing agreed there is room for officials to stretch the bounds of the legislation, and that the government has already given contradictory views about nuclear plant information.

The LDP expected Baba to show an understanding to the necessity of the legislation. The ruling party noted that nuclear power plants are not specified in the bill.

But Baba instead mentioned the government's bungling of information in the early stages of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

The government failed to quickly release data from the computer-simulated System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information (SPEEDI). Much like a weather map, the system shows the predicted spread of radioactive materials following an accident.

Lacking the SPEEDI information, many Namie residents fled toward areas of high radiation levels during the evacuation.

Residents in Fukushima Prefecture are particularly worried about the concealing of information under the legislation, in light of the water leaks and other problems at the Fukushima No. 1 plant, as well as the decommissioning process that is expected to take decades to complete.

"The general public is concerned about officials' broad interpretation of state secrets," said Yumiko Nihei, professor of law at Sakura no Seibo Junior College who was invited by the opposition Democratic Party of Japan to give her views at the hearing.

Nihei, who called for a halt to the bill, also said the government should respect the opinions of the public. The government solicited views from the public on its website in September. Of the 90,480 comments posted, 77 percent were opposed to the legislation.

Nobuyoshi Hatanaka, a professor of the Japanese Constitution at Iwaki Junior College, stressed the importance of the government having a well-informed public before making a crucial policy decision.

“Defense and diplomacy are the central government’s sole prerogative, but how can the central government facilitate the benefit for the public without keeping the public informed?” he said.

He spoke on the invitation of New Komeito, the LDP’s junior coalition partner.

The bill lists four areas of protection for state secrets: defense, diplomacy, the prevention of harmful activities, such as spying, and the prevention of terrorist activities.

Hiroyasu Maki, vice chairman of the Fukushima Bar Association and a speaker at the hearing, said the government has varied its language about security measures concerning nuclear power plants.

“On one day the government says ‘routine security measures are not state secrets,’ whereas on another day it says ‘a security plan drawn up in response to tips on possible terrorist activities at potentially targeted nuclear power plants may be designated as state secrets,’” he said.

Maki, invited to the hearing by the DPJ, said this occurred because the bill’s clauses are ambiguous and can cover a wide range of issues.

The government bill sets a maximum 10-year prison term for violators who leak state secrets. With **no clear guidelines on what constitutes a state secret**, potential whistle-blowers and journalists hoping to expose government corruption may back off to avoid arrest. That, in turn, could undermine the public’s right to know.

Kiyohiko Toyama, a New Komeito member of the Lower House, stressed at the hearing that legitimate news-gathering activities will not be punished.

He said “extremely unlawful acts” by journalists, as defined in the bill, include deception, assault, blackmail, property theft, intrusion and gaining illegal access.

Maki countered that reporters may be significantly discouraged from digging for the truth because the bill can allow investigative authorities to arbitrarily determine an “extremely unlawful act” in news gathering.

Mitsugi Araki, a lawyer invited to speak by the Japanese Communist Party, said the simple act of distributing fliers to residences could be punished as an unlawful intrusion under the legislation.

Even LDP members of the Fukushima prefectural assembly expressed concerns about the bill after the hearing.

The Fukushima prefectural assembly in October adopted a statement calling on the government and the Diet to proceed with caution in discussing the legislation.

After the hearing, Shoichi Kobayashi, an LDP assembly member, echoed the criticism that the scope of designated state secrets remains blurred.

“I’m afraid that the government and the Diet themselves have not had sufficient debate over that point,” he said.

Fukushima residents plead against state secrets bill

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131126p2a00m0na014000c.html>



Fukushima residents hold banners against the state secrets bill in front of a building where the public hearing was held in Fukushima, on Nov. 25. (Mainichi)

FUKUSHIMA -- Fukushima Prefecture residents expressed their concern about a controversial state secrets protection bill at a public hearing, amid fear that information on the crippled nuclear plant might be concealed if the bill was passed.

The House of Representatives' special committee for national security held a public hearing in Fukushima on Nov. 25 where representatives of Fukushima residents offered their opinions on the special secrets protection bill.

Yumiko Nihei, a professor from Fukushima-based Sakura no Seibo Junior College, received a request to speak at the hearing on Nov. 21, just four days before the session. While she thought that the government would use this opportunity to claim its willingness to listen to locals' opinions before passing the bill in the lower house, she felt that she should clarify her position on the matter after seeing the plant disaster.

"I'm still not sure if I should teach young women in this city," said Nihei in the hearing session, as information about the plant hasn't been properly provided after the disaster. "I'm opposed to a bill that denies people's access to information," she added.

Another speaker at the session, Tamotsu Baba, mayor of the town of Namie, said "If information concerning the nuclear plant was categorized as special secrets against terrorism, the government could hide it under the bill."

After the hearing session, however, Baba expressed his frustration, saying "**Fukushima residents' voices didn't seem to reach the committee members.**"

Even nuclear proponents...

November 25, 2013

Nuclear firm concerned about secrecy bill

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131125_43.html

A representative of a nuclear-related company in Fukushima voiced concern about the proposed state secrets legislation at a public hearing on Monday.

Yukiteru Naka is the chairman of a company that has been involved in equipment design and

maintenance at nuclear plants.

He said the draft legislation may make workers too fearful of punishment to relate what they've learned at their nuclear plants.

He said that although it is important to strengthen anti-terror measures, too much control of information exerts psychological pressure on workers.

Naka's company provides the stricken Fukushima Daiichi plant with 60 employees that do clean-up and decommissioning work.

He said the bill would make it even harder to recruit workers for the decommissioning work, which it is believed will take 40 years.

Naka said it had once been taboo to raise questions about nuclear plant safety, and that created the myth that nuclear plants were safe.

He said there will be no nuclear safety without disclosure of information, and that the bill should not be applied to the nuclear power industry.

Who said transparency?

November 26, 2013

Ruling coalition seeking to ramrod state secrets bill through Lower House

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201311260066

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The ruling coalition on Nov. 26 railroaded the state secrets protection bill through a Lower House committee, ignoring overwhelming opposition at a public hearing the previous day in Fukushima city and outrage from opposition parties over the lack of debate.

With the current Diet session scheduled to end on Dec. 6, the Liberal Democratic Party and junior coalition partner New Komeito were seeking to ramrod the legislation through the Lower House in time for a vote in the Upper House. If passed by both chambers, the new law would instill harsher penalties, including up to 10 years in prison, for the leaking of designated state secrets.

At a morning session of the Lower House special committee on national security, the LDP and New Komeito put a bill that included revisions proposed by Your Party and the Japan Restoration Party to a vote to send it to the floor before final deliberations were held.

Opposition party directors of the special committee harshly criticized the move, saying sufficient debate had not been conducted.

Ruling coalition directors of the special committee proposed taking a vote on the legislation on the morning of Nov. 26. However, members from the Democratic Party of Japan, Japan Restoration Party, Japanese Communist Party and People's Life Party opposed the vote on the grounds of insufficient debate. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sat in on the session where questions were asked about the revised legislation. However, before further deliberations could be conducted in the special committee, an LDP director submitted a special motion requesting a vote on the legislation. LDP, New Komeito and Your Party members voted for the bill. Japan Restoration Party members left the committee room in protest, while other opposition parties voted against the legislation.

After the special committee vote, Gen Nakatani, an LDP director, said, "We revised the proposal as much as possible to address the concerns held by the public."

However, Atsushi Oshima, a DPJ director, called the vote a "defeat for the legislative branch."

After the vote, five opposition parties--the DPJ, Japan Restoration Party, JCP, People's Life Party and the Social Democratic Party--requested a meeting with Lower House Speaker Bunmei Ibuki to ask that the legislation not be brought to a vote before the entire Lower House. They argued that railroading the bill through the special committee was an outrage that damaged the fundamentals of a democracy.

However, Ibuki refused to meet with the opposition parties. The Lower House was scheduled to vote on the legislation later on Nov. 26.

Japan Restoration Party members had said they would support the revised legislation if they received assurances from the prime minister that a third-party organ would be set up to oversee the designation of state secrets.

Hiroshi Yamada, a Japan Restoration Party special committee member, asked Abe if he would set up such an entity. Abe twice said he would make efforts to set up such a body, adding, "I believe it would be better to set up such an organ."

Takao Fujii, a Japan Restoration Party special committee director, said after the session that Abe had given a clear response.

When asked why party members vacated the committee room before the vote, Fujii said that action was to protest the lack of debate.

However, because the establishment of a third-party agency has not been written into the legislation, it remains to be seen if it will actually be set up as stated by Abe.

Abe also said that the prime minister would serve in an oversight function regarding the designation and declassification of state secrets.

Forcing bill through Lower House

November 26, 2013

Ruling bloc rams secrets bill through Lower House

Opposition balks after panel skips further debate on contentious legislation

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/11/26/national/ruling-bloc-rams-secrets-bill-through-lower-house/#.UpTbgSfij9k>

by Ayako Mie
Staff Writer

The ruling coalition forced its contentious state secrets bill through the Lower House on Tuesday evening amid calls from all but one of the opposition forces for further deliberations on its provisions.

The bill was immediately sent to the Upper House after the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and its junior coalition partner, New Komeito, and Your Party of the opposition camp supported the bill at the plenary session of the lower chamber.

With only the support of Your Party, the ruling bloc earlier in the day rammed the bill through the Lower House's special committee for national security.

Disregarding normal procedures, committee Chairman Fukushima Nukaga of the LDP moved to end deliberations after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe took questions at the committee. Normally there is debate before the committee votes on a bill, but the ruling bloc bypassed the procedure to get the bill to the Lower House plenary session later in the day.

Angered by the ruling bloc's maneuver, the Democratic Party of Japan, Seikatsu no To (People's Life Party) and the Japanese Communist Party voted against the bill in the committee.

Key to Tuesday's committee vote was whether Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party), which had reached an agreement on amendments with the ruling coalition last week, would vote for the bill. Despite that agreement, Nippon Ishin repeatedly threatened to vote against the bill if the LDP and New Komeito tried to steamroller it through the committee.

Nippon Ishin has sought assurances from Abe that an independent panel will be created to oversee the classification of the state secrets. As it stands now, the bill states only that an oversight mechanism will be considered.

During the committee session Tuesday, Abe tried to placate Nippon Ishin by saying an independent body would be created before the bill is passed.

In the end, however, the party walked away, insisting more deliberations are needed, considering that 70 percent of the public feels the Diet should not rush to pass the bill.

"Rather than saying I am sorry about the forcible action by the ruling camp, I have to say the ruling camp is steering the Diet in a high-handed way, leveraging on a comfortable majority in both chambers," said Takao Fujii, Nippon Ishin's general council chairman, after the party walked away from the vote.

The opposition camp lodged a protest with Lower House Speaker Bunmei Ibuki, demanding that he not allow the bill to be sent to the plenary session, to no avail.

The opposition parties are especially critical of the ruling bloc for trying to hold a vote Tuesday, only one day after the amended bill was submitted to the committee, which also held a public hearing in Fukushima Prefecture.

Everyone who took part in Monday's public hearing expressed either opposition to or concern about the bill, fearing it could be used to infringe on the public's right to know. **As it reads now, the bill gives the government the power to designate state secrets at its discretion.**

For its part, the ruling coalition contends that after more than 45 hours in the Lower House committee, there had been enough deliberation on the bill.

"With the amendment agreed upon with Nippon Ishin and Your Party, we did our best to ease the public's concerns about the bill," said the LDP's Gen Nakatani, leader of the ruling camp's special committee members.

The bill allows the government in power to designate state secrets, keep them classified for an indefinite time, and provides stiff penalties for leaks or for attempts to learn such secrets in a manner deemed problematic.

Secrets bill must not become law

November 27, 2013

EDITORIAL: Secrets protection bill must not be allowed to become law

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201311270048>

In what can only be termed the power of the majority in the wrong hands, the ruling coalition railroaded the state secrets protection bill through the Lower House on Nov. 26.

We seriously question the Abe administration's perception of democracy and fundamental human rights. The dangers posed by this bill have been pointed out by news organizations as well as legal experts, constitutional scholars, historians and numerous concerned citizens groups. As the nature of this bill became more widely known, public opinion also began to turn increasingly against it.

And let us not forget that only the day before the bill cleared the Lower House, it received the thumbs-down from all seven panelists who had been invited to state their opinions at a public hearing held in the city of Fukushima.

Yet, the ruling coalition simply rammed the bill through the chamber in blatant disregard of the will of the people and the opposition camp's call for further deliberation.

As we have repeatedly pointed out, the most dangerous aspect of this legislation is that it is designed to keep the public in the dark about what the government has designated as state secrets for protection. This

means that any reason for information to remain a secret will itself remain a secret, thereby breeding more secrets, ad infinitum, without the public's knowledge.

SECRECY TO BE JEALOUSLY GUARDED

The designation of massive volumes of information as state secrets will be effectively left to the discretion of bureaucrats. This would obviously require the presence of an independent organ that is empowered to constantly monitor the legitimacy of each designation, determine how long designated information ought to remain withheld, and order changes to be made as needed. However, such an organ is unlikely to be created under the state secrets protection legislation.

The government has a duty to promise the sovereign populace that today's state secrets will be eventually declassified. But the proposed legislation is full of loopholes that will enable the government to keep them secret even after 60 years, or simply scrap them quietly.

This is how the bureaucracy will jealously guard its secrecy.

And there will be stiff penalties for conscientious civil servants who decide to blow the whistle, or journalists and ordinary citizens who try to find out the truth.

A healthy balance must exist between the government's authority to control information and the public's right to know.

Japan's information disclosure system is still underdeveloped. To enact this state secrets protection legislation now would only tip the balance even more heavily in the government's favor.

STATE COMES FIRST

The Global Principles on National Security and the Right to Information, or the Tshwane Principles for short, were drawn up in June in Tshwane, South Africa. The process took two years and involved more than 500 security and human rights experts from over 70 countries and regions. Organizations that were involved include the United Nations, the Organization of American States and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Around the world, a growing number of countries are now bolstering their secrets protection laws as a way to combat terrorism, and Tshwane Principles offer guidelines on information control.

The 50-point principles recognize that the public authorities may restrict the public's right of access to information on national security grounds, but they also require the public authorities to clearly specify the duration of classification. The principles also require oversight bodies to have legally guaranteed access to all information, and exempt from punishment anyone who is not a public servant.

Japan's state secrets protection bill violates the Tshwane Principles in every way.

In the Diet session, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said it was vital to have a law to protect state secrets that is comparable with those of the United States and European nations.

But he dismissed the Tshwane Principles as unimportant, claiming they were "issued by a private organ" and have not been "authorized" as international principles.

Not only Abe, but most individuals speaking on behalf of the government and the ruling coalition have made it amply clear that the interests of the state must come before those of the people.

Former Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura asserted, "It makes no logical sense at all to guarantee the people's right to know and not be able to guarantee the survival of individuals and the state."

Machimura's assertion is tantamount to blackmail against the people. We wholeheartedly agree that national security is of vital importance. But Machimura clearly has no understanding whatsoever that there is no democracy without the public's right to know.

GOING AGAINST GLOBAL TREND

The impracticality of implementing what the state secrets protection bill purports to set in place has become amply clear from the series of Diet debates we have heard so far.

Under the government's bylaws, there are currently 420,000 "specially controlled secrets" pertaining to diplomacy and national security. The government claims there will be fewer secrets under the new legislation, but there is no doubt that the number will be in the order of hundreds of thousands.

How are the prime minister and the Cabinet ministers going to check them all? A supplemental provision of the amendment bill, submitted by the ruling coalition and the opposition Japan Restoration Party and Your Party, proposes to consider the establishment of a new organ that will examine and oversee the criteria by which information may be classified as state secrets.

Abe referred to such an organ before the Diet on Nov. 26, but there is no guarantee whatsoever that it will be created.

Just getting a panel of experts to examine the criteria will

definitely not prevent arbitrary classification of information as state secrets. Nor will it eliminate the likelihood of government ministries and agencies taking advantage of the legislation to hide inconvenient information.

If an independent oversight organ is to be established, it must be staffed with enough people to handle massive volumes of state secrets and be given the authority to demand the declassification of privileged information.

What the government is trying to do with this new legislation runs completely counter to today's global current in the maintenance and disclosure of state secrets as well as its obligation to respect people's rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

The debate will move to the Upper House. This bill must never be allowed to become law.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Nov. 27

Editorial: More discussion needed to prevent state secrets bill from destroying democracy

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20131127p2a00m0na004000c.html>

The ruling coalition's ramming of a controversial special state secrets bill, which would impose harsh penalties on those who leak classified government information, through the House of Representatives on Nov. 26 has stunned the public.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was absent from the chamber's special committee on national security when it approved the bill. Since the voting session was aired live, the ruling coalition comprised of the Liberal

Democratic Party (LDP) and the New Komeito party reportedly decided not to show the public that it rammed the bill through in the presence of the prime minister.

This has suggested that even the ruling bloc cannot take pride in the passage of the bill through the powerful chamber. During a public hearing in Fukushima the previous day, all the attendees demanded that the bill be either scrapped or deliberated cautiously. However, such desperate calls from the area affected by the nuclear crisis did not reach the legislative branch of the government.

The bill cleared the lower house after only 20 days of deliberations. The bill does not clearly show the scope of information that could be classified as special state secrets, and the legislative and judicial branches cannot check classified government information. Moreover, a decision on rules on releasing declassified information will be made sometime later.

Ensuring that members of the public can access government information is one of the key basics of a democratic society. However, if the bill is to be enacted and come into force, it could discourage citizens as well as journalists from seeking access to such information for fear of harsh punishment, blocking government information from circulating in society. The Diet failed to thoroughly deliberate the bill to clarify these problems. Flaws in the bill are beginning to surface one after another.

The prime minister failed to provide a sufficient explanation of the bill during the campaign for the House of Councillors election in July this year and made no mention of the legislation in his policy speech at the outset of the ongoing Diet session. Nevertheless, the Abe administration is now taking a tough line in a bid to ensure the bill becomes law during the current Diet session that ends on Dec. 6. This highlights the arrogance that the ruling coalition is now showing only four months after it regained a majority in the upper chamber, which had been controlled by opposition parties, in the July poll.

A few opposition parties further tainted the issue by reaching a compromise with the government over the bill in an easy-going manner. An agreement that the coalition reached with the Japan Restoration Party (JRP) and Your Party to revise the bill has not changed its core elements at all. The ruling bloc agreed to consider setting up a third-party organization to examine whether the government's classification of internal information as special secrets is appropriate, as demanded by the JRP, but stopped short of pledging to establish such an independent panel.

As a result of their negotiations, some clauses of the bill have even worsened, such as the extension of the maximum period during which government information could be classified as special secrets to 60 years. As such, these parties could be regarded as nothing but forces complementary to the ruling parties.

Although the bill cleared the lower house, legislators should scrutinize whether such legislation is truly necessary once again.

It is understandable for the government to classify information that could pose a threat to national security over a certain period.

Currently, the National Public Service Act, the Self-Defense Forces Act and the legislation on the protection of secrets regarding the U.S. and Japan Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement specifically outlaw leaks of government information. Those who leak confidential information face up to one, five and 10 years in prison, respectively, under these laws.

The government has officially confirmed that there have been five serious cases in which public servants leaked classified information over the past 15 years. Defendants in these cases either evaded indictment or were handed prison terms far shorter than the maximum terms provided for under these three laws.

The government should place priority on creating systems in all the administrative organs to prevent confidential information from leaking and ensure all officials abide by the rules on information management.

Under the bill, information on defense, diplomacy and national security as well as that regarding the prevention of terrorist attacks could be classified as special state secrets. Investigations into offenses that have disrupted public security -- which center on surveillance activity -- could restrict the human rights of members of the public.

Serious questions remain as to whether such new legislation should be created even if it raises the possibility that citizens will be punished for attempting to gain access to government information.

The bill would neither sufficiently guarantee people's right to know nor establish a system to check information designated as secrets. There are numerous other problems with the bill.

The upper house should hold thorough discussions to highlight problems involving the bill instead of making haste to pass it into law, and clearly show the danger that the bill poses to the public.

Banning journalism

November 27, 2013

Japan Reacts to Fukushima Crisis By Banning Journalism

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/japan-reacts-to-fukushima-crisis-by-banning-journalism/5359632>

By Washington's Blog

Global Research, November 27, 2013

Washington's Blog



Japan - Like the U.S. - Turns to Censorship

2 weeks after the Fukushima accident, we reported that the government responded to the nuclear accident by trying to raise acceptable radiation levels and pretending that radiation is good for us.

We noted earlier this month:

Japan will likely pass a new anti-whistleblowing law in an attempt to silence criticism of Tepco and the government:

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government is planning a state secrets act that critics say could **curtail public access to information on** a wide range of issues, including tensions with China and the **Fukushima nuclear crisis**.

The new law would dramatically expand the definition of official secrets and journalists convicted under it could be jailed for up to five years.

In reality, reporters covering Fukushima have long been harassed and censored.

Unfortunately, this is coming to pass. As EneNews reports:

Associated Press, Nov. 26, 2013: Japan's more powerful lower house of Parliament approved a state secrecy bill late Tuesday [...] Critics say it might sway authorities to withhold more information about nuclear power plants [...] The move is welcomed by the United States [...] lawyer Hiroyasu Maki said the bill's definition of secrets is so vague and broad that it could easily be expanded to include radiation data [...] Journalists who obtain information "inappropriately" or "wrongfully" can get up to five years in prison, prompting criticism that it would make officials more secretive and intimidate the media. Attempted leaks or inappropriate reporting, complicity or solicitation are also considered illegal. [...] Japan's proposed law also designates the prime minister as a third-party overseer.

BBC, Nov. 26, 2013: Japan approves new state secrecy bill to combat leaks [...] The bill now goes to the upper house, where it is also likely to be passed.

The Australian, Nov. 25, 2013: Japanese press balks at push for 'fascist' secrecy laws [...] Taro Yamamoto [an upper house lawmaker] said the law threatened to recreate a fascist state in Japan. "This secrecy law represents a coup d'etat by a particular group of politicians and bureaucrats," he told a press conference in Tokyo. "I believe the secrecy bill will eventually lead to the repression of the average person. It will allow those in power to crack down on anyone who is criticising them – the path we are on is the recreation of a fascist state." He said the withholding of radiation data after the Fukushima disaster showed the Japanese government was predisposed to hiding information from its citizens and this law would only make things worse. [...] The Asahi Shimbun newspaper likened the law to "conspiracy" regulations in pre-war Japan and said it could be used to stymie access to facts on nuclear accidents [...] Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan president Lucy Birmingham: "We are alarmed by the text of the bill, as well as associated statements made by some ruling party lawmakers, relating to the potential targeting of journalists for prosecution and imprisonment."

Activist Kazuyuki Tokune: "I may be arrested some day for my anti-nuclear activity [...] But that doesn't stop me."

Lawrence Repeta, a law professor at Meiji University in Tokyo: "This is a severe threat on freedom to report in Japan [...] It appears the Abe administration has decided that they can get a lot of what they want, which is to escape oversight, to decrease transparency in the government by passing a law that grants the government and officials broad authority to designate information as secret."

U.S. Charge d'Affairs Kurt Tong: It's a positive step that would make Japan a "more effective alliance partner."

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe: "This law is designed to protect the safety of the people."

See also: Japan Deputy Prime Minister talks about "learning from the Nazis" — Previously said to let elderly people "hurry up and die" (VIDEO)

Rather than addressing the problems head-on, the Japanese government is circling the wagons.

Unfortunately, the United States is no better. Specifically, the American government:

- Censors journalists who raise inconvenient truths
- Pressured the Japanese government to re-start its nuclear program, and is allowing Fukushima seafood to be sold in the U.S.
- Weakened safety standards for U.S. nuclear reactors after the Fukushima disaster

As we noted 6 months after Fukushima melted down:

American and Canadian authorities have virtually stopped monitoring airborne radiation, and are not testing fish for radiation. (Indeed, the EPA reacted to Fukushima by raising "acceptable" radiation levels.)

The failure of the American, Canadian and other governments to test for and share results is making it difficult to hold an open scientific debate about what is happening.

Earlier this year, the acting EPA director signed a revised version of the EPA's Protective Action Guide for radiological incidents, which *radically relaxing the safety guidelines agencies follow in the wake of a nuclear-reactor meltdown or other unexpected release of radiation*. EPA whistleblowers called it "a public health policy only Dr. Strangelove could embrace."

As we noted right after Fukushima happened, this is standard operating procedure for government these days:

When the economy imploded in 2008, how did the government respond?

Did it crack down on fraud? Force bankrupt companies to admit that their speculative gambling with our money had failed? Rein in the funny business?

Of course not!

The government just helped cover up how bad things were, used claims of national security to keep everything in the dark, and changed basic rules and definitions to allow the game to continue.

See this, this, this and this.

When BP – through criminal negligence – blew out the Deepwater Horizon oil well, the government helped cover it up (the cover up is ongoing).

The government also changed the testing standards for seafood to pretend that higher levels of toxic PAHs in our food was business-as-usual.

So now that Japan is suffering the worst nuclear accident since Chernobyl – if not of all time – is the government riding to the rescue to help fix the problem, or at least to provide accurate information to its citizens so they can make informed decisions?

Of course not!

The EPA is closing ranks with the nuclear power industry

Indeed, some government scientists and media shills are now "reexamining" old studies that show that radioactive substances like plutonium cause cancer to argue that they help **prevent** cancer.

It is not just bubbleheads like Ann Coulter saying this. Government scientists from the Pacific Northwest National Laboratories and pro-nuclear hacks like Lawrence Solomon are saying this. [Update.]

In other words, this is a concerted propaganda campaign to cover up the severity of a major nuclear accident by raising acceptable levels of radiation and saying that a little radiation is good for us.

Any time the results of bad government policy is revealed, the government just covers it rather than changing the policy.

460,000 documents may become "special secrets"

November 30, 2014

Under new law, about 460,000 documents likely to be called 'special secrets'

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/11/30/national/politics-diplomacy/new-law-460000-documents-likely-called-special-secrets/#.VHuLF8l5Cos>

Kyodo

The government will likely designate around **460,000 documents as "special secrets" deemed highly sensitive in the areas of diplomacy, defense, counterterrorism and counterespionage** after a state

secrecy law takes effect on Dec. 10, a Kyodo News survey covering 19 government offices showed Sunday.

The documents are currently considered as highly confidential state secrets in the area of national security and diplomacy based on a 2007 government guideline, with the Cabinet Secretariat keeping the largest portion of around 353,000 items as of late last year.

Signaling the opaqueness of the new system aimed at toughening penalties on leakers of secrets, only three of the 19 government offices provided concrete answers regarding how much information they plan to label as “specially designated secrets” when the secrecy law takes effect.

Others said they are still “considering” the matter or “refraining from answering” just weeks before the entry into force of the controversial law that has triggered concern that the public’s right to know will be undermined.

But it is believed the 460,000 documents currently deemed highly confidential will be treated as special secrets under the new law.

Many offices did not answer questions on issues such as which section will be in charge of dealing with whistle-blowers who have suspicions about the arbitrary classification of state secrets by the government in violation of the secrecy law.

Kyodo News asked the 19 government offices in mid-November to respond to its questionnaire and received answers by Nov. 25.

In addition to the Cabinet Secretariat, the Foreign Ministry had 21,826 documents deemed as secrets requiring special control as of late last year, the Public Security Intelligence Agency had 15,292 documents and the National Police Agency had 13,951 documents.

The Defense Ministry, which has its own system to control secrets, kept about 45,000 documents categorized as secrets.

The Finance Ministry and the Financial Services Agency said they would not designate any documents as special secrets under the secrecy law on their own, as they would share such secrets designated by other government bodies through budgetary requests and other sessions.

The Cabinet Office said it might have one document related to defense issues that could be designated as a special secret.

Asked whether current secrets will be labeled as special secrets under the new law, the Foreign Ministry said it will “narrow down” the items and “newly add” other documents.

The Fire and Disaster Management Agency said “nearly all” the documents currently categorized as secrets will also be treated as secrets under the new system.

The Cabinet Office, meanwhile, said that it might add other information as special secrets.

Yukiko Miki, the head of nonprofit organization Access-Info Clearinghouse Japan, said she senses “excessive secretiveness” in the government offices as it is difficult to imagine that the contact point for whistle-blowers or other details have not yet been decided at this point.

“It makes me worry that the information disclosure level of each government office after the secrecy law takes effect might be very low. If information is not substantially disclosed, it is impossible to check whether the law is being implemented appropriately,” she said.

Fuk-hush-ima Law?

State Secrets Act to suppress Fukushima information

http://www.theecologist.org/News/news_round_up/2139614/state_secrets_act_to_suppress_fukushima_information.html

Oliver Tickell
30 October 2013

Japan's new State Secrets Act promises a fearful clampdown on journalist and whistle-blowers. Critics say its main purpose is to lock down information about Fukushima.

The Act is already being referred to by campaigners as the "Fuk-hush-ima Law

Japan's prime minister Shinzo Abe is planning a new State Secrets Act that could suppress publication and dissemination of information about the Fukushima nuclear disaster and other contentious issues.

A draft of the new law was approved by his cabinet last week and is likely to be passed in the current Parliamentary session, since Abe's Liberal Democratic Party-led bloc enjoys a big majority in both houses of parliament. Moreover the opposition is fragmented and disorganised.

The law would impose harsh penalties on those who leak secrets, or even try to obtain them. Journalists found to be breaking the law could be sent to prison for five years. Government employees releasing secret information could be imprisoned for a decade.

Media and legal experts also say the law is both broad and vague, giving the Japanese government enormous scope to determine what would actually qualify as a state secret. Furthermore the law makes no provision for any independent review process, leaving wide latitude for abuse.

"Basically, this bill raises the possibility that the kind of information about which the public should be informed is kept secret eternally," Tadaaki Muto, a lawyer and member of a task force on the bill at the Japan Federation of Bar

Associations, told Reuters. "Under the bill, the administrative branch can set the range of information that is kept secret at its own discretion."

The proposed law names four categories of 'special secrets', which would be covered by protection - defense, diplomacy, counter-terrorism and counter-espionage. It would also create a powerful new National Security Agency modelled on the US's NSA.

Critics of the Act believe that one of its main objectives could be to prevent the release of information relating to the ongoing nuclear catastrophe at Fukushima - reported today to have already cost as much as \$100 billion. The Act is already being referred to by campaigners as the "Fuk-hush-ima Law".

Industry ministry continued pushing nukes even right after 3/11

December 2, 2013

Ministry continued promoting nuclear power right after Fukushima accident

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201312020059>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The industry ministry began working to continue promoting nuclear power even immediately following the disastrous meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011, sources said.

The Asahi Shimbun has obtained a copy of **the ministry's confidential internal document titled, "Toward the Renaissance of Nuclear Energy,"** which was compiled in late March 2011.

The report was written by a senior ministry official familiar with nuclear power facilities and distributed to its executives involved in designing the country's energy policy, according to the sources.

The in-house document was used as a basis to determine the nation's future nuclear policy in the aftermath of the disaster triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, the sources said.

In the introduction, the ministry outlines the overall purpose of the report, saying "the stable supply of energy will be impossible without nuclear power," and that "the government will announce its decision to maintain the nuclear promotion policy."

The document also states in the introduction that Japan “will resuscitate nuclear energy, and rebuild the basis for promoting exports of infrastructure facilities,” indicating that the ministry would continue to advance nuclear power generation and further expand nuclear facilities exports.

Saying the success of nuclear power promotion would be the symbol of “the ministry’s revival,” the document gives the status of a key national policy to nuclear power advancement.

Regarding exports of nuclear plants, it promises that Japan “will analyze factors behind the current tragedy and share information with the world.”

Because the pro-nuclear Abe administration has said, “We will share our experience of the accident and lessons learned from the disaster with countries of the world,” the ministry’s report can be regarded as a prototype for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s nuclear policy.

The internal document consists of four chapters: emergent measures (to address the accident); declaration in an emergency situation; formation of a new nuclear watchdog agency; and the dismantlement of Tokyo Electric Power Co. and establishment of a new electricity supply business system.

Apparently, based on the report, the Nuclear Regulation Authority was established by the Democratic Party of Japan-led government.

The document also stipulates that nuclear plant operators would be allowed to bring their reactors back online when the reactors were deemed to meet new safety standards. All the nation’s 50 nuclear reactors have been taken offline in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster.

The idea was likely used as a basis for the course taken by the Abe administration as well as the DPJ-led government, which said they would approve the restarts of nuclear facilities that pass a screening by the NRA.

The NRA is currently screening reactors across the country, including ones at TEPCO’s Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata Prefecture, to assess if they meet its new safety standards.

Meanwhile, the ruling coalition is working to pass a contentious state secrets protection bill through the current Diet session, which ends Dec. 6, promising stiff prison sentences for those handling information designated as “specified secrets” who leak them.

Under the bill, specified secrets will cover four areas: defense; diplomacy; prevention of spying and other harmful activities; and prevention of terrorism.

Documents and other materials related to nuclear promotion, including the industry ministry's report that The Asahi Shimbun obtained, could be candidates to be classified as specified secrets if the bill becomes law.

If the bill is enacted, Japanese citizens may become unable to check the planning processes of government nuclear policies in the future.

1,700 skilled personnel in core divisions to leave TEPCO soon

December 3, 2013

Tepco expects 1,700 to quit by March

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/12/03/business/tepco-expects-1700-to-quit-by-march/#.Up30Yifj9k>

Kyodo

By the end of next March, Tokyo Electric Power Co. expects 1,700 workers will have taken voluntary retirement since the 2011 start of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant calamity, amid uncertain business prospects and pay cuts, according to Tepco documents.

Employees from the business strategy division at Tepco's head office as well as nuclear engineers account for around 40 percent of the retirees, raising fears that the loss of personnel could affect the utility's core activities.

By age, junior and midlevel employees younger than 40 years old make up around 70 percent of all retirees.

With annual salaries having been cut by 20 to 30 percent and uncertainty over the company's future, Tepco plans to include measures to improve the treatment of employees in a business turnaround plan it is currently revising.

According to the documents obtained Monday by Kyodo News, voluntary retirees jumped from 134 in fiscal 2010 to 465 in the year the nuclear crisis started.

The figure reached 712 in fiscal 2012 and Tepco estimates that around 560 will leave the company voluntarily in the current fiscal year through March 2014.

As part of its cost-cutting efforts, Tepco is seeking to reduce its workforce by 3,600 to 36,000 in two years from fiscal 2011 to fiscal 2013. Although the company is likely to meet this target, **it is losing skilled personnel in core divisions, which could further complicate its decommissioning work.**

Tepco needs massive funds to compensate people and companies affected by the nuclear crisis and to carry out the decades-long decommissioning of the Fukushima plant's crippled reactors.

"No place for such totalitarian-style legislation"

December 2, 2013

The politics of secrets

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/12/02/editorials/the-politics-of-secrets/#.Up42Pyfij9n>

The contentious bill for protection of state secrets — now under deliberation in the Upper House — even keeps secret what pieces of government information have been designated as special secrets and could punish people who try to obtain them, even if they are not aware that the information they seek has been given such a designation. There is no place for such totalitarian-style legislation, which threatens press freedoms and the people's right to know, in democratic Japan.

Under the bill, officials who handle designated secrets can be punished by up to 10 years in prison for leaking them. People who "conspire," "incite" or "instigate" in the leaking of designated secrets can be sentenced to up to five years in prison — even if the secrets in fact have not been leaked to them.

The bill can be read to mean that citizens — including journalists and members of civic groups, for example — could be punished for trying to access government-designated secrets even if it is done in a casual manner. They could be accused of "conspiracy" for discussing approaching government officials for pieces of information that happened to have been designated as special secrets, or "incitement" for just

asking officials to release such information. Even if they have no way of knowing beforehand whether the information they're seeking is a designated secret.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe repeatedly brushed aside concerns that the bill will restrict the people's right to know. But when it actually goes into force, the threat of such heavy penalties alone could be enough to discourage efforts by people to find out what their government is doing.

Masako Mori, state minister in charge of the legislation, told an Upper House committee session that the government would consider creating a code of conduct between government officials and journalists. She then retracted the statement a day later, saying that such an act could discourage reporting activities by media organizations. But later in the same day she returned to the original position over the matter.

This and many other flip-flops in government explanations regarding the bill suggest that the government itself has no clear idea about what kinds of relevant concrete measures it plans to take in accordance with the legislation.

People's concern that their right to know could be undermined is evident in the unanimous opposition to the bill expressed by participants in the Nov. 25 public hearing held in the city of Fukushima. Seven officials and experts invited by both the ruling coalition and the opposition camp were speaking on the basis of their experience in the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

Mayor Tamotsu Baba of the town of Namie, picked by the Liberal Democratic Party to speak at the hearing, pointed out that the scope of information to be designated as special secrets is too wide and too vague. On the basis of the experience that many local people were exposed to low-level radiation because the government did not promptly disclose a prediction by SPEEDI (System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information) after the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, Baba expressed distrust toward the government's inclination to conceal a wide range of information from the public.

Both Baba and Hiroyasu Maki, vice president of the Fukushima Prefectural Bar Association, invited by the Democratic Party of Japan, expressed a fear that the government will hide more information about nuclear power plants. Maki said that once the bill is enacted, the scope of government secrets will expand due to bureaucrats' arbitrary interpretation and application, and that information on such matters as damage to tanks containing radioactive water from the crippled nuclear power plant may be hidden.

A reply by an LDP lawmaker present that nuclear power plants will not be subject to the application of the bill was not convincing. Both Baba and Maki pointed out that the government can hide information concerning nuclear power plants by justifying the act as necessary for the sake of counterterrorism.

Yukiteru Naka, chairman of Tohoku Enterprise Co., picked by Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party), said that people have the right to know correct information about the safety of nuclear power plants. He said that it is important to allow the existence of whistle-blowers, apparently referring to the lack of a provision in the bill to protect whistle-blowers. The statements by these three people are much more convincing than the explanations by the LDP lawmaker.

Mitsugi Araki, a lawyer, picked by the Japan Communist Party, pointed out that it is impossible for people to know what information has been designated as special secrets and that they may be punished for unknowingly seeking or leaking such secrets. He said that this would "terrorize" people and have the effect of restricting their various activities.

Nobuyoshi Hatanaka, a specially appointed professor at Iwaki Junior College, picked by New Komeito, said that it is impossible to promote people's public interests if they are prohibited from access to government-held information even though security and diplomacy are matters to be handled by the government.

These people convincingly demonstrated the grave problems inherent in the secrecy bill.

As if to ignore the fears expressed by these people about the bill, the LDP, New Komeito and Your Party rammed the bill through the Lower House on the night of the following day. After the bill reached the floor of the Upper House, Abe has again said that the secrecy bill has “layers of devices” to prevent arbitrarily designation of government information as special secrets. But it is clear that the bill does not have such mechanisms.

The bill would solidify control and monopoly of government information by the administrative branch — and in concrete terms by bureaucrats — without independent oversight.

A revision made to the bill calls on the government to “consider” a third-party mechanism to examine the validity of the classification process, but government officials indicate that such an organ would be set up within the government organization. It is clear from the government’s explanations so far that such an organ would only do perfunctory examinations and would not examine the content of designated secrets. In the Upper House interpellation, lawmakers — whether they are from the ruling or opposition bloc — must expose the dangerous nature of the bill and do their utmost to kill it.

Bent on starting again, yet "independent and critical"?

December 4, 2013

Team of int'l experts to advise on safety culture at TEPCO

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131204p2g00m0dm060000c.html>

LONDON (Kyodo) -- An international taskforce of nuclear experts will start meeting in January to advise Tokyo Electric Power Co. on safety issues, according to Barbara Judge, who has been called in by the Japanese utility to draw up a new culture and standards.

Judge, former chairwoman of Britain's Atomic Energy Authority, is currently assembling a team of six experts who will gather about four times a year to assess plans by the utility, known as TEPCO, to improve the safety culture at its plants.

Judge was appointed by TEPCO following criticism of the company's attitude to safety in the aftermath of the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in 2011.

Three reactors suffered core meltdowns after cooling systems were left without power following the huge earthquake and tsunami in northeastern Japan.

Judge has already established an office within the company to oversee working practices led by a former colleague from Britain. This newly created body of international experts will review the work of this office and provide best practice from all over the world.

"This taskforce will be a way to give the Japanese and TEPCO the benefit of international expertise on the specific issue of safety which is what they need in order to reopen the plants," Judge told Kyodo News.

"No one country can ever have enough experience...it needs cooperation and collaboration," she said.

Judge is the deputy chairwoman of an advisory committee of outside experts set up by TEPCO. The body is led by former U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chairman Dale Klein.

Judge, a lawyer who has also worked in banking, has been visiting Japan since the 1980s and says she feels "honored" to have been given this role.

She says safety must now be an absolute priority for everyone working at TEPCO and staff should be actively praised for raising any worries relating to safety.

"Our goal is to have the best safety culture in the world. We know the Japanese can do it," said Judge.

Previously she had been critical about the pace and quality of reforms at TEPCO, but now feels the company is now "doing a good job" and is genuinely committed to cleaning up its act.

"If I thought they were paying lip-service to what I was suggesting and the Nuclear Safety Oversight Office (the in-house regulator set up by Judge), I wouldn't be wasting my time. We (Klein and Judge) feel it's our job to be independent and critical," she said.

Judge believes that despite recent setbacks nuclear energy is essential to revitalize Japan's economy.

"At the moment Japan is buying liquefied natural gas (LNG) at the highest price in the world and I don't think, even with wind, sun and LNG, that enough power will be generated to bring the economy back to where it should be," she said.

She feels TEPCO should be allowed to restart the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata Prefecture as long as it meets all the requirements laid down by the new regulator.

Judge argues that as well as safety, TEPCO needs to improve its public relations.

"It's important for TEPCO and other producers to start communicating with the public about what goes on in the plants and talk about the benefits and detriments in an even-handed fashion," she said.

Judge says TEPCO's public communications are getting better and she would like to see the utility create visitor centers at reactor sites in order to increase awareness.

TEPCO has also been criticized for delays in informing the public about leaks of radioactive material into the ocean.

Work is currently under way at the Fukushima Daiichi plant to remove assemblies from the spent fuel pool in the No. 4 reactor building. It is expected to take up to 40 years to decommission the plant.

Journalists worried about Secrets bill

December 4, 2013

Foreign journalists in Japan raise concerns over state secrets protection bill

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201312040056

By MASATO TAINAKA/ Staff Writer

Foreign journalists in Japan say the state secrets protection bill that the Abe administration is trying to push through the Diet before the current session ends on Dec. 6 will only make their already difficult jobs that much harder.

David McNeill, 48, a Tokyo correspondent for the British newspaper The Independent, predicts that the anonymity prevalent in Japan's bureaucracy that is already quite secretive will only broaden.

When Japanese bureaucrats accept interviews, they often attach a condition that they are not to be identified in stories. McNeill thinks they may become even more reluctant to speak on the record if the bill is passed.

“After the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant (in March 2011), a lot of us tried to find workers inside the power plant. Now if we interview those people, maybe we could be breaking the law,” he said.

Another journalist questioning the legislation is Jake Adelstein, 44, a Tokyo correspondent with the U.S. online magazine The Daily Beast, whose investigative reports have covered issues involving police and financial scandals.

“The state secrets protection bill aims to crush investigative reporting,” he said.

Adelstein cited the fact that information disclosure in Japan is slow and that the bill has yet to make it clear whether a third-party organization tasked with determining whether designations of secrets are appropriate will actually be established.

“Some foreign investors are saying that they will stop investing in Japanese markets. In a country where freedom of the press is not established, the risk (of investment) is high because it is difficult to obtain objective economic information,” he said.

Meanwhile, German freelance journalist Siegfried Knittel, 68, said both Germany and Japan are U.S. allies. But the difference, he said, is that Germany openly criticizes U.S. policy where Japan is less likely to do so. Underlying Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s rush to pass the bill is Japan’s eagerness to please the United States, he argued.

Knittel said Abe was supposed to promote policymaking initiated by lawmakers instead of powerful bureaucrats. At present, however, Abe is hastening to pass the “bill to strengthen bureaucrats’ powers,” he said.

All experts at Diet hearing worried about Secrets bill

December 4, 2013

Experts voice concern over secrecy bill at Diet hearing

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131204p2g00m0dm015000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- All of the experts invited to appear at a Diet hearing on Tuesday expressed concern about controversial legislation to toughen penalties for leakers of state secrets that the ruling bloc is aiming to enact this week.

Lawyer Yoichi Eto of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations, who has been analyzing the bill, called for the secrecy bill to be scrapped during his appearance as an unsworn witness in the session of the upper house's security committee, saying the bill could be "used for the suppression of free speech and for political suppression."

Referring to the "special secrets" of the state concerning counterterrorism, diplomacy, defense and counterespionage that the bill targets, Eto said, "While it may be necessary to protect special secrets in terms of security, the beneficiary of security should be the people," calling for the highest priority to be placed on respecting the people's right to know.

Toshiaki Hibino, the head of the Japan Federation of Newspaper Workers' Unions, also said the bill should be scrapped, noting that public servants who have been providing information to journalists will be intimidated and certainly stop passing on information that the public should know.

Toshio Seya, former head of the Regional Banks Association of Japan, acknowledged the necessity of the bill but expressed concern about the possibility that private individuals will be punished under the envisioned law, calling for careful deliberations.

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party and its coalition ally the New Komeito party pushed the bill through the lower house last week and now plan to have it clear the upper house by Friday, the end of the current Diet session.

Eto and Hibino were recommended as witnesses by opposition parties, while Seya was recommended by the ruling coalition.

28 billion dollars investment plan for TEPCO

December 5, 2013

TEPCO prepares \$28 billion investment plan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131205_26.html

Tokyo Electric Power Company is planning to spend about 28 billion dollars over 10 years to improve its business performance.

The utility needs to increase profits in the wake of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster to pay for the plant's decommissioning and compensate those affected.

The firm's new investment plan says it will rebuild and modernize thermal power plants more than 40 years old, mainly in the Tokyo Bay area.

The utility hopes to raise the thermal plants' efficiency, as it is expected to have to reduce its dependence on nuclear power.

And it plans to build facilities to handle shale gas imported from North America. The low-priced gas is expected to cut costs.

TEPCO will also invest in overseas gas development projects.

The investment plan is to be finalized this month.

Ishiba has not changed in mind on "terrorism"

December 4, 2013

Ishiba validates secrecy bill fears

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/12/04/editorials/ishiba-validates-secrecy-bill-fears/#.UqCpYifij9k>

On Nov. 29, Liberal Democratic Party Secretary-General Shigeru Ishiba criticized public demonstrations near the Diet building by those opposed to the state secrets bill. "I believe the tactics of simply shouting (opinions) at the top of one's voice seems not so different from an act of terrorism in essence," he wrote in his blog of that date.

In the apology and "correction" that he issued Dec. 2, Ishiba crossed out the phrase "not so different from an act of terrorism" in a manner that left it legible and added "different from the way a democratic method should be." Obviously Ishiba intended his blog readership to understand that his original sentiment remained intact.

This episode shows that the LDP's No. 2 official fails to understand the importance of protests and demonstrations as a fundamental democratic means for citizens to express their opinions and demands as guaranteed by Article 21 of the Constitution, which in part says, "Freedom of assembly and association as well as speech, press and all other forms of expression are guaranteed."

Ishiba's statement also has rekindled concerns over the definition of terrorism in the secrecy bill. The fear that the bill could be used to silence citizens who express political opinions or demands is clearly not groundless. Ishiba's reaction to the demonstrations brought into sharp relief the danger of the bill and validated the fears of the bill's opponents.

In specifying a procedure to qualify people for handling designated secrets, Article 12 of the bill provides for the examination of whether a person under consideration is linked to "designated harmful activities," including spying, or has links to "terrorism." The article's definition of terrorism includes the following phrase: activities that force political and other principles or opinions on the state and other people. This is far more encompassing than the widely accepted definition of terrorism: The systematic use of violence to create a general climate of fear in a population and thereby to bring about a particular political objective.

Under the government's definition, it cannot be ruled out that state authorities would regard political, civic and other activities by citizens aimed at persuading the government and other organizations or people to consider opposing opinions or demands as acts of terrorism. It also suggests that the state would not hesitate to monitor, investigate or suppress their activities, even before such activities become public. And since information related to anti-terrorism activities may be designated as special secrets under the bill, such moves by the police and other government organizations would largely be shielded from scrutiny. Moreover, if someone learns of such actions by the state and leaks this information to others, they could face arrest.

All of this suggests that freedom of thought and conscience as guaranteed by Article 19 of the Constitution will be in grave danger if the secrecy bill becomes law. The secrecy bill could give rise to a society in which citizens must live in constant fear that they could be placed under surveillance by the state at any time. While the secrecy bill has many flaws, the existence of Article 12 alone is sufficient reason to kill it.

Japan should not sign Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage

December 4, 2013

Japan should shun treaty that will shield nuclear tech suppliers

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2013/12/04/voices/japan-should-shun-treaty-that-will-shield-nuclear-tech-suppliers/#.UqCFkyfij9k>

Dear Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida,

Although you are probably unaware, longtime readers of The Japan Times may recall that in April 2011, I sent an open letter to then Prime Minister Naoto Kan (“Who pays for nuclear nightmare?” Hotline to Nagata-cho, April 19, 2011) asking about who was going to pay for the massive costs resulting from the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

This question was prompted in part by the existence of documents revealing that as early as November 1971, officials at the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) expressed concern about design flaws in General Electric’s Mark I nuclear reactors. All of the reactors that experienced meltdowns at Fukushima No. 1 were of this type.

In fact, in a memo dated Sept. 25, 1972, the top safety official at the AEC, Joseph Hendrie, agreed that elements of the General Electric (GE) reactor design could contribute to a core meltdown in the event of an accident. However, he refused to take action because doing so “could well mean the end of nuclear power.”

Further, by 1976, three GE nuclear engineers became so concerned about the dangerous shortcomings of the GE design that they resigned their highly paid positions in protest and testified about the reasons they had done so before the U.S. Congress. Yet no substantive corrective action was taken.

While this may now seem like old news, the question of who is going to pay for the massive and ever-growing cost associated with the 30-to-40-year-plus cleanup and associated compensatory damages has yet to be finalized, beyond ad hoc financial assistance dished out to Tepco by the Japanese government — i.e., ultimately by taxpayers in Japan, both Japanese and foreign.

The question now is whether this is fair in the face of possible financial liability on the part of GE, especially since the company built part of the Fukushima No. 1 complex as a turnkey operation. GE was also involved in shaving down the 35-meter-high cliff at the plant’s construction site to only 10 meters above sea level, thereby greatly increasing the plant’s vulnerability to tsunami.

Is GE financially liable for its part in the Fukushima No. 1 disaster? No one can answer that question until a thorough investigation of the relevant facts and applicable laws has been undertaken. Yet such an investigation has not been conducted either in Japan or anywhere else. Why not?

What gives this question particular urgency are recent news reports that **Japan is now preparing to sign a treaty known as the Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage. This treaty assigns accident liability *entirely to plant operators* rather than equipment and technology vendors.**

At the moment, this treaty is not yet legally binding inasmuch as it requires a total of five countries to ratify it. At present only four nations have done so: the U.S., Romania, Morocco and Argentina. Thus, if Japan ratifies this treaty, it will, as the fifth nation, bring this treaty into force.

On Nov. 1, Kyodo News reported that you, Foreign Minister Kishida, intend to ask the Diet to ratify this treaty early next year. Ratification would appear to make examination of GE’s responsibility for the Fukushima disaster moot since, moving forward, Japan will be unable to hold GE or any other domestic or foreign nuclear equipment vendor financially liable, no matter how defective or dangerous the equipment they installed is. This is of special concern inasmuch as Japan currently has an additional 23 boiling water reactors of similar design to those in service at Fukushima No. 1.

I am aware there is a positive side to this treaty, i.e., that U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz recently promised assistance with the cleanup at Fukushima No. 1 once Japan ratifies the treaty. Yet, could the U.S. afford to be seen to be *withholding* technical assistance to Japan when the Pacific Ocean, the common resource of both nations, continues to serve as a sewer for Fukushima’s radioactively contaminated water?

But the real question, Foreign Minister Kishida, is this: As someone who is responsible for protecting Japan's national interest, is it fair to taxpayers in Japan to be saddled either directly or indirectly with the massive costs of the Fukushima cleanup for a generation or more when there is good reason to believe that GE is legally liable for at least a portion of that cost?

As someone deeply attached to this country and its people, I appeal to you to postpone introducing this treaty to the Diet for ratification until the question of GE's financial responsibility for the ongoing disaster has been clarified.

BRIAN VICTORIA

Kyoto

Japan needs independent watchdog to gain public's trust

December 7, 2013

INTERVIEW/ Peter Bradford: Independent watchdog needed to monitor Fukushima work

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/opinion/AJ201312070014>

By SHIRO NAMEKATA/ Correspondent

PERU, Vermont--An independent watchdog should oversee the daunting task of decommissioning the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and combating the contaminated water problem, a former member of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission said.

Although Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government plans to increase its involvement in the efforts at the plant, outside experts are needed because plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. and members of the "nuclear village" have already lost the public's confidence, said Peter Bradford, a nuclear expert with experience in dealing with the 1979 Three Mile Island accident.

In a recent interview with The Asahi Shimbun, Bradford also said an important task of Japan's nuclear authority is to listen to the voices of those affected by the disaster and to get the public involved in the decision-making process.

Excerpts from the interview follow.

Question: How do you evaluate the contaminated water problem at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant?

Bradford: For anyone with a background in nuclear power and nuclear regulation, it is impossible not to be sympathetic, first toward the people in Japan, but also toward the officials and the people in TEPCO who are trying to deal with these conditions because there has been nothing like it in the nuclear industry elsewhere.

The Three Mile Island accident was just one reactor and did not involve substantial issues with the water. Chernobyl was a much worse accident but still just one reactor and did not present the kind of long-term cooling issues that Fukushima does.

There just aren't the same kinds of groundwater issues. The situation in Japan is unique, and there aren't a lot of easy answers.

One thing that seems to be different in Japan, from the way we would approach a serious nuclear accident in the U.S. system, is that much more has been left to TEPCO to do, whereas during the Three Mile Island accident--and I am sure it would be true in any other one as well--the Nuclear Regulatory Commission became very much involved in the accident management process.

The private company had to notify NRC with regard to any release of radioactivity and get permission for releases of radiation to the air or to the water.

NRC had representatives at the reactor site from the beginning of the accident, and then sent many more people afterward. It became the primary focus of the commission for two years after the accident.

My impression is that Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority is being asked to spend a lot of its time--maybe most of its time--on the question of reopening the other 50 reactors, and it has been less involved in the management of the accident.

Q: There is an argument in Japan that the NRA's main task is to keep nuclear power plants safe, and that it should not deal with the contaminated water problem because it does not have enough expertise in such areas as hydrology or geology.

A: A nuclear regulatory authority does not normally expect to have to deal with these complicated hydrology or geology questions, but if this were in the United States, either NRC or the Department of Energy, they would hire the people that they needed for expertise.

Their expertise was being brought to bear on the problem, with some independence from the company responsible for the accident. That way they are not involved in issues relating to accident cost liability.

The public is inevitably going to be skeptical of TEPCO because it is the company that caused the accident. The same thing happened at Three Mile Island.

TEPCO has begun to bring in people from other countries, but these are still “nuclear village” people. They’re just international nuclear village instead of Japanese nuclear village.

Q: Did NRC provide technical assistance following the Three Mile Island accident?

A: Most of the technical assistance came either from the rest of the nuclear industry, which convened their own response centers, or from our national laboratories, which are technically part of the Department of Energy, because they have a much greater research capability.

But the decisions as to what the licensee--the plant owner--was permitted to do were made by NRC, drawing on the expertise of whoever we needed to have involved.

Also, the process of explaining to the public what was being done, and giving the public an opportunity to participate in decision-making through hearings, was all done by NRC.

If the public had a substantial concern about a proposed activity, they would take it to NRC, to be involved through the hearing process, and the committee could reflect it in whatever decisions we had to make.

After Three Mile Island, a number of groups were formed in the area that were concerned about the cleanup or were concerned about allowing the second nuclear plant to resume operations, and they raised a number of different types of concerns, ranging from technical issues to issues like psychological stress on residents.

NRC agreed to hold public hearings mostly on the subject of restarting the second unit. But some had to do with aspects of the cleanup of the damaged plant. These hearings became a vehicle for these groups to be able to continually raise their concerns about what was happening at the site.

In the three months after the accident, I probably went to the site or just to people’s homes in the area for about 10 times. I would just get in my car and drive 2-1/2 hours up to there from Washington, D.C.

Q: Was it a mission of NRC to explain the situation to the public?

A: Before the accident, NRC had assured the public that nuclear power was safe, and then we had an accident. It was most important just to go and hear what their feelings were. It seemed to make a lot of difference to these people, some of whom were very angry.

There was an evacuation that only lasted five days. It was nothing like what has happened in Fukushima, but it was very upsetting especially to parents with young children.

They wanted reassurance as to whether it was safe to go on living there. But mainly, they just wanted somebody from Washington to listen, just to feel that their views and their experiences mattered.

On one occasion, the licensee needed to release a quantity of radioactive krypton gas from the containment into the atmosphere two or three months after the accident.

The public, like the fishermen at Fukushima, did not want any more radiation. But it was necessary to get the radiation levels in the containment down enough so that workmen could begin to actually work on the reactor levels--the same kind of discussion you have now about the water.

We asked the nongovernmental organization Union of Concerned Scientists to review the activity and make a report of their own. They had credibility with the public that certainly the licensee company and probably the government did not have.

When the group said it was a reasonable thing to do, it was very helpful in reassuring the public that that release would be acceptable.

I don't have the impression that anyone has asked independent groups to review any of the activities at the Fukushima plant. It might help to sort through which activities with the contaminated water are reasonable and which ones pose some danger.

And there is no reason to think that the public is going to be any more reassured by them than they would be by a TEPCO employee or a government employee. **You really have to be willing to involve people who have been skeptical about nuclear power if you expect to expand the public credibility.**

Peter Bradford, born in 1942, served as a member of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission between 1977 and 1982. He is currently an adjunct professor at Vermont Law School and senior fellow at the school's Institute for Energy and the Environment.

By SHIRO NAMEKATA/ Correspondent

TEPCO will try to sell power outside usual service areas

December 4, 2013

TEPCO plans to sell power outside its home turf

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/economy/business/AJ201312040052>

By MARI FUJISAKI/ Staff Writer

Tokyo Electric Power Co. plans to enter the turfs of other electricity suppliers in fiscal 2014, a move that could lead to full-scale competition in an industry long monopolized by regional utilities, sources said.

The success of TEPCO's plan, however, depends on whether the operator of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant gains approval to restart reactors in Niigata Prefecture.

TEPCO plans to first sell electricity to corporate users outside its usual Kanto service areas, and then to individual households when the government fully liberalizes the electricity retailing business in fiscal 2016, the sources said.

The policy will be included in TEPCO's revised rehabilitation plan due before the end of the year, according to the sources.

With TEPCO's operations encumbered by the 2011 Fukushima accident, other regional utilities are entering the market in the Tokyo metropolitan area, TEPCO's prime territory.

In October, Chubu Electric Power Co. acquired an 80-percent stake in Diamond Power Corp., an electricity retailing subsidiary of trading house Mitsubishi Corp., and began selling power in the capital and other areas.

Kansai Electric Power Co. also plans to sell electricity in the Tokyo area starting in spring 2014.

TEPCO's electricity rates are the highest among the nine major regional utilities, excluding Okinawa Electric Power Co. The company will likely be **forced to lower rates and take other measures to compete.**

According to its rehabilitation plan, TEPCO plans to lower its electricity rates after it restarts two idle reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture in summer 2014.

But before that can happen, the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant will have to pass the Nuclear Regulation Authority's new safety standards.

In addition, many in the general public oppose TEPCO's reactor restart plan.

If TEPCO's nuclear reactors cannot resume operations, the company will have only a limited amount of electricity to sell outside its service areas.

TEPCO chairman to retire soon

December 6, 2013-12-06

Tepco chairman reportedly to retire next June

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/12/06/national/tepcO-chairman-reportedly-to-retire-next-june/#.UqGgNyfij9k>

JJI

Tokyo Electric Power Co. Chairman Kazuhiko Shimokobe plans to step aside after a general shareholders' meeting next June, sources said Friday.

Shimokobe believes that Tepco can pave the way for its business reconstruction after the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant with the planned adoption of a revised special business program by the end of this month, sources said.

Tepco's management and the government are expected to ask Shimokobe to stay on. At the same time, they will look for his successor, but that would appear to be difficult, according to the sources.

Shimokobe, **former head of the steering committee of the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund**, a public-private body helping Tepco with compensation payments, played a leading role in the utility's rationalization.

He became Tepco chairman in June 2012, succeed Tsunehisa Katsumata.

Shimokobe, who registered as a lawyer in 1974, took the post of vice president of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations in 2007.

A way of "making investigative journalism illegal"

Source : The Guardian

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/05/whistleblowers-japan-crackdown-state-secrets>

Japan whistleblowers face crackdown under proposed state secrets law

Officials who leak 'special state secrets' and journalists who seek to obtain them could face prison if bill is approved this week

- theguardian.com, Thursday 5 December 2013 15.14 GMT

Whistleblowers and journalists in Japan could soon find themselves facing long spells in prison for divulging and reporting state secrets, possibly including sensitive information about the Fukushima nuclear disaster and the country's souring relations with China.

Under a special state secrets bill expected to pass on Friday, public officials and private citizens who leak "special state secrets" face prison terms of up to 10 years, while journalists who seek to obtain the classified information could get up to five years.

Critics of the new law say it marks a return to the days of prewar and wartime Japanese militarism, when the state used the Peace Preservation Act to arrest and imprison political opponents.

"It is a threat to democracy," said Keiichi Kiriya, an editorial writer for the Tokyo Shimbun newspaper, adding that the legislation would "have a chilling effect on public servants, who could become wary about giving the information" to journalists.

In the aftermath of the Edward Snowden leaks, Japan has come under pressure from Washington to better protect state secrets – including intelligence shared by the US – at a time of rising regional tensions.

Japan's prime minister, Shinzo Abe, says the law is crucial if his US-style national security council, approved this week, is to function properly.

The law is seen as part of his conservative project to bolster Japan's security in response to escalating tensions with China and concern over North Korea's nuclear weapons programme.

Abe, who does not have to fight an election for another three years, is expected to push ahead with his nationalist agenda, including constitutional reforms that would end the military's purely defensive role.

The secrecy bill's hasty passage through the lower house has been marked by noisy public demonstrations and opposition from journalists, lawyers, politicians, academics and scientists, as well as film directors and manga artists concerned about freedom of expression.

They say the prospect of prison terms will deter whistleblowers from leaking sensitive or embarrassing information in the public interest, and journalists from trying to obtain it.

The upper house of Japan's parliament is expected to approve the bill before the end of the current parliamentary session on Friday, possibly later on Thursday.

The chief criticism of the bill is its vague definition of what constitutes a state secret, potentially giving officials carte blanche to block the release of information on a vast range of subjects, including measures to counterbalance China's growing military influence in the region, and the safety of the country's nuclear reactors.

"There are few specifics in the law, which means it can be used to hide whatever the government wishes to keep away from public scrutiny," said Mizuho Fukushima, an opposition MP.

"In its current form, the prime minister can decide by himself what constitutes a secret."

The law would apply to four areas – defence, diplomacy, counter-terrorism and counter-espionage – and gives officials the power to keep sensitive information out of the public domain indefinitely.

Senior politicians insist the law will not be used to gag the press or restrict the public's right to know.

But the justice minister, Sadakazu Tanigaki, refused to rule out police raids of newspapers suspected of breaking the law.

Masako Mori, the state minister in charge of the bill, said the law could be applied to Japan's nuclear power industry, because it is a potential target for terrorists. But she denied the legislation would affect the release of information about radiation leaks at Fukushima Daiichi.

Last week, the secretary general of the governing Liberal Democratic party, Shigeru Ishiba, angered many when he likened people protesting against the bill to terrorists. He later apologised for the remarks.

"There is a demand by the established political forces for greater control over the people," said Lawrence Repeta, a law professor at Meiji University. "This fits with the notion that the state should have broad authority to act in secret. It seems very clear that the law would have a chilling effect on journalism in Japan."

Widespread opposition to the law is testing Abe's popularity. A recent poll by the Asahi Shimbun newspaper found public support for Abe has dropped to below 50% for the first time since he took office last December. More than 60% of those polled expressed concern that the bill was being rushed into law.

In response, Abe this week attempted to dismiss claims that officials would abuse the law to prevent the disclosure of information that is in the public interest. "There is a misunderstanding," he said. "It is obvious that normal reporting activity of journalists must not be a subject to punishment."

Abe said the government would set clearer definitions of state secrets and appoint a third party to oversee possible violations. Critics point out that the proposed body, comprising senior officials from the foreign and defence ministries and the national police agency, is far from independent.

"What we need is a third party, not a quasi-third-party system that can check," said Banri Kaieda, leader of the main opposition Democratic party of Japan. "I can say with certainty now that the bill is created by bureaucrats for the bureaucrats to hide information."

The prospect of harsh penalties for Snowden-style whistleblowers and their reporter associates has prompted concern outside Japan. Reporters Without Borders accused Japan of "making investigative journalism illegal".

It said in a statement: "How can the government respond to growing demands for transparency from a public outraged by the consequences of the Fukushima nuclear accident if it enacts a law that gives it a free hand to classify any information considered too sensitive as a state secret?"

Navi Pillay, the UN high commissioner for human rights, accused Japan's government of imposing the legislation with little public debate. "They should not rush through the law without first putting in proper safeguards for access of information and freedom of expression as guaranteed in Japan's constitution and international human rights law," she said.

The law reflects a decline in Japan's standing as a protector of the free press. In the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index for 2013, it dropped 31 places from 2012 to a new low of 53rd out of 179 countries.

Abe's promises "not safeguards"

December 10, 2013

ANALYSIS: Abe offers reassurances, not safeguards, on state secrets law

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201312100055

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Dec. 9 promised citizens that their lives will not be affected by the state secrets protection law, but he failed to explain how this will be achieved.

Instead of announcing safeguards against possible abuse, Abe essentially asked the public to place trust in himself, the government and bureaucrats to do the right thing.

"Ordinary lives of people will never be threatened," Abe told a news conference at the prime minister's office in Tokyo, a day after the extraordinary Diet session ended. "The existing scope of secrets will not be expanded."

Abe mentioned media reports that said private citizens could face severe punishment by blogging about stories they hear from their friends, and that free creative activities, such as filmmaking, will be limited.

"But such things will never happen," Abe said.

The law was enacted last week amid widespread protests from the public and opposition lawmakers that its vague wording could lead to arbitrary designations of state secrets of any information. Criticism was also lodged at the lack of any independent organization to oversee whether the designations are appropriate.

Abe acknowledged that his efforts to win public support for the bill were lacking.

"I think I should have taken more time to provide more detailed explanations," Abe said. "From now on, I will explain carefully to erase people's concerns."

The prime minister and the ruling coalition were criticized as ignoring public opinion in their determination to railroad the bill through the Diet.

Abe said that move was needed for the good of Japan.

"It was necessary to enact (the law) as soon as possible, along with establishing the national security council, so that we can protect the lives and property of our citizens," Abe said.

The state secrets protection law covers four areas: defense; diplomacy; prevention of spying and other harmful activities; and prevention of terrorism. Its purpose, ruling coalition officials say, is to prevent leaks of information that could jeopardize Japan's national security.

“There have been no rules on how to handle specified secrets so far,” Abe explained.

The prime minister said the security situation surrounding Japan has become increasingly severe, referring to China’s new air defense identification zone that covers skies above the disputed Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea.

“If we failed to establish rules to manage secret information, we would not be able to gain information from foreign countries,” Abe said.

Abe added that rules will also be set for the disposal of classified information, pointing to ambiguities in the actions of the previous government led by the Democratic Party of Japan.

“The DPJ-led government disposed of 30,000 defense secrets in only three years,” Abe said. “It remains unknown why those secrets were discarded and who was responsible for that.”

The prime minister said the state secrets protection law “will dramatically enhance transparency and make clear the responsibility.”

However, Abe did not offer any new measures on how to ensure transparency, a key sticking point in arguments against the law.

The Abe administration has vowed to set up monitoring bodies to check the appropriateness of state secret designations. But those organizations will be established within the government, and bureaucrats--the same people with the power to designate state secrets--are expected to play a central role.

The prime minister also did not touch upon how much information will be kept secret after the law takes effect and for how long.

In addition, he did not explain how those authorized to handle state secrets will be selected and did not address the concerns about invasions of privacy in the process.

The new legislation stipulates that people in the private sector who leak state secrets could face up to 10 years in prison.

For private sector people allowed to manage state secrets, governmental agencies will be allowed to delve into their personal information, including drinking habits, loans and family members’ nationalities, after obtaining their consent.

Abe said he will make sure everything is on the up and up.

“The prime minister will be obligated to report to an information preservation advisory panel about (newly designated) specified secrets at least once a year, and the advisory panel will present its opinion to the Diet,” he said.

But under the law, even this advisory panel will not be allowed to investigate individual state secret designations.

The same day, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato said it will be difficult to allow a body completely independent from the government to check the appropriateness of state secret designations.

“Political value judgments will be inevitably necessary,” Kato said on a TV program. “The government of the moment will make decisions from the perspective of national security.”

Although the legislation states that the new law will go into effect within a year, Abe did not give a definitive timeframe.

“I hope to enforce it at an appropriate time, after providing sufficient explanations,” he said.

Nukes need TWO panels

December 10, 2013

Abe wants ministerial panels for nuclear issues

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131210_30.html

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has instructed his Cabinet ministers to set up ministerial panels to address policies on nuclear power and highly radioactive nuclear waste.

Abe spoke to the ministers on Tuesday about Japan's new basic energy policy, which he hopes the Cabinet will approve in January.

The prime minister wants one group of relevant ministers to address nuclear power policies that are necessary to establish responsible measures for energy production.

Abe wants another ministerial panel to deal with highly radioactive nuclear waste, which is created during operations at nuclear power plants.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters after the Cabinet meeting that Japan's energy supply has become a very significant issue after the nuclear accident in Fukushima.

Suga said it's important that all members of the government become involved and take the initiative. He added that the government is especially determined to take the lead in dealing with highly radioactive nuclear waste.

State secrets regulation, conspiracy, etc.

Ishiba says media reports on state secrets should be regulated

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201312120043

December 12, 2013

By SACHIKO MIWA/ Staff Writer

A ruling party executive suggested that media coverage of state secrets specified under new legislation should be regulated, contradicting the prime minister's assurances that the public's right to know will not be compromised.

Shigeru Ishiba, secretary-general of the Liberal Democratic Party, also told the Japan National Press Club on Dec. 11 that those who reported specified secrets could be punished.

“I think the act (of reporting specified secrets) will be kept in check in one way or another if our nation’s safety is put at great risk,” he said. “It will be eventually up to judicial judgment (whether those who reported them should be punished).”

The ruling coalition of the LDP and New Komeito railroaded the legislation, which toughens penalties against public servants and others for leaking secrets that could jeopardize Japan’s national security, through the Diet on Dec. 6.

Ishiba effectively retracted his comments later in the day, but the remarks revealed not only his ignorance of the law’s provisions, but also his intention to put protection of government secrets before the public’s right to know.

Article 22 of the state secrets protection law says: “Due consideration should be given to freedom of reporting and news gathering that contribute to the guarantee of the people’s right to know.”

The Abe administration added the clause in response to criticism that the legislation could infringe on the public’s right to know by intimidating whistle-blowers and journalists.

At a news conference days after the law was enacted, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe attempted to dispel deep-rooted concerns by emphasizing that the public will not be deprived of their right to know.

The state secrets protection law also says, “News gathering activities for publishing and reporting are considered legitimate unless they violate laws and regulations or are done in an excessively unjust manner.”

It does not stipulate any punishment for those who reported specified secrets.

“I found that those who reported (specified secrets) will not be subject to punishment, although public servants who leaked (them) will be punished,” Ishiba told reporters at the LDP headquarters two hours after the news conference.

He also said he did not mean to ask for media coverage of specified secrets to be kept in check.

Still, Ishiba repeatedly emphasized that reports on specified secrets could endanger national security and the lives of citizens, implicitly demanding that media organizations refrain from reporting those secrets.

“It is by no means good that a nation’s peace and security, and people’s lives, safety and property will be adversely affected (by reports on specified secrets),” he said. “If media organizations decide to report (specified secrets) despite being aware of such risks, they should consider their own responsibilities.”

On Dec. 12, Ishiba again expressed doubts that media organizations should be free to report specified secrets.

“(Specified secrets) will have grave consequences on the nation’s security and the people’s lives and safety if they come out into the open,” he said on a radio program. “What will happen if a large number of people died (as a result of reporting)?”

Ishiba recently equated protests to the state secrets protection legislation with terrorism on his blog and was forced to withdraw his remarks.

Government takes another stab at unpopular 'conspiracy' legislation

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201312120063

December 12, 2013

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The government is seeking to rejuvenate decade-old legislation to make the act of “conspiracy” a punishable crime, even if no criminal act has been committed.

Word of the move sparked revived criticism that such a law could lead to prosecution against civil advocacy groups for the mere act of communicating. Even members of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s administration questioned the need for a conspiracy law.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters on Dec. 11 that government would not try to advance the measure during the next Diet session, which starts in January.

But government officials say the legislation is needed in part to bolster police powers to fight terrorism before Tokyo hosts the 2020 Summer Olympic Games. The event will draw huge crowds from around the world and is seen as an inviting target for terrorists.

The legislation is also seen as a key law enforcement tool to fight organized crime. It would penalize mere complicity in plots to commit serious criminal acts in an “organized” way as part of “activities of a group.”

“Conspiracy legislation is a necessity from a global perspective in the light of the (United Nations) Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime,” a senior government official said Dec. 11. “We have always been discussing the issue, which is an international requisite.”

The Diet has voted in favor of signing the U.N. convention, which was adopted by the world body in 2000. However, Japan says it needs its own domestic law covering acts of conspiracy before it can sign the convention.

Bills to strengthen current laws have been submitted on three occasions to the Diet since 2003. But protests by the general public and opposition parties have forced lawmakers to abandon the legislation each time.

The legislation would criminalize acts of conspiracy regarding more than 600 types of crimes, even if they have not been committed. Critics are also concerned over potential abuse of the law by authorities.

The Abe administration came under heavy fire for steamrolling the state secrets protection bill through the Diet earlier this month. The approval ratings for Abe’s Cabinet dropped across the board in surveys conducted by various media organizations after the law was enacted.

That led the prime minister’s office to reject calls by some in his administration to submit a conspiracy bill, or a set of bills to amend related laws, during the next Diet session. The Abe administration instead plans to take its time to discuss the issue and lay out its argument for the conspiracy legislation.

But criticism runs deep.

“The state secrets protection law, conspiracy legislation and the wiretapping law are all part of a single package,” said lawyer Yuichi Kaido. “Once the conspiracy legislation is enacted, the government could next seek to expand the law to allow wiretapping to clamp down on conspiracy.”

Yoshitomo Ode, a Tokyo Keizai University professor and an expert in the Criminal Procedure Law, also voiced concerns.

“Making uncommitted acts of crime eligible for punishment would very likely engender false charges in a manner that is expedient to investigative authorities,” Ode said.

Even an aide to Abe said Japan does not need conspiracy legislation.

“We have to strive to let foreigners know that Japan is such a safe and secure country,” the aide said.

A senior administration official said, “I believe the state secrets protection law is necessary, but conspiracy legislation would have a more direct impact on the general public.”

The Liberal Democratic Party’s platform for the December 2012 Lower House election made no direct mention of conspiracy legislation.

The only reference that can be construed as similar stated, “We will bolster measures to fight organized crime, including crackdowns on cross-border crime rings.”

TEPCO releases new info on 3/11

December 13, 2013

New findings on Fukushima accident to be released

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131213_22.html

Tokyo Electric Power Company says the early breakdown of a reactor cooling system, coupled with failed attempts to inject water into the reactor, led to the meltdown of the number 3 reactor after the March 2011 quake and tsunami.

The operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant is still verifying the details of the accident in March 2011.

The latest findings are the follow-up to a study whose findings were made public in June 2012.

The previous study found that a meltdown began at the plant's Number 3 reactor at about 10:40 AM on March 13th, 2011 -- 2 days after the quake and tsunami.

The latest findings include analysis of how the meltdown started.

TEPCO says the readings of the reactor's water gauge early that morning suggested that the water levels inside the reactor were low enough to expose part of the fuel above the water's surface.

This indicates that the functions of the emergency cooling system had already been lost.

It also says water injections by fire engines started shortly after 9 AM on March 13, but they could have been ineffective because of leaks from the piping.

TEPCO plans to disclose the findings to the public later on Friday. The utility says it will continue its investigation to find out why massive amounts of radioactive substances were released and how this happened.

No third-party for nuclear secret designation

December 12, 2013

Japan has no third-party oversight body for nuclear secrets

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131212p2a00m0na013000c.html>

There has been no third-party body in Japan for nearly 15 months to check the validity of the designation by the central government and nuclear plant operators of information related to nuclear power facilities as secrets, it has been learned.

No third-party oversight body has been set up since the establishment in September 2012 of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA). This means that the government and nuclear plant operators have decided what should be made secret behind closed doors with no external checking functions. While the recently enacted state secrecy law poses serious questions over the way in which the government is to designate information as "special secrets," the latest revelation is likely to call into question the government's stance toward a third-party oversight body.

In response to growing global threats of terrorism, Japan revised the Nuclear Reactor Regulation Law in 2005 to require power companies to set up rules to protect nuclear materials and designate information related to the security of nuclear facilities as "secrets." The rules apply to information related to equipment designed to prevent attacks on facilities and thefts of nuclear materials, emergency contact systems and management of doorways at facilities and so on.

Under the revised law, the government conducts inspections once a year to confirm whether designation of information as secrets is appropriate and such secrets are not subject to the Freedom of Information Act. If nuclear plant operators and administrative officers leak such information, they will face up to one year in prison or fines of up to 1 million yen.

Meanwhile, according to the NRA's secretariat, the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA), the NRA's predecessor, set up a nonbinding oversight committee on protection of secrets related to nuclear materials, which consisted of university professors, lawyers and the like. The panel was established because of concerns arising during Diet deliberations that nuclear-related information could be designated as secrets freely by the government and nuclear plant operators and outsiders had no way of knowing what were made secrets. The oversight panel had held a meeting almost every year since 2005 to check whether information was designated as secrets beyond necessity.

However, when the NISA was replaced by the NRA in September 2012 -- after the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake -- the oversight committee was abolished. What should be done over a third-party body has been left up to the NRA and no discussions have been made on the issue ever since. Because of all this, the NISA and the NRA confirmed designation by nuclear plant operators of information as secrets at a total of 60 nuclear facilities in fiscal 2012, but the secrets were not checked by a third-party body, sources say. The NRA secretariat has not revealed the number of secrets, saying, "We have not counted them."

There was not a case in which the oversight committee had not judged in the past that information was improperly designated as a secret, but in its last meeting held in March 2012, the panel screened 380 pieces of secret information, sources say.

The NRA secretariat's nuclear security office says, "We recognize the need for third-party checking. Although it could be judged that inspections by the NRA (which is highly independent from the Cabinet) are sufficient and it is not necessary to set up a third-party body, we are tied down to other duties so that no discussions have been made at the NRA."

Masahiro Usaki, professor at Dokkyo Law School, said that it is difficult for the NRA to play the role of an oversight body, which consists of experts on information disclosure and crisis management, because it is tasked mainly with handling technical problems although it is highly independent of the government. He said a third-party oversight body should be established as soon as possible. "The government is negligent in its duties because it has left secret designation up to electric power companies even though the public has lost confidence in nuclear power," he added.

December 12, 2013(Mainichi Japan)

Using gains on state-owned TEPCO shares

December 15, 2013

TEPCO share sales to fund decontamination work

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131215_10.html

The government of Japan has increased the estimated cost of decontamination work by 10 billion dollars, as a result of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident in March 2011.

Original estimates for decontaminating buildings and soil tainted with radioactive fallout by the end of fiscal 2013 were about 15 billion dollars.

The governing coalition made a proposal last month to accelerate recovery and rebuilding work.

The government has reviewed the cost of decontamination and building intermediate storage facilities for radioactive waste and soil.

It has also reviewed how the cost should be paid by Tokyo Electric Power Company.

On top of what TEPCO will pay from its ordinary profit every year, the government plans to use gains on the sale of utility shares to cover the cost of decontamination.

The state-backed Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund currently owns TEPCO shares valued at about 10 billion dollars.

If the gains are not enough, TEPCO will shoulder the additional cost.

The cost of building intermediate storage facilities is estimated to be about 10 billion dollars. Radioactive soil and debris collected during decontamination work will remain there for up to 30 years.

It will be funded by a special account for energy with the tax money for electric power source development.

The burden on TEPCO will be alleviated with such measures. However, using gains on the sale of state-owned shares and tax money may invite criticism that the government is in effect rescuing the company.

Raising loan ceiling for TEPCO again

December 15, 2013

Tepco loan ceiling may hit ¥10 trillion

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/12/15/national/tepco-loan-ceiling-may-hit-%C2%A510-trillion/#.Uq3pXifj9l>

The government might raise its loan ceiling for Tokyo Electric Power Co. to ¥10 trillion from the current range of ¥5 trillion to ¥9 trillion, in light of the compensation payments and radioactive decontamination work it must carry out in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima disaster, sources said Saturday.

It is also considering financing the cost of the decontamination work, currently estimated at ¥2.5 trillion, by selling Tepco shares held by a state-backed fund, the sources said.

The decision on the additional assistance for Tepco will be made later this month. The measures would be included in the utility's new business turnaround plan to be compiled by the company and the fund by the end of the year.

Under its current loan scheme, the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund, which provides financial assistance to the utility, is allocated a type of government bond worth up to ¥5 trillion, which carries no interest and can be cashed by Tepco when necessary.

The government is considering lifting the bond issuance ceiling by about ¥4 trillion to ¥5 trillion, with ¥2.5 trillion earmarked for decontamination and ¥1 trillion for storage facilities for radioactive waste, the sources said.

The government is studying how much additional assistance will be needed for damage compensation, they said.

To alleviate the financial burden on the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the bailout fund will sell Tepco shares acquired in July 2012, the sources said.

The utility received ¥1 trillion in public funds and fell under effective state control when the fund bought its shares and acquired a majority of the company's voting rights at the time. The capital injection was meant to help the nation's largest utility avoid bankruptcy.

The state-backed fund hopes to gain about ¥2 trillion from the shares, assuming the rise sharply in step with efforts to increase Tepco's revenues in the turnaround plan. The utility will shoulder the remaining decontamination costs if earnings from shares fall short, the sources said.

Before the crisis, Tepco's shares fetched more than ¥2,000 each but have since plunged to around ¥500. Critics doubt it will rise as the fund expects.

December 14, 2013

Gov't mulls raising loan ceiling for TEPCO

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131214p2g00m0dm040000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The government is considering raising the ceiling on loans available to Tokyo Electric Power Co. for compensation payments and decontamination work following the 2011 nuclear disaster from the current 5 trillion yen to 9 trillion to 10 trillion yen, sources close to the matter said Saturday.

The government plans to decide on the additional assistance for TEPCO later this month, while the operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex seeks to include the assistance in its business plan to be reviewed by year-end, according to the sources.

Under the current loan scheme, the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund is allocated a type of government bond up to 5 trillion yen, which carries no interest and can be cashed by TEPCO when necessary.

The government is considering lifting the bond issuance ceiling by about 4 trillion to 5 trillion yen. Of the additional assistance, 2.5 trillion yen is to be earmarked for decontamination work and 1 trillion yen for construction of facilities to store radioactive waste from decontamination, the sources said.

The government is now studying how much additional assistance will be necessary for damage compensation, they said.

December 14, 2013(Mainichi Japan)

Ominous words indeed

December 15, 2013

Ishiba's ominous words

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/12/15/editorials/ishibas-ominous-words/#.Uq7-_yfij9k

Liberal Democratic Party Secretary-General Shigeru Ishiba raised a public outcry when, in a blog entry dated Nov. 29, he referred to public demonstrations near the Diet building by those opposed to the state secrets bill — which was subsequently enacted on Dec. 6 — and wrote, “I believe the tactics of simply shouting (opinions) at the top of one’s voice seems not so different from an act of terrorism in essence.”

Since the law’s definition of terrorism includes the phrase “activities that force political and other principles or opinions on the state and other people,” Ishiba’s statement underscored the very real danger that the law could undermine freedom of speech, expression, thought and conscience as guaranteed by the

Constitution. U.N. officials have also stated that they regard the law as running counter to Article 19 of the U.N. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1996, to which Japan is a party.

Ishiba caused another commotion on Dec. 11 when he expressed opinions on news reports that divulge information designated as special secrets under the law. At a news conference at the Japan National Press Club, he said that if reporting such secrets puts the nation's security in grave danger, "the act will be curbed by some method." Although he later backpedaled slightly, what he said was enough to raise concern that, at the very least, the LDP's No. 2 official is considering using the state secrets law to control the media. Ishiba also hinted that reporters who have divulged such secrets may be punished by stating that final judgments would be rendered in court.

At a news conference held later that same day at LDP headquarters, Ishiba revised his earlier statement and said that he was only asking for self-restraint on the part of the media when they report on classified information. He also said that such reporting activities would not be subject to punishment.

Nonetheless, attention should be paid to his original statement, which used the phrase "the act will be curbed by some method." This wording can be interpreted as referring to a non-media organization actively curbing reporting activities rather than relying on "self-restraint" on the part of the media.

At the LDP headquarters news conference, Ishiba said that if the media report on classified information, they should do so at their own risk and take full responsibility for their actions. These words could be interpreted as a veiled warning for journalists to use self-restraint or face the consequences.

On a Dec. 12 radio show, Ishiba said, "What if news media report on information whose revelation they know would greatly affect the nation's safety, and what if the reporting leads to the deaths of many people?" This was a clear hint that it would be best if such reporting is not done. But it must be remembered that the media have the responsibility and duty to report information that they believe the people have a right to know.

The National Secrets law says that sufficient consideration must be given to the freedom to carry out reporting activities that contribute to ensuring the people's right to know. But Ishiba's statements point to the possibility that this clause is mere window-dressing. Ishiba clearly places state decisions to conceal "secrets" above the people's right to know — a pillar of democracy — and backs the idea of controlling the media — something that is done in authoritarian societies, not democracies. His statements, with their chilling totalitarian undertones, constitute enough of a basis to push for the repeal of the state secrets law.

Ishiba's call for media controls draws ire from opposition parties

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201312130057

December 13, 2013

By SACHIKO MIWA/ Staff Writer

Ruling Liberal Democratic Party Secretary-General Shigeru Ishiba has provoked a backlash from opposition parties and even surprised the prime minister by advocating media restrictions concerning state secrets specified under new legislation.

"What's that?" an aide quoted Prime Minister Shinzo Abe as asking. "Is there something wrong with him?"

Ishiba on Dec. 11 suggested at the Japan National Press Club that media coverage of information designated under the state secrets protection law, promulgated on Dec. 13, should be regulated.

The Lower House member effectively retracted his statements, but again stirred controversy the following day.

"(Media outlets) would argue that they are free (to report specified secrets) because they are practicing press freedom and are not subject to punishment," Ishiba said on a radio program Dec. 12. "(But) what will happen if a large number of people died (as a result of reporting)?"

Akihiro Ohata, secretary-general of the Democratic Party of Japan, criticized Ishiba's remarks for causing confusion about whether press freedom will be respected or not.

Seiji Mataichi, secretary-general of the Social Democratic Party, was more direct.

"(Ishiba's remarks) have given away more of the real motive of the government and ruling coalition," Mataichi said in a statement. "They want to suppress freedom of speech, reporting and news gathering, deprive the people of their right to know, and put a gag on the nation."

The ruling coalition of the LDP and New Komeito steamrolled the legislation through the Diet on Dec. 6 despite widespread criticism that the public's right to know will be undermined.

Just days before the law's enactment, Ishiba equated street protests against the legislation with terrorism on his blog. He was forced to withdraw those remarks.

"He will be considered a dangerous politician if he repeatedly says the wrong thing," a senior LDP official said Dec. 12.

Ishiba, a security policy expert and a former chief of the Defense Agency, the predecessor of the Defense Ministry, has long emphasized the importance of protecting state secrets.

At a news conference Dec. 12, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said the government will not take exception to Ishiba's remarks at the Japan National Press Club.

"We understand that he made supplementary explanations to keep the record straight," he said.

New Komeito leader Natsuo Yamaguchi only said that media organizations are free to report information they have gathered through appropriate means.

Too much for Japanese banks?

Banks look to cut off new lending to TEPCO after 300 billion yen loans

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201312160068>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Commercial banks that have extended loans to Tokyo Electric Power Co. have agreed to offer an additional 300 billion yen (\$2.91 billion) to the struggling utility, while considering ending any future lending to it.

With TEPCO's debt from 77 private financial institutions swelling to an unprecedented level by month's end, the creditor banks are weighing capping their loans to the utility at 4.5 trillion yen, sources at the banks and the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund said.

The additional 300 billion yen will raise TEPCO's total debt to 4.5 trillion yen, more than twice the amount before the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami triggered the accident at the utility's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The largest creditor bank for TEPCO, Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp., has offered about 990 billion yen, three times higher than before the nuclear disaster began to unfurl.

Under normal circumstances, Japan's large-scale banks typically lend around 200 billion yen to their respective major corporate customers.

Subsequently, **the government and the commercial banks have concluded that it will be difficult for private financial institutions to extend additional new loans to TEPCO.**

While the banks may not provide more new loans from next year, the utility will be allowed to refinance its existing debt, according to the sources.

The financial institutions are also weighing whether to make the existing collateralized loans unsecured, if the utility is allowed to refinance them. TEPCO has received a total of more than 1 trillion yen of secured lending to date.

The utility's shaky finances are being shored up by taxpayer money, as the Abe administration has apparently decided TEPCO alone cannot shoulder the entire costs related to the nuclear disaster.

The government will cover part of the costs of decontamination work around the Fukushima plant and compensation for victims of the nuclear disaster. It plans to raise the ceiling of government loans to TEPCO from the current 5 trillion yen to 9 trillion to 10 trillion yen.

Those financial measures will be included in the utility's rehabilitation plan, scheduled to be compiled by year-end.

While it is estimated that TEPCO will have to pay up to 2.5 trillion yen to complete cleanup work near the stricken plant, the Finance Ministry has decided to include more than 350 billion yen in the fiscal 2014 draft budget to help the utility accelerate decontamination efforts.

If the proposal is approved, the government will spend nearly 2 trillion yen for cleanup work.

Currently, TEPCO plans to erect new thermal power plants as well as expand its gas-related business. Funds for such new businesses will be procured by establishing new joint ventures with other companies and borrowing money via the ventures.

The new sources of power are needed to make up for the shutdown of the utility's nuclear reactors following the accident. TEPCO has applied to the Nuclear Regulation Authority for safety screenings to allow the restarts of its No. 6 and No. 7 reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture.

(This article was written by Hidefumi Nogami and Mari Fujisaki.)

Gov't to reduce TEPCO's financial burden

December 17, 2013

Plan in works to ease TEPCO's cleanup burden

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201312170046>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The government plans to reduce the financial burden of Tokyo Electric Power Co. by allocating gains from future sales of TEPCO shares for cleaning up Fukushima nuclear disaster areas, sources said.

The move is bound to stoke controversy as leftover assets from government-sponsored corporate rehabilitation have traditionally gone into state coffers.

TEPCO, operator of the crippled Fukushima No.1 nuclear plant, is expected to spend up to 2.5 trillion yen (\$24.3 billion) for decontaminating communities affected by radioactive fallout.

According to sources, the plan will be discussed at a meeting of the government's nuclear emergency response headquarters as early as Dec. 20 as part of steps to speed up reconstruction and support TEPCO.

It will also be included in TEPCO's rehabilitation plan, expected to be completed by the end of the year.

The government-backed Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund owns TEPCO shares worth 1 trillion yen in book value. It plans to sell its stake in the late 2020s and 2030s after the utility turns around its finances.

The government expects 2 trillion yen in gains if the stock sells at 900 yen per share, compared with 524 yen on Dec. 16, which would cover a large part of TEPCO's decontamination costs.

A government source said the proposed arrangement will serve as "an incentive for efficient operation," saying that TEPCO will have to pay less for decontamination if its corporate value improves and share price rises.

But critics could argue that profits should be returned to taxpayers because the government knew that its investment would be lost if the utility went bankrupt.

The state-backed Industrial Revitalization Corp. transferred 43.2 billion yen in assets to state coffers when it was disbanded in 2007 after turning around Daiei Inc., Kanebo Ltd. and other companies.

About 1 trillion yen made on sales of government-held shares in Japan Tobacco Inc. this spring was used for reconstruction from the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, which triggered triple meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

The government is providing loans to TEPCO through the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund to help the utility in decontamination and paying compensation to nuclear disaster victims. It plans to raise the maximum amount of loans from 5 trillion yen to 9-10 trillion yen.

About 5-6 trillion yen would be used for compensation, and 1 trillion yen would be used for intermediate storage facilities for radioactive debris, in addition to 2.5 trillion yen for decontamination.

(This article was written by Mari Fujisaki and Takashi Ebuchi.)

see also :

<http://fukushima-is-still-news.over-blog.com/article-using-gains-on-state-owned-tepco-shares-121624861.html>

Too easy to hide information on nuke safety (state secrets law)

State secrets law raises concern about safety of nuclear power plants

December 17, 2013

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201312170006>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

There is growing concern that the government may be tempted to keep sensitive information on the safety of nuclear power plants under wraps once the state secrets protection law goes into force.

Experts cite the government's secretiveness that hindered access to U.S. contingency plans on how to respond to a total power failure resulting from a terrorist strike against a nuclear power plant even before disaster struck the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant nearly three years ago.

On several occasions up to 2008, the U.S. government shared details with Japan on its contingency plans for responding to a catastrophic situation involving a nuclear power plant. The information was passed to what was then the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) in Japan.

But the section chief in charge of such steps at NISA acknowledged that he was kept out of the loop. The official said he was not privy to the information. The official was interviewed by The Asahi Shimbun in autumn 2011, months after the nuclear accident unfolded in March that year.

NISA limited access to the U.S. contingency plans known as B.5.b to only a handful of its senior officials. This was because the U.S. government provided the information on the understanding it would remain classified.

The Japan Federation of Bar Associations has expressed strong concern that the new law on state secrets may embolden the government's propensity to hold back crucial information on nuclear safety.

One reason for this is that the legislation leaves unclear what matters will be designated as state secrets and who will have authorization to determine what should be withheld from the public.

"A tendency to hold back on vital information left nuclear power plants vulnerable to earthquakes and tsunami, resulting in the nuclear disaster," said Yutaka Saito, a member of the federation's task force on problems related to information. "We cannot fully engage in discussion about safety if information is withheld."

B.5.b was developed after the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States as a response to a possible strike on a nuclear facility.

B.5.b stipulates that operators of U.S. nuclear power plants must prepare for a total power failure by equipping themselves with transportable batteries; by developing procedures for manually operating vent valves and reactor-core cooling systems; by organizing instruction manuals setting out the procedures; and by training operators to implement the measures.

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), an independent body of the U.S. government, established the policy to deal with a total power failure triggered by the same circumstances that caused the Twin Towers at the World Trade Center to collapse after commercial airliners commandeered by terrorists deliberately crashed into the buildings.

Nuclear experts believe that the B.5.b procedures could have provided crucial guidance during the first few days of the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

But NISA did not share the information with the Japan Atomic Energy Commission, which oversaw anti-terrorist steps, nor operators of nuclear power plants, such as Tokyo Electric Power Co., which owns the crippled Fukushima No. 1 facility; nor did NISA oblige utilities to put contingency measures in place that reflected the points raised by B.5.b, leaving nuclear power plants without steps to cope with the loss of all power sources.

Due in part to the availability of batteries as backup power sources, NISA concluded that to prepare for a total power failure or a terrorist attack was not a top priority for Japanese nuclear power plants.

But when disaster struck the Fukushima No. 1 plant, staff there were unable to respond to the crisis swiftly and adequately.

Technicians spent too long confirming proper procedures and obtaining appropriate equipment before operating vent valves with automotive batteries or manually trying to decrease pressure inside the nuclear reactors.

The result was meltdowns at the No. 1 through No. 3 reactors and hydrogen explosions at the No. 1, No. 3 and No. 4 reactors within days of the crisis triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, that left the Fukushima plant in total blackout.

The Diet panel looking into the nuclear accident, the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission, said in a report in June the following year that the Fukushima disaster could have been averted if NISA, while handling the sensitive information, had notified utilities about steps described in B.5.b and obliged them to put the steps in place.

TEPCO mentioned B.5.b in its report the same month, saying, "It could have helped delaying the development of the accident."

It also said the content of B.5.b was not deemed to be information that private operators of nuclear power plants in Japan are not allowed to have access to.

With regard to B.5.b, TEPCO said in a summary of the accident in March this year that it likely would have noticed the existence of B.5.b if it had closely monitored efforts overseas to bolster safety precautions around nuclear facilities.

By June 2011, three months after the Fukushima disaster, the U.S. government released key points of B.5.b.

The official who oversees emergency measures at the Nuclear Regulation Authority, which succeeded NISA in 2012, now has access to relevant B.5.b literature.

Gregory Jaczko, a former NRC chairman, told The Asahi Shimbun in an interview in September that B.5.b was initially clandestine to prevent would-be terrorists from learning about the vulnerability of nuclear power plants. He served as NRC chairman at the time of the Fukushima crisis.

B.5.b was declassified after the Fukushima disaster because U.S. authorities decided that making it public would contribute to the improved safety of nuclear power plants.

The U.S. nuclear industry also wanted to reassure the public that it had measures in place to cope with a contingency such as those raised in B.5.b, he added.

(This article was written by Toshihiro Okuyama and Hiroo Sunaoshi.)

French journalists allowed in Fukushima Pref.

December 18, 2013

French journalists inspect Fukushima Pref.

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131218_22.html

French journalists have toured Fukushima Prefecture to see how residents are tackling radiation contamination from the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

French radiation protection specialists arranged the tour for about 20 journalists. The specialists are concerned that French media reports on Fukushima may not have been accurate.

The journalists visited Yanagawa Town in Date City. They observed radiation checks of dried

persimmons, a local specialty. Firms recently resumed shipments of the persimmons for the first time in 3 years.

The reporters heard that contamination levels have all been within the safety standard.

They also visited a former peach orchard that now serves as a first point of storage for contaminated soil.

The journalists learned that authorities were able to secure the use of the site with the cooperation of locals.

Pierre LE HIR, a reporter for Le Monde newspaper, said it was impressive to see how hard people are working to ensure local farm produce is safe for consumption.

He said he hopes to correct sometimes biased views about Fukushima in France through his reporting.

Takamitsu Sawa - "A strong totalitarian tendency"

December 16, 2013

Abe shows totalitarian bent

by Takamitsu Sawa

The "old" Liberal Democratic Party that former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi is supposed to have destroyed is making a strong resurgence as is the traditional "triangle" of the LDP, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and the Japan Business Federation (Keidanren).

When Prime Minister Shinzo Abe goes abroad, he is often accompanied by as many as 100 business leaders as he busies himself with exporting nuclear reactors and other infrastructural items through "top-level sales campaigns."

Furthermore, defying the traditional practice of determining wage levels through labor-management negotiations, Abe has asked Keidanren Chairman Hiromasa Yonekura to raise the wages of workers and this request has been handed down to Keidanren member corporations.

His intervention in wage negotiations clearly indicates that Japan is **a nation of highly controlled state capitalism, transcending a free market economy.** Moreover, should a constitutional revision come to restrict freedom of speech, Japan would become a de facto totalitarian state.

At least at this point, the results of “Abenomics” — economic policies pursued by Abe’s government — have fallen far short of being dramatic. Preliminary figures of the National Accounts Statistics show that the growth rate of private consumption, which is an engine of economic growth, has been on a downward trend — decreasing from 0.8 percent in the January-March period of 2013 to 0.6 percent in April-June and to 0.1 percent in July-September.

Meanwhile, thanks to an unprecedented easy-money policy adopted by the Bank of Japan, the value of yen against other currencies is falling and stock prices are going up, although there have been temporary slowdowns in the process.

But even with a cheap yen, exports in terms of volume are on a declining trend contrary to expectations. This has coupled with increased import of fossil fuels necessitated by the total suspension of the operation of nuclear power plants, causing imports to exceed exports. Thus Japan has become a trade deficit country.

I had expected Abe to undertake political reform including constitutional revisions after confirming that his Abenomics has worked well. But my expectations have turned out to be off the mark.

Apparently having gained self-confidence after his LDP won a resounding victory in the Upper House election in July, he submitted to the Diet two major legislative bills — a bill to protect specially designated state secrets and a bill to create the National Security Council, patterned after a U.S. body bearing the same name.

Although Abe has succeeded in having the Diet enact these two bills, it should be remembered that history offers numerous examples of impetuous and intemperate excess leading to self-destruction.

Koizumi’s structural reform plans were aimed at turning the market into a free and competitive one and thus creating an environment in which the market will give full play to its potential. In contrast, Abenomics follows the line of state capitalism with a high degree of control. This means that it will deprive individuals and corporations of freedoms in the economic sphere.

On the social front, the Abe administration also has a strong totalitarian tendency because of its move toward depriving individuals of freedoms. Such a tendency is exemplified by the enactment of the state secrets law and its call for a constitutional revision designed to restrict freedom of speech and basic human rights if they run counter to “public interest and public order.”

I would like to add, as a reminder, that **conservatism emphasizes libertarianism in the economic sphere and order and traditions in the social and political sphere.**

Former Prime Ministers Yasuhiro Nakasone and Koizumi were pure-blooded conservatives as they advocated “small government” and regarded the market as omnipotent while visiting Yasukuni Shrine to pay their respects to the war dead.

In the United States, the Republican Party follows conservatism while the Democratic Party advocates liberalism. Liberalists insist that government intervention is indispensable because, if everything related to the economy is totally placed in the hands of the market, imbalances like unemployment and instability like the boom-bust cycle cannot be avoided. At the same time, liberalists seek to guarantee maximum freedoms in the social and political fronts.

The Abe administration is neither conservative nor liberal. In short, I cannot help calling it “totalitarian.” Yet, very seldom do I encounter opinions criticizing the Abe administration for endangering freedoms. Quite belatedly, on Nov. 28, a group of 31 scholars issued a statement expressing their opposition to the state secrets law.

Major newspapers are divided into two camps — one group supporting the law and the other opposing it. There once were heated debates in newspapers for and against Abenomics, but they seem to have subsided.

Since the Constitution has not yet been revised, freedom of speech is presumably still guaranteed. But journalistic bravery in expressing criticism appears to have been paralyzed either because mass media have been overwhelmed by the Abe administration’s high spirits or because they are under overt or covert pressure.

I cannot help thinking that the current Japan is drifting away from the modern Western European ideals based on liberalism, democracy and individualism.

In her recent book titled “NOT FOR PROFIT: Why Democracy Needs Humanities,” Martha C. Nussbaum, professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago, issued a warning against neglecting knowledge gained through humanities for the sake of pursuing short-term profits and economic growth.

With regard to both natural and social science, she wrote: “When practiced at their best, moreover, these other disciplines are infused by what we might call **the spirit of humanities**: by searching critical thought,

daring imagination, empathetic understanding of human experiences of many different kinds, and understanding of the complexity of the world we live in.”

She added: “Cultivated capacities for critical thinking and reflection are crucial in keeping democracies alive and wide awake.”

Under the Abe administration, there is a growing tendency to allocate larger budgets to university departments of natural science, engineering, medicine and pharmacology — sectors considered to contribute to economic growth. Thus the tendency to neglect humanities and social science is becoming stronger.

I would like to ask readers: **Which country would you prefer not to live in — a country without economic growth or a country without democracy.**

Takamitsu Sawa is president of Shiga University.

How to ensure NHK's independence?

December 21, 2013

Editorial: New NHK president must keep a close eye on authority

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20131221p2a00m0na004000c.html>

Katsuto Momii, special advisor to Nihon Unisys Ltd., is set to succeed NHK President Masayuki Matsumoto, whose tenure expires Jan. 24. Momii is the third consecutive president to be recruited from outside the public broadcaster. However, it remains unclear how NHK's Board of Governors -- many of whom are close to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe -- arrived at their choice of Momii.

One might be tempted to question if there was any way for Matsumoto to serve another term. He should be credited for his managerial prowess over the past three years, including cutting NHK subscription fees, reducing the number of NHK employees and trimming their salaries, which were often criticized as being too high. All of these efforts were made in spite of the adversity accompanying the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

At the same time, NHK's news reports on issues including nuclear reactor restarts and Osprey deployment have been criticized as "biased" in political and business circles, though the broadcaster's coverage was by no means partial. In an opinion poll NHK conducted in July, nearly 80 percent of viewers said the broadcaster's programs in general were "fair and impartial." In spite of the results, Matsumoto decided to step down -- as if he had been cornered into doing so.

The NHK president is appointed with consent from nine out of the 12 members of the Board of Governors. **"Recently, the selection of NHK presidents appear to rely upon personal connections with people in political and business circles,"** commented Satoshi Daigo, professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo. Daigo is also a co-representative of a group called "NHK o Kanshi Gekirei Suru Shichosha Community" (Viewers' community for monitoring and encouraging NHK). Considering the run of appointments from business circles, Daigo's assessment makes sense.

But is this kind of approach desirable for picking out a president? Since those from business circles are often stakeholders in such social issues as restarting reactors, it is questionable whether they can maintain a neutral stance in reporting.

Momii is urged to stand firm in defense of fair and impartial public broadcasting, just as he pledged at a news conference on Dec. 20. To that effect, he should distance himself from politics and fulfill the role of keeping an eye on authority.

The enactment of the controversial special secrets protection law is a specific topic for consideration. Was NHK's coverage of the process leading to enactment of the law sufficient? We are not debating the pros and cons of the law, but rather stressing that viewers can make their own decisions only after the broadcaster has delved into problems arising from the law and sorted out the challenges. The public was frustrated that the law was hard to understand. Did NHK manage to respond to questions that viewers wanted to know about the legislation?

A challenge that remains for NHK is building a system of broadcasting programs on air and over the Internet simultaneously. If NHK is to collect viewing fees from all households across the country under such a system, the Broadcast Law needs to be revised, a task that would put the new president's caliber to the test.

Prime Minister Abe recently expressed his view that NHK should report on territorial issues more strategically. Such remarks should not intimidate workers at the public broadcaster. NHK is urged to maintain an environment in which employees can report the news and produce programs in a free atmosphere. Such a setting should **ensure the medium's independence**, guarantee the quality and appeal of its broadcasting, and lead to viewers' confidence.

Fukushima plan approved by Cabinet

December 21, 2013

Cabinet approves new approach to rebuilding Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201312210036>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The Abe Cabinet approved guidelines that take a more realistic approach to rebuilding Fukushima Prefecture after the 2011 nuclear accident, including abandoning the goal of having all evacuees return to their homes.

But the plan, approved on Dec. 20, could raise criticism because taxpayers will bear the brunt of the burden.

Under the plan, the central government will provide additional compensation to evacuees to buy land and homes where they now reside. Compensation for psychological distress will also be paid to evacuees who are uncertain if they can ever return home.

The new approach will likely increase the number of evacuees who give up hope of returning home, leading to population decreases that could affect local governments. Central government officials plan to consult with local government officials about the future status of those municipalities.

At the same time, the central government is also considering providing an additional 900,000 yen (\$8,600) in compensation to each evacuee who decides early on to return home.

The guidelines will also revise the method used to determine how much radiation the returnees are exposed to. Until now, estimates of radiation exposure were calculated based on airborne levels. In the future, returnees will be given dosimeters to measure their individual radiation doses.

This change is expected to relax the standards for deciding on what areas need decontamination from radiation.

While the new guidelines will maintain the long-term goal of annual radiation levels of 1 millisievert or less as the cutoff point for decontamination, the individual radiation level readings are expected to come out lower than the airborne readings.

That would in effect weaken the standard at which decontamination is required and would lead to reduced clean-up expenses.

Reflecting the huge task involved in rebuilding Fukushima communities, the new guidelines do not provide a timetable of when evacuees can return to specific municipalities nor does it include a road map to create an environment to allow evacuees to return home.

Some mayors have already voiced criticism that the new guidelines do not provide a vision for the future of Fukushima, raising doubt that the guidelines will in fact accelerate the rebuilding process.

The central government will also provide additional loans to Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, because of the ballooning costs for dealing with the accident. The central government now estimates that at least 11 trillion yen will be needed.

Under the law, TEPCO is supposed to bear the entire burden, but the central government decided to pay for the construction of interim storage facilities for contaminated soil. The central government will also raise the upper limit for interest-free loans to TEPCO from 5 trillion yen to 9 trillion yen.

By providing additional funds to TEPCO, the central government is also bound to face criticism for essentially putting the financial burden on taxpayers.

However, Toshimitsu Motegi, the industry minister, explained the need for government involvement.

“Measures have been delayed because everything was forced on TEPCO,” he said at a Dec. 20 news conference. “We will accelerate rebuilding in Fukushima by clearly delineating the roles to be played by the central government and TEPCO.”

HEAVIER BURDEN ON TAXPAYERS

Of the 11 trillion yen needed to deal with the nuclear accident, about 2.5 trillion yen will go to decontamination, about 1.1 trillion yen will be used for construction and management of interim storage facilities and about 5.4 trillion yen will be required for compensation.

In addition, at least 2 trillion yen more would be needed for decommissioning the reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 plant and to deal with radiation-contaminated water there.

While TEPCO and the electric power industry will have to repay the loans from the government used for compensation and decontamination work, most of the money will likely come in the form of higher electricity rates.

The cost for constructing interim storage facilities will also be repaid over 30 years in the form of a tax that is already included in electricity rates. About 35 billion yen is expected to be paid from that tax in the next fiscal year. Any additional costs for decontamination will be directly covered by taxpayer money.

There are also plans to reduce the burden on taxpayers. One is to have the government-backed Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund sell off the TEPCO shares it possesses and use the gains to pay for decontamination work. If TEPCO share prices rise due to improved corporate performances, the burden on taxpayers would be reduced.

But some within the utility doubt that the share prices will increase over time.

Since it was pointed out from the very beginning that there would be limits to what TEPCO could shoulder, having the central government bear some of that burden can be considered a move in a more realistic direction.

Still, little debate was conducted during the Upper House election in the summer over the government providing assistance to TEPCO.

Normally, when companies undertake rehabilitation after racking up huge debts, shareholders and financial institutions that provided the loans would be asked to absorb some of the losses.

However, since the central government has provided 1 trillion yen in capital to TEPCO and because of concerns about the effect on paying compensation, bankruptcy proceedings were never an option with TEPCO.

That means taxpayers' wallets will take a hit while shareholders are left free of bearing any responsibility for the mess that TEPCO is now in.

(This article was compiled from reports by Daisuke Fukuma, Noriyoshi Ohtsuki, Mari Fujisaki and Takashi Ebuchi.)

Mrs. Judge sees improvement in TEPCO

December 20, 2013

Monitor sees improvement in Tepco culture

Safety taking priority over efficiency with internal reform

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/12/20/national/monitor-sees-improvement-in-tepco-culture/#.UrRB2ifij9k>

by Kazuaki Nagata
Staff Writer

Forcing Tokyo Electric Power Co. into bankruptcy so the battered utility can get a fresh start is a notion that has been floated by critics and lawmakers, but it's a bad idea, says Barbara Judge, deputy chairwoman of Tepco's nuclear reform monitoring committee.

Facing huge compensation payments for the public havoc wreaked by the Fukushima No. 1 meltdowns and exorbitant bills for the decontamination and decommissioning work, Tepco has been unable to function as a normal company. This, critics and lawmakers say, could negatively affect morale and performance.

They say that the government should place Tepco into bankruptcy, take charge of the compensation problem and spin off the decommissioning work so a new Tepco can focus on its core job: providing electricity.

"I don't believe you're doing anyone a favor by forcing a company into bankruptcy, any company into bankruptcy," said Judge, a former chairwoman of the U.K. Atomic Energy Authority, during an interview Tuesday at Tepco's headquarters.

The nuclear reform monitoring committee, formed in September 2012, is headed by Dale Klein, a former chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Its purpose is to keep an eye on Tepco's efforts to reform its nuclear division.

"I don't think (employees) get more motivation by working for a company that's been through bankruptcy in general," Judge said.

Instead, the government should work more closely with Tepco and give it the tools it needs to become healthy again, she said.

“You get more motivation from people by turnarounds . . . and by going through tunnels and coming out the other end (rather) than just by jumping off the roof and starting to swim.”

She recommends dividing Tepco’s nuclear division in two. One section would handle power generation and the other would tackle the reactor decommissioning, which requires a completely different skill set.

Judge, who was hired by Tepco to spearhead its “self-regulation” and “social communications” efforts, said the division has been making progress in shifting from “a culture of efficiency” to “a culture of safety.”

One small step forward was made when the utility set up a nuclear safety oversight office directly under the board of directors to serve as the in-house regulator, she said.

The NSOO is divided into three groups, with one at Fukushima No. 1, one stationed at the massive Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture, and the third at Tepco’s headquarters.

She said the NSOO played an important role last month overseeing the plan to begin removing fuel rods from the cooling pool of reactor 4 in Fukushima.

When the utility finished transferring the first special transport cask of fuel rod assemblies from reactor 4 to a safer building, the NSOO halted the removal process for a few days to conduct a safety review.

Under normal circumstances the workers would have forged ahead. But Judge said the NSOO was prudent in calling for an immediate safety review.

She recalled that when the company decided to establish the NSOO, many employees appeared to wonder if it was really necessary.

Even those who were transferred to the NSOO appeared bewildered about their role and were shy about giving their opinions at meetings.

But as time went by, they opened up and their commitment grew, and the successful start of the fuel removal has given them confidence and motivation, Judge said.

Another area that needed improvement when Judge came in was corporate communications.

“They weren’t really in touch with their consumers . . . when they did talk to them, it was in a very technical way,” she said.

“I also thought that this was a culture of efficiency and not a not culture of safety.”

Internal reform, through a new social communications office set up in April, has helped Tepco get better at dealing with the public, Judge said.

For instance, the utility is trying harder to explain what is going on at Fukushima No. 1 and with other related matters in a way laymen can understand.

Even though she said communications have improved, it is still doubtful whether the new office has been truly effective, considering how Tepco was unwilling to admit that toxic water was seeping into the Pacific until the day after the Upper House election in July, a blunder that Judge has harshly criticized.

“I’d like to say myself how disappointed and distressed I was when I arrived in Japan yesterday,” she said at a news conference July 26. “To find that the communication with respect to the water problem has been so difficult and so late was devastating.”

While Judge points out some of the areas where Tepco has made progress, the public is still concerned by the problems that continue to plague Fukushima No. 1.

Judge said Tepco will just have to keep demonstrating that it has changed if it is ever going to win back the public’s trust.

For example, the utility will have to “not just pass, but excel” in an upcoming safety evaluation to restart the reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, she said.

Improved, TEPCO? TEPCO involved in bid-rigging

December 21, 2013

TEPCO group firm, 35 others fined over power line bid-rigging

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131221p2g00m0dm034000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Japan's antimonopoly watchdog said Friday it has imposed fines of around 740 million yen on 36 firms, including a group firm of Tokyo Electric Power Co., for **fixing bids related to power line construction work**.

TEPCO group firm Transmission Line Construction Co. took a leading role in bid-rigging for projects to build overhead power lines while Tokyo-based Kandenko Co., a TEPCO subcontractor, took such a role in projects to build underground power lines, the Japan Fair Trade Commission said.

TLC was fined around 110 million yen, Kandenko about 100 million yen and Sumitomo Electric Industries Ltd., based in Osaka City, roughly 30 million yen.

The commission said some officials of TEPCO had encouraged or facilitated the bid-rigging.

The 36 firms based in 13 prefectures rigged bidding for the overhead and underground power line construction work as far back as late January 2012 by deciding beforehand on successful bidders.

"The jackboots come closer and closer"

Japan's designated secrets bill - the sound of the jackboots

Saul Takahashi 10 December 2013

<http://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/saul-takahashi/japans-designated-secrets-bill-sound-of-jackboots>

Japan's new secrecy law is yet another disturbing symptom of the country's rising militarism, broadening the government's power to classify state secrets amidst increased belligerence in the region.

As if it ever needed repeating, the people of Japan were once again treated to a reminder of how secretive and arbitrary their government can be during the nuclear disaster in Fukushima 2011. Government foot-dragging and reluctance to divulge information meant that people remained exposed to high doses of radiation for over a month after the meltdown with potentially grave health consequences. Now, what is easily the most right wing government Japan has seen in decades has forced through parliament a bill to classify “special secrets” that would essentially give the executive carte blanche to withhold information on a massive scale, not seen since the period of militarism directly leading up to, and during, World War 2.

The law, known as the Designated Secrets Bill, was hurriedly rammed through the more powerful lower house on 26 November, and then passed through the upper house in equally speedy fashion on 6 December. It gives unrestricted power to the executive to designate a broad range of information as national secrets. There are no effective checks or balances, no truly meaningful opportunity for the involvement of any independent body, and no effective way to ensure that the executive is not abusing its power. Only the barest of outlines of information regarding what sort of information has even been designated as secret will be disclosed to the public. The bill would violate the right of people’s right to access information, severely punish whistleblowers, and have a chilling effect on journalism, civil society organizations, and the actions of concerned citizens.

The government has repeated the mantra that the bill is necessary because Japan is a “heaven for spies” due to a lack of espionage and state secrets legal infrastructure. They would have the people believe that the government lacks the power to keep information confidential, and that Tokyo is full of foreign agents who freely collect sensitive secrets. Nothing could be further from the truth – the government already designates a wide range of information as confidential – 410,000 pieces of information have been designated so since a sweeping government policy was implemented on this in 2009.

In addition, in response to a question in parliament, Prime Minister Abe admitted that the government was aware of five cases of “leaks of important information by civil servants” over the past fifteen years. Five cases over fifteen years can hardly be described as a “heaven”. The truth, as even the government admits, is that this bill is intrinsically connected with another bill adopted by parliament in November, establishing a National Security Council much along the lines of the US body by the same name. Indeed, the Secrets bill specifically provides for the sharing of designated secrets with foreign governments, who are apparently more trustworthy than Japan’s own people.

Constitutional infringement

There are four categories of information listed in the bill that could potentially qualify for designation as a secret - defense, diplomacy, “designated dangerous activities”, and prevention of terrorism - but they are worded in an extremely broad manner. Seemingly any kind of information related to defense could qualify, as well as any “important security related information” in the area of foreign relations, any information related to official efforts in the area of counter terrorism, and any information related to “activities potentially harmful to national security”. The possible designations of particular information as

'secret' are essentially infinite; though there is a principled maximum period of sixty years (already extremely long) stipulated in the amended bill, there are also categories of information – almost equally sweeping - which it is possible to designate secret with no time limit. The role envisioned for parliament is extremely limited, to the extent that it would most probably be meaningless.

The bill does state that, in applying the law, the government should “fully take into account” journalistic reporting “aimed at ensuring the peoples’ right to access information”. These provisions are “vague” to say the least, and appear to grant the government leeway to decide which reporting is “aimed at ensuring” this right. But punishments for the revealing of secrets are severe – up to ten years imprisonment for civil servants or persons subcontractors dealing with secrets. Persons who obtain secrets through illegal means are also subject to up to ten years imprisonment, and persons who “incite” the revealing of secrets are subject to up to five years imprisonment. Persons who reveal secrets through negligence can also be subject to imprisonment, as are persons who “incite” or conspire to divulge secrets.

It is worth pointing out that the right to access information is not only a vital element of the right to freedom of expression, but also a fundamental human right guaranteed by the Japanese constitution. Article 21 states that “freedom of...speech, press, and all other forms of expression are guaranteed” and, in accordance with developments in international law, this article has been interpreted by the Japanese courts to include the right to access information. The same article also states that the government must “refrain from violating fundamental human rights in an unreasonable manner” in applying the law, begging the question as to what “unreasonable” means in this new environment.

Even worse, article 21 goes on to say that reporting by the media will not be punished “insofar as those activities are aimed solely at ensuring the public interest and are not based on illegal or clearly unreasonable methods”. There is no definition of what the “public interest” means in this context, and just how the government will ascertain this. The government has even stated that some bloggers and other social media activists may not fall under the definition of “media” in this article, indicating that even the above pathetic safeguards would not apply.

As one could imagine, public outcry regarding the bill has been intense with near-daily demonstrations and criticism from human rights organizations, including the Japanese Bar Association, former prominent conservative MPs, academic societies, journalist societies, and prefectural and local councils. Unusually for a country that is used to being under the radar of international scrutiny, the bill was also the target of harsh criticism from human rights actors in the United Nations. The UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression together with the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health issued a statement criticizing the sweeping provisions of the bill, and the lack of protection for whistle blowers. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights also expressed similar concerns.

Government responses to these concerns have been a shining example of evasion, vagueness, and a condescending ‘shut up and trust us’ mentality – indeed, the fact that the government opened the bill to public comment for only two weeks, as opposed to the normal practice of a full month, shows the contempt in which it holds views it does not agree with. One NGO filed a request for the minutes of the

meetings of a government panel that had discussed the provisions of the bill – minutes that date back to 2008. In an insult to the notion of government accountability, the documents the NGO was provided with were almost completely redacted, i.e. blacked out.

A new chilling effect

In one telling response to the obvious question of what would entail a “clearly unreasonable method” of reporting, Minister Masako Mori, the female Cabinet member charged by Prime Minister Abe to steer the bill through parliament seemingly for no reason other than placing a woman in front of the cameras would give the bill a ‘soft’ image, gave the example of the infamous Nishiyama case of 1972. Takichi Nishiyama, a former journalist for Mainichi Shimbun, a major Japanese broadsheet, was arrested for obtaining information from a Japanese Foreign Ministry secretary (with whom, it later came to light, he had been having an affair) regarding a secret agreement between Japan and the US surrounding the return of Okinawa to Japanese sovereignty. Though the agreement that had been made public by the two governments had stated that certain expenses totaling USD 4 million would be paid by the US, this was an outright lie, and the secret agreement specified that the costs would be footed by the Japanese.

For his efforts in exposing government deception of the people, Nishiyama was convicted in 1978 of inciting a civil servant to reveal confidential information. 30 years later, declassified US government documents confirmed Nishiyama’s allegations – and yet his name is used by the government as a good example of ‘bad’ journalism. Tellingly, Mori has declared that subjects of intense public debate, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) economic agreement currently being negotiated behind closed doors with the United States and other countries, could be designated as secrets. And government reassurances have been unable to quell fears that with such broad provisions in the bill, important information regarding nuclear safety could be designated as secret as well.

Perhaps most important in all of this is the chilling effect that the law would have on people accessing or publishing any sort of information. With the opaque phrasing of the law persons will have no idea as to whether information they are accessing or publishing is in fact a designated secret. The Japanese Bar Association notes that, under the provisions of the bill, it is entirely plausible that people could be accused and tried without them or their lawyer being told exactly what information they are accused of having revealed. Unsurprisingly, government assurances that persons who accidentally come across or reveal secrets would not be punished are not convincing – and logic indicates that, even if they ended up not being punished, such persons would be subject to investigation.

In the early hours of 5 December, the government announced in response to mounting pressure that it would create two 'independent' bodies to oversee implementation of the law and ensure that there was no abuse. However, of these two bodies, only one is truly independent – a panel of legal experts which will advise the PM in creating guidelines regarding the designation of secrets, and which will receive an annual report on implementation of the law. However, it appears that the PM will only provide this panel with a simple outline stating the number of pieces of information that had been designated secret by category. Beyond that, there is no clarity as to how this panel would operate, and how much power it would actually

have. It would be child's play for the government to appoint a panel of government cronies to rubber stamp a one page note.

Calling the other body to be created "independent" is an insult to one's intelligence. The "oversight committee for information retention" will monitor application of the law and ensure that there is no abuse, and is clearly the more powerful body of the two. However, it will be made up of undersecretaries (the highest ranking civil servants) from the Foreign and Defence Ministries – the two ministries that will undoubtedly be designating the largest number of secrets. Unsurprisingly, no one in Japan expects any kind of serious oversight from this body.

Many opposed to the bill have pointed out strikingly similar language in legislation from darker times, in particular the infamous National Defence and Public Security Act of 1941, which was used by the government to jail opponents of the war effort. The Japanese experience from those days is that government secrets lead to more government secrets, and then to war. To use a phrase the generation that remembers the 1930s often uses to describe the creeping nature of militarism - the jackboots come closer and closer.

And now the "crime of conspiracy"

December 22, 2013

Abe's second strike against freedoms

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/12/22/editorials/abes-second-strike-against-freedoms/#.Urfnfvi9l>

The Abe administration has reportedly started preparations for introducing the "crime of conspiracy" by revising the law on the punishment of organized crime and the control of proceeds resulting from crime.

Although it has not been decided when a revision bill will be submitted to the Diet, there is the danger that it will give the government a strong weapon to control civic movements, especially those that oppose government policies.

The recently enacted state secrets law will not only greatly limit people's access to government information but also punish those who try to get secret information even if they didn't know it was designated as secret. The introduction of the crime of conspiracy will further weaken freedoms that have already been hollowed out by the secrecy law. So it is important for citizens to start a widely based action to stop this move by the administration.

If the crime of conspiracy is introduced, one could be punished for joining others to plan a crime even if it is not actually carried out or even if no concrete preparations have been made — a huge departure from the current principle that arrests can be made only when a crime has actually been committed or attempted.

In the past, the Liberal Democratic Party-New Komeito administration, including the first Abe administration in 2006, submitted three similar bills on criminal conspiracy to the Diet. All of them were killed because of the efforts of the opposition parties and the Japan Federation of Bar Associations. They feared that the bills' loose definition of conspiracy could lead to abuse.

Judging from these earlier bills, the crime of conspiracy will likely cover more than 600 types of crimes punishable by at least four years of imprisonment at present, including murder and burglary.

Citizens need to remember that LDP Secretary-General Shigeru Ishiba only recently equated demonstrations against the state secrets bill with acts of terrorism and that the law already has a provision to sentence people who “conspire,” “incite” or “instigate” the leaking of designated secrets to up to five years in prison — even if the secrets have not been leaked.

It is inevitable that conspiracy investigations will widely employ informers as well as wiretapping, including the monitoring of email communications. Thus the crime of conspiracy could be used to suppress civic movements, serving as a tool to violate freedoms of speech, thought and expression as guaranteed by the Constitution.

The government will argue that the enactment of a bill to introduce the crime of conspiracy is needed for Japan to ratify the 2000 United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, which Japan signed in December that year.

But the bill submitted in 2006 by the first Abe administration covered as many as 615 different types of crimes, including violations of the Road Traffic Law, the Corporate Tax Law, the Employment Security Law and the Public Offices Election Law. It is clear that to include such a wide range of crimes is incongruous with the aims of the U.N. convention, which targets crimes that are transnational in nature and involve criminal organizations.

The crime of conspiracy bill is the Abe administration's second attack on citizens' freedoms, following the state secrets law. Citizens must actively oppose the administration's moves.

Impropriety?

December 22, 2013

Firms linked to municipal assembly members received nuclear facility contracts

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201312220026

By SATOSHI OTANI/ Staff Writer

ROKKASHO, Aomori Prefecture--With the public alarm over the safety of nuclear facilities following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident, municipal assembly members would be expected to monitor closely any local nuclear-related project and avoid any appearance of impropriety.

However, The Asahi Shimbun has learned that did not occur in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, which is home to a number of facilities connected to the nation's nuclear fuel recycling program.

Five construction companies in the village won construction orders totaling at least 520 million yen (\$5 million) in fiscal 2011 and 2012 after the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. All five companies were headed by individuals related to incumbent Rokkasho municipal assembly members.

The nuclear fuel recycling facilities are operated by Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd., which handed out the construction contracts.

The five companies in question are now headed by either the wife, son or younger brother of a Rokkasho municipal assembly member. However, all five assembly members once served as president of the companies and three were the founders.

The assembly members connected to the construction companies in question denied that any conflict existed.

"Even if orders were won, that does not mean I have no say with Japan Nuclear Fuel," one assembly member said.

Another was resigned to criticism that might arise because of the contracts from Japan Nuclear Fuel.

An official with Japan Nuclear Fuel declined to provide specific information about the contracts, and only said the agreements were commissioned based on the quality, price and construction volume that the companies could provide.

According to construction work records submitted to the Aomori prefectural government by the five companies, in fiscal 2011 and 2012, the firms won between two to nine contracts from Japan Nuclear Fuel. The amounts of the contracts totaled between 30 million yen and 220 million yen.

According to sources at the five companies as well as other construction companies in Rokkasho, whenever Japan Nuclear Fuel gives out orders to local companies rather than major construction firms, it is always limited to two joint ventures undertaken by the five companies.

The five companies also receive other contracts serving as subcontractors for nuclear fuel recycling facility construction work commissioned by Japan Nuclear Fuel.

According to the assembly members as well as a private-sector economic research company, between 30 to 50 percent of the total sales of the five companies come from projects related to the nuclear fuel recycling facilities.

The five companies had been winning construction orders from Japan Nuclear Fuel from before the Fukushima nuclear accident.

The facilities at Rokkasho form a core part of a planned program to process spent nuclear fuel from Japanese reactors in order to reuse it as nuclear fuel.

After the Fukushima nuclear accident, the central government then under the control of the Democratic Party of Japan reviewed the nation's nuclear energy policy. In September 2012, the 18 members of the Rokkasho municipal assembly approved a document calling for the continuation of the nuclear fuel recycling program.

It had been learned that Japan Nuclear Fuel officials lobbied the municipal assembly members to pass such a document.

Pro-nuclear pressure from all sides

December 23, 2013

Nuclear power backers picking up steam on reactor restarts

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/analysis/AJ201312230062>



THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Japan's 2011 nuclear disaster triggered feverish calls among citizens and even politicians to abandon the nation's reliance on nuclear power.

But almost three years later, pro-nuclear officials, business leaders and utilities wielding awesome economic and political clout are regaining strength and maneuvering to tighten the noose around local government leaders who have been demanding that Japan do away with nuclear power.

LDP, DPJ SUPPORT 'NOT ANTI-NUKE' CANDIDATE

One example is the way the recent mayoral race in Tokai, Ibaraki Prefecture, played out. Tokai is home to the Tokai nuclear power plant, the nation's first nuclear plant, and the Tokai No. 2 plant, along with related facilities.

Osamu Yamada won the September election with support from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan.

The LDP has championed nuclear power for decades and is eager to get the nation's reactors back online, arguing that this clean source of energy is indispensable to propping up the economy.

The DPJ, on the other hand, has been promoting a nuclear phaseout by the end of 2039. However, many DPJ members in local chapters are not on board, as became clear in the Tokai mayoral race.

Yamada won a landslide against his opponent, who was supported by the Japanese Communist Party and ran on the platform of pulling the plug on nuclear power.

Yamada's victory was a bitter irony to his predecessor, Tatsuya Murakami. Murakami played a prominent role in efforts by local leaders around the nation to advance the idea of a nuclear phaseout through a network called "Mayors for a Nuclear Power Free Japan," which was first organized in 2012.

Two months before the mayoral election, Murakami, who had served four terms since 1997, announced that he would not seek re-election.

Murakami named Yamada his successor, giving Yamada high marks for his ability to administer affairs.

Murakami became deeply skeptical of nuclear power after an accident at a fuel processing facility in Tokai village operated by JCO Co. in 1999, which resulted in the deaths of two people.

Fast-forward to the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011. The disaster convinced Murakami that the Tokai No. 2 nuclear plant should be decommissioned, and he was very outspoken on the subject.

Murakami warned that the Tokai No. 2 plant would have met the same fate as the crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant--complete loss of power after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami--if it had been engulfed by a tsunami just a little higher than that for which it was prepared.

The tsunami that struck the Tokai No. 2 plant in March 2011 was estimated at 5.4 meters. The plant's breakwater structure is 6.1 meters high.

As Japan's oldest nuclear power plant, the Tokai plant first went online in 1966. It ended its service in 1998. It is currently in the process of decommissioning. Japan Atomic Power Co. owns both Tokai plants.

Murakami's growing call for mothballing the Tokai No. 2 plant alarmed Kenjiro Shimoji, a member of the Ibaraki prefectural assembly and whose constituency includes Tokai, along with six pro-nuclear members of the village assembly.

They criticized Murakami, saying he had not listened to the viewpoints of others and ignored the fact that those who work in nuclear facilities in the village have contributed to the community's well-being.

They also blasted Murakami for championing a nuclear phaseout after the village saw a steep decline in sales at convenience stores and hotels due to the suspension of operations at the Tokai No. 2 nuclear power plant after the Fukushima crisis.

Shimoji has strong ties with the nuclear industry.

Before he won his first seat in the prefectural assembly in 2010, Shimoji had served as an aide to Hiroshi Kajiyama, an LDP lawmaker in the Lower House who hails from a local electoral district including Tokai.

Kajiyama previously worked for the predecessor of the government-affiliated Japan Atomic Energy Agency, which operates research facilities in Tokai. Pro-nuclear members of the village assembly are backed by companies in the nuclear industry.

Although one of those described Murakami as "leaning too far for a break with nuclear power," many villagers sided with Murakami on his cautious approach to nuclear power in the races prior to the September vote.

The pro-nuclear bloc considered the recent Tokai mayoral election as one they could not afford to lose. They moved fast to select a candidate who was not averse to the continuation of nuclear power generation.

Several months before the election, Shimoji and the six village assembly members invited Yamada to a dinner to determine his stance on nuclear power.

"I am not anti-nuclear power," Yamada told the politicians.

Kajiyama and Shimoji plotted to gain support for Yamada from villagers in Tokai who commute to the neighboring city of Hitachi to work for engineering and electronics giant Hitachi Ltd.

Both politicians agreed that Akihiro Ohata, DPJ secretary-general and a member of the Lower House, would be the right person to do the job of rallying the support of Hitachi employees. Before becoming a politician, Ohata served as an official with Hitachi's labor union.

"Kajiyama contacted Ohata last year and they decided they should pick a candidate who could cooperate with them on the matter and thereby maintain the status quo at the village," Shimoji said.

In the spring, Shimoji began talking Yamada about entering the race for mayor.

Murakami was not invited to the pre-election rally held on Aug. 30 by the joint team of LDP and DPJ supporters who sit on Yamada's election staff.

In an interview with The Asahi Shimbun, Yamada said he decided to run to prevent a division in the village.

"The issue of nuclear power is important, but we also have other issues to look at in terms of the development of the village," he said.

Unlike Murakami, Yamada has no intention to join the Mayors for a Nuclear Power Free Japan network. He said nobody should be able to stop reactor restarts as long as all safety issues are confirmed by the Nuclear Regulation Authority and local governments hosting the facilities give the green light to restarts. However, Yamada said that does not mean he will approve the resumption of the Tokai No. 2 plant.

"I have listened to what my predecessor thinks on this issue, and I need to take into account how people in municipalities surrounding Tokai stand on this," Yamada said. "I don't want others to quickly assume that the wind has now shifted (with my taking office)."

UTILITY AROUSES UPROAR OVER HOSPITAL IN SAGA PREFECTURE

Power utilities, which have stable revenue from electricity rates under a regional monopoly system, are also dominating players in regional economies. Regional business federations have often been headed by top executives of power utilities.

Kyushu Electric Power Co. is no exception.

Shingo Matsuo, its honorary adviser, served as chairman of the Fukuoka-based utility when he was named chairman of the Kyushu Economic Federation.

“We are posting daily deficits of 1 billion yen (\$9.6 million) (from our idled nuclear reactors),” Matsuo said during an opening ceremony for a cancer treatment facility in Saga Prefecture in May. “It would be no big matter if only we could restart (our reactors) four days earlier.”

Matsuo was referring to the 4 billion yen in promised, but unfulfilled, donations by Kyushu Electric to help build the Saga Heavy Ion Medical Accelerator in Tosu, which is subsidized by the governments of Saga and Fukuoka prefectures. He was sending a clear message that Kyushu Electric would make good on its promise only if it was allowed to restart its offline nuclear reactors.

Kyushu Electric donated 300 million yen of the promised 4 billion yen at the end of fiscal 2011, but put the rest on hold because of a downturn in its bottom line. That stemmed from the fact that all its nuclear reactors were shut down after the Fukushima nuclear disaster began to unfold.

Matsuo’s remarks were perceived as a sign of arrogance on the part of the electric power industry and sparked an uproar. He was later forced to apologize after a protest by the Saga prefectural assembly.

SHIGA GOVERNOR FEELS DWARFED BY POLITICAL PUNCH OF POWER INDUSTRY

Elsewhere, on the political scene, Shiga Prefecture Governor Yukiko Kada said she realized the enormous clout of the electric power industry when two reactors were reactivated at the Oi nuclear power plant in neighboring Fukui Prefecture in summer 2012.

Kada said her resistance to the restarts was tamped down by pressure that came from all sides.

Local industry had been cooperative in Shiga Prefecture’s power-saving initiative in 2011, but made an about-face the next year and pressed the governor by asking if the prefectural government could “provide its own supply of electric power.” She was hard-pressed to ignore the opinions of manufacturing plants, which abound in Shiga Prefecture.

“They had probably been given various explanations (by Kansai Electric Power Co., operator of the Oi nuclear plant),” Kada said. “I realized a governor’s authority did not account for much in the face of a power utility.”

Kada is currently worried about the chances of re-election for a fellow governor, Hirohiko Izumida of Niigata Prefecture, who remains cautious about approving the restart of a nuclear plant in his own prefecture.

“The power industry is so influential that nobody can antagonize it and still be elected,” Kada said.

NIIGATA GOVERNOR UNDER MOUNTING PRESSURE

Izumida is little different from many of his fellow governors in that he counts local business circles among his core power bases. His election committee is headed by Eiichi Tsurui, president of Hokuriku Gas Co. and former head of the Niigata Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Communities in Niigata Prefecture that used to rely on the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant for their livelihoods are stepping up moves to seek restarts of reactors there.

In July this year, Toshihiko Maruyama, a member and former chairman of the Kashiwazaki city assembly, saw representatives of other parts of Japan hosting nuclear plants push openly for reactor restarts in their own communities. Maruyama was attending a council meeting in the capacity of an adviser to a union of assembly heads from municipalities hosting nuclear plants.

"Why don't we push for restarts at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa?" Maruyama told Kazumi Sato, chairman of the Kariwa village assembly, during the meeting.

That overture resulted in the Nov. 20 creation of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa study group on a future energy community, which organized about 100 members of local commerce and industry. The group is pushing for a restart of the nuclear plant, where all seven reactors have remained idle since March 2012.

"Several thousand jobs have been lost because of the idle reactors," Maruyama said. "So many livelihoods have been wiped away from our community. The local economy is only withering."

Maruyama denied that Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, is behind the creation of the study group. But the group does present an antithesis to Izumida, who has not backed down in his face-off with TEPCO as the utility has sought to have the No. 6, No. 7 and other reactors reactivated at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant.

"We are not exactly applying pressure," Maruyama said. "This is our way of expressing our views to our governor."

A separate consortium of companies in the nuclear power sector in Niigata Prefecture also held a lecture session in Kashiwazaki in September to promote the use of nuclear energy to revitalize the regional economy.

Meanwhile, Governor Izumida is standing firm.

"I am planning to use an extra budget to provide aid to offset ramifications of the long-lasting hiatus of the nuclear plant," Izumida said in a message to The Asahi Shimbun, which requested an interview. "I will do my utmost to block corporate bankruptcies and job losses."

(This article was written by Senior Staff Writer Atsushi Komori and Kaname Kakuta.)

"Nuclear safety myth raising its ugly head again"

December 24, 2013

EDITORIAL: Nuclear safety myth is raising its ugly head again

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201312240044>

Electric power companies have filed formal applications with the Nuclear Regulation Authority for permission to restart 14 idled nuclear reactors on grounds the facilities meet new regulatory standards. The Abe administration is keen to allow utilities to bring their reactors back online.

But the grim reality is that efforts by local governments to develop emergency evacuation plans have not made satisfactory progress.

Before any of the offline reactors are restarted, a workable plan must be in place in preparation for a possible serious nuclear accident.

No matter what precautions are built into a safety system, a totally unexpected situation can occur at any time. That's a bitter lesson to be gleaned from the 2011 disaster that crippled the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN A BIND

The local governments that have been entrusted to work out evacuation plans are tearing their hair out in the face of the many tough challenges they are confronting.

Stunned by the scale of damage caused by the Fukushima accident, the central government decided that local governments within a 30-kilometer radius of nuclear power plants must have disaster response plans in place. Previously, this was limited to local entities within eight to 10 kilometers of nuclear power plants.

As a result, the number of cities, towns and villages that are subject to the requirement has risen sharply to 135 from 45. They have been under extreme pressure to craft evacuation plans on an unprecedented scale.

Nuclear disasters are quite unlike any natural catastrophe. Since radiation is invisible, residents in affected areas have no way of knowing what danger they are facing. The fallout from a severe nuclear accident affects a huge area.

In response to pleas for assistance from local governments, the government's Nuclear Emergency Preparedness Council, which comprises all Cabinet ministers, ordered ministries and agencies this

autumn to help local governments develop the evacuation plans. But there are many complicated and formidable challenges to be overcome.

In dealing with radiation, it is vital to ensure that accurate information is obtained and disseminated swiftly. During the Fukushima nuclear crisis, however, the government, for fear of causing a panic among the public, used many terms and phrases that didn't reflect the reality. As a result, the risk of radiation exposure was not communicated effectively to local residents, causing many people to be exposed unnecessarily. Just ensuring that correct information will be provided in a timely manner to the public in a way that doesn't cause a panic is itself a tricky task.

It is also difficult to secure evacuation routes. In the rural, depopulated areas where nuclear power plants are located, there aren't many roads local residents can use to flee. The limited routes mean they will be clogged with traffic if tens of thousands of cars use them.

In situations where multiple disasters are taking place simultaneously, such as a massive earthquake and tsunami triggering a severe nuclear accident, local roads are likely to become impassable. In such cases, many people will be unable to use their cars, which are vital for quick evacuation.

It then becomes a tall order to figure out where and how people who can't move or be moved easily, like hospitalized patients, should be evacuated. In the Fukushima disaster, there were many tragedies in which the condition of patients deteriorated sharply during the evacuation process, sometimes resulting in their deaths.

In addition, each nuclear power plant has its own unique geographical conditions.

SAFETY IGNORED

The Ikata nuclear power plant in Ehime Prefecture, one of the facilities preparing to restart idled reactors, is located near the root of the Sadamisaki Peninsula, which is long and narrow.

If a major accident occurs at the plant, some 5,000 people living in areas farther along the peninsula will be left isolated. The local government is considering a scenario in which they are evacuated by ship. But that might not be a workable idea given the danger of tsunamis.

The Tokai No. 2 power plant in Ibaraki Prefecture, the nuclear power plant closest to the Tokyo area, is located in an area with a sizable daytime population. The daytime population within 30 kilometers of the

plant is around 980,000. According to an estimate by the prefectural government, it would take 15 hours to evacuate 90 percent of the people within 5 kilometers of the plant. It would take twice as long if the Joban Expressway, a highway running through the region, becomes impassable.

Fukui Prefecture hosts 14 nuclear reactors, the largest number among prefectures. A major accident at any one of them could lead to a massive release of radioactive materials into the atmosphere. That would render other reactors around inaccessible. The situation could trigger a chain reaction of nuclear accidents.

The plight of these local governments underscores one fundamental problem with the locations of nuclear power plants in Japan: Many of them have been built at sites where there should be no nuclear reactor.

The guidelines for assessing and approving the proposed locations of nuclear power plants were established in 1964. They require that a radius of certain distance from a nuclear plant have no form of human habitation.

While testifying as an unsworn witness at a session of the Diet's Fukushima accident investigation commission, however, Haruki Madarame, then chairman of the Nuclear Safety Commission, expressed the view that the guidelines had been created to allow the construction of nuclear power plants.

In fact, the decisions on how large the radius of the uninhabitable zones should be for specific nuclear plants have been based on excessively optimistic assumptions concerning accidents. As a result, many plants were built in areas where a swift evacuation of local residents is effectively impossible.

Banking on the nuclear safety myth, the government has promoted a policy of locating nuclear plants mainly in depopulated areas suffering from a decline of the local industries.

LESSONS ALREADY FORGOTTEN?

In the United States, no nuclear reactor can be operated without a workable evacuation plan. **In Japan, however, even the newly created regulatory standards don't require an evacuation plan as a prerequisite for operating a reactor. The development of the plans has been entrusted to the local governments while there is no central government agency responsible for assessing the feasibility of the developed plans.**

Now that the safety myth has been shattered, the government should quickly decide to decommission all reactors for which there is no practical evacuation plan.

Some of the local governments have no choice but to support the restarts of nuclear reactors because of the importance of the nuclear facilities for the local economy.

Some local government chiefs may approve the plant operators' plans to bring offline reactors back on stream even if there is only a questionable, insufficient plan to deal with a crisis.

Will vital decisions concerning the safety of local residents be left to discretionary judgment of the local government chiefs? Will this nation move toward restarting nuclear reactors while there are huge differences in the preparedness for nuclear emergencies among the local communities? That would be **like performing on the flying trapeze without a safety net.**

Proponents of nuclear power generation argue that electricity charges will go up unless atomic energy is used to produce electricity. They also claim that keeping reactors offline would have a negative impact on the domestic economy. Even these people, however, wouldn't say reactors should be restarted quickly even if there is no reliable system to protect the safety of local residents.

Five reactor meltdowns have occurred around the world in the past in 30 or so years. The government must not try to revive the safety myth by putting too much faith in the ability of humans to prevent nuclear disasters.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Dec. 24

Difficult to export nukes without TEPCO

December 25, 2013

Without TEPCO, nuclear plant builders left with export risks

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201312250069>

By YASUAKI OSHIKA/ Staff Writer

Nuclear reactor manufacturers in Japan are finding it tough to do business abroad, partly because their main potential partner is so caught up in bringing the crippled Fukushima plant under control.

It is often difficult for the companies to win overseas contracts unless they take part in nuclear power generation, in which they have little expertise.

Prior to the nuclear crisis that unfolded in March 2011, the government hoped that Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd., Toshiba Corp. and Hitachi Ltd. would export reactors in tandem with Tokyo Electric Power Co.

TEPCO was expected to provide services related to plant operations.

Tadashi Maeda, managing executive officer at the Japan Bank for International Cooperation and one of the architects of the nuclear plant export strategy, said the 2011 disaster at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 plant shattered initial calculations.

"We planned to go abroad with a package that included assurances on safety and training of engineers," said Maeda, a former special adviser to the Cabinet. "But with TEPCO out of the picture, all we have is equipment for export."

Japan is not expected to embark on construction of new reactors after the triple meltdowns at the Fukushima plant, the worst nuclear disaster since the 1986 Chernobyl accident. Overseas markets have become crucial for MHI, Toshiba and Hitachi.

Without TEPCO on hand, however, the companies often need to be involved in plant operations to win overseas orders.

An international consortium that includes MHI on Oct. 29 reached a "broad framework" of agreement with the Turkish government to build four reactors in the Black Sea city of Sinop.

On the same day, visiting Prime Minister Shinzo Abe signed a joint declaration on cooperation in nuclear energy with his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The Sinop project, a deal estimated to be worth 2 trillion yen (\$19 billion), represents MHI's first success at exporting nuclear plant technology.

MHI will be responsible for installing the Atmea 1, a new type of reactor developed with French reactor manufacturer Areva SA. It will be the first time for it to do so.

MHI President Shunichi Miyanaga is well aware of the potential risks.

"The project is entirely different from those for domestic electric power companies," he said. "We will try to identify all the risks involved and solve problems one by one."

The broad framework is nothing but a verbal agreement. The official contract covering engineering and construction will not be concluded until after MHI completes a two-year study on natural conditions and economic feasibility.

"It will be difficult (to carry out the project) if an active fault is discovered on the site," said Senior Vice President Terumasa Onaka, general manager of MHI's nuclear energy systems division.

In particular, the company will have to make a sizable financial investment in operating the Sinop plant.

"We have to reinforce our financial base further (in preparation for the project)," Miyanaga said.

MHI learned a hard lesson from a U.S. nuclear power plant project.

In 2012, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission suspended operations of the San Onofre nuclear plant in California after cooling water containing radioactive materials leaked from piping for one of the four steam generators MHI supplied.

Southern California Edison Co., the plant operator, went to the International Court of Arbitration in October, demanding MHI pay \$4 billion in compensation, including costs for decommissioning the reactors.

The amount is nearly three times as large as MHI's pretax profit for the year ended March 2013. MHI has argued that the damages be limited to \$137 million for the steam generators.

Japan started pushing nuclear plant exports in 2009 but suffered a setback at the end of that year.

A Hitachi-led Japanese consortium lost a contract in the United Arab Emirates to a group of South Korean companies that included Korea Electric Power Corp. and Doosan Heavy Industries and Construction Co.

Up to 370 reactors are expected to be built around the world, particularly in emerging economies, by 2030. The UAE contract offered one of the first bites in those projects.

Hiroki Mitsumata, who was director of the nuclear energy policy planning division at the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, part of the industry ministry, said the loss upset Japan.

“Samsung was leading in electronics, and Korean films and dramas were all the rage in video content,” Mitsumata said. “We feared that South Korea’s offensive would continue in the nuclear business as well.”

The Democratic Party of Japan, which came to power in 2009, lacked an economic growth strategy.

Maeda of the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, who was close to DPJ heavyweight Yoshito Sengoku, called on him to promote exports of nuclear plants.

“Despite advanced technology, reactor makers have failed to break into global markets,” he said. “We need to export infrastructure packaged with maintenance and services.”

In 2010, the DPJ government under Prime Minister Naoto Kan included “exports of packaged infrastructure” into its new economic growth strategy.

It also appointed Maeda and Harufumi Mochizuki, a former administrative vice industry minister and another advocate of nuclear plant exports, as special advisers to the Cabinet.

At the industry ministry, Takaya Imai, who was deputy director-general of the trade and economic cooperation bureau, spearheaded efforts to promote nuclear plant exports. Imai now serves as secretary to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

TEPCO was expected to partner with reactor makers in export projects. The utility adopted overseas expansion as a goal under its new management plan.

However, the troika of the industry ministry, reactor makers and TEPCO ground to a halt when the Fukushima No. 1 plant was devastated by the tsunami spawned by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

A Toshiba-led consortium obtained preferential negotiating rights for Turkey’s Sinop project in 2010, but negotiations were suspended after the nuclear disaster and TEPCO eventually pulled out of the group.

Toshiba in 2008 won a contract to build two reactors at the South Texas Project nuclear plant in the Lone Star State, and TEPCO also decided to invest in the project but withdrew after the nuclear disaster.

TEPCO also was unable to play a central role in International Nuclear Energy Development of Japan Co., a joint venture set up in 2010 by utilities and reactor makers under an industry ministry initiative aimed mainly at exporting nuclear plants to Vietnam.

Last year, Hitachi purchased Horizon Nuclear Power Ltd., a British nuclear power generation company. Hitachi will supply four to six reactors and plans to sell its interest in Horizon after its plants begin operations. Still, it will have to be involved in nuclear power generation for a certain period.

Areva, which began exporting nuclear plants before Japanese rivals, knows firsthand about the risks contractors can end up with when things go wrong.

It was sued for damages over construction delays and safety upgrades in a project to build a new type of reactor at the Olkiluoto nuclear plant in Finland. The company was forced to sell its power transmission and distribution division in 2009 to raise funds for compensation.

TEPCO presents 10-year business plan

December 25, 2013

TEPCO's 10-year business plan presented

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131225_37.html

Japan's state-backed fund for nuclear crisis compensation has **broadly approved** a 10-year business plan by Tokyo Electric Power Company, the operator of the disaster-hit Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

The Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund held a meeting of its steering committee on Wednesday to discuss the plan.

The plan outlines the restarting next year of 2 of the 7 idle reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata Prefecture on the Japan Sea Coast. The 2 reactors are now undergoing safety screenings by the government.

TEPCO plans to restart 2 more reactors at the same plant in 2015.

But it says the remaining 3 reactors will not start until 2016, or even possibly until 2023, as preparations are needed to meet new government safety standards.

The utility says it aims to reduce fuel costs for thermal plants by resuming the idle reactors and making profits between one and 2 billion dollars per year.

If the profits are realized the utility plans to gradually reduce electricity charges by up to about 10 billion dollars annually over the next 10 years.

The plan also includes an increase in the government funding for interest-free loans to the utility to pay for compensation and decontamination work from the nuclear accident in March 2011.

The utility and the fund will apply to the government for approval of the plan on Friday.

NRA Tanaka meets LDP lawmaker

December 25, 2013

Nuclear regulatory body chief meets LDP lawmaker

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20131225_29.html

The head of Japan's nuclear regulatory body has met a ruling party lawmaker to discuss its operations.

Nuclear Regulation Authority Chairman Shunichi Tanaka has avoided meetings with politicians and utility officials, to underscore the body's independence.

This is because the former regulatory agency, which oversaw the sector at the time of the 2011 accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, was criticized for being controlled by the plant's operator.

A project team of the Liberal Democratic Party studying nuclear power regulation recently submitted a set of proposals regarding the NRA's operations to Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga.

Team leader Yasuhisa Shiozaki met Tanaka on Wednesday and gave him a copy of the proposals.

The document criticizes the NRA as becoming isolated rather than independent. It urges the body to meet more people and hear a wide range of opinions, be fully accountable to win the public's trust and to put more effort into personnel training.

Shiozaki told Tanaka to make independent decisions only after communicating with a wide variety of people.

Tanaka said that will take time but he will try to meet more people next year.

Tanaka later told reporters he asked that the meeting be open to the media to avoid doubts about the NRA's independence. He stressed that the body remains firmly committed to independence.

Tanaka suggested that he will meet utility managers, saying understanding their ideas is crucial for ensuring nuclear safety.

New NHK president will be under scrutiny

December 26, 2013

All eyes on the new NHK chief

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/12/26/editorials/all-eyes-on-the-new-nhk-chief/#.UrxMwrT8nIU>

NHK's Board of Governors on Dec. 20 appointed Katsuto Momii, former president of Nihon Unisys, a major computer and communication systems and software company, as the next president of Japan's public broadcast organization. His three-year term starts Jan. 25.

How to cope with the rapidly changing environment caused by digital innovations is a big challenge for NHK. But the most important task for Momii will be to keep a distance from politics and to refrain from intervening in NHK's right to freedom of expression as a news organization. He is close to business leaders who have strong ties with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Momii reportedly supports the state secrets law, which severely limits ordinary citizens' and journalists' access to government information, as well as Abe's ideas for revising the Constitution.

At an earlier stage to select the next NHK president, the Board of Governors had regarded current NHK President Masayuki Matsumoto as the main candidate. Matsumoto, a former president of Central Japan Railway Co. (JR Tokai), introduced lower TV broadcast subscription fees in October 2012. He also improved NHK's revenue-expenditure balance sheet by carrying out wage cuts and by increasing the number of people who pay fees to receive NHK satellite broadcasts.

But Matsumoto suddenly announced Dec. 5 that he will step down Jan. 24, the last day of his first term. Apparently he became fed up with the Diet's approval in November of Abe's appointment of four new members to the Board of Governors. All of the new members are close to Abe, including author Naoki Hyakuta and philosopher Michiko Hasegawa. Opposition by four of the 12 board members can veto the appointment of a new NHK president.

In the Abe Cabinet and the Liberal Democratic Party, there has been deep criticism of NHK's reporting on the issues of nuclear power generation, the deployment of the Osprey tilt-rotor transport planes by the U.S. armed forces and territorial disputes.

Abe's selection of the new four members for NHK's Board of Governors is regarded as an expression of his desire to change NHK's reporting direction and his intention to intervene in the selection of the new NHK president. The Board of Governors, NHK's highest decision-making body, determines NHK's basic policy and supervises the activities of NHK executives, including those of the NHK president. The prime minister cannot appoint the NHK president; that's the task of the Board of Governors. NHK's operations are not covered by tax or commercial funding, but rather by TV subscription fees. The purpose of these systems is to ensure the editorial independence of NHK as a news organization.

We hope that Momii understands and respects the principle behind the systems. He should refrain from large-scale cost-cutting in the production of radio and TV programs because program quality would likely deteriorate as a result. He should strive to ensure that NHK provides high-quality news, documentaries, and education/cultural programs that are based on wide coverage and scrupulous research.

Most importantly, Momii should make it his mission to ensure that NHK employees can express themselves freely at work and produce programs that reflect their sense of duty and conviction as members of a public broadcast organization. In nutshell, he should refrain from any acts that could undermine NHK's independence.

State secrets could be destroyed by civil servants

December 30, 2013

Special state secrets could be destroyed at discretion of officials

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20131230p2a00m0na013000c.html>

The possibility has emerged that under the new heavy-handed state secrets law, **information designated as a special state secret could be destroyed by civil servants with jurisdiction over the information before declassification**, drawing criticism from experts.

Under the state secrets protection act, a special state secret can be destroyed after declassification with the approval of the prime minister, but the law does not address the possibility of destroying information during its special state secret classification.

The possibility was revealed in the government's response to a question from opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) legislator Akira Nagatsuma asking whether information could be destroyed while it is designated a special state secret. The Cabinet approved a response on Dec. 6, the day the state secrets law was passed, that "it cannot be denied that through a government ordinance, information could be destroyed before it is declassified if it is found to be truly unavoidable to preserve the secret."

Article 5 of the new law seeks Cabinet members with the authority to designate special secrets to institute necessary regulations through government ordinances. What sort of rules will be established regarding the disposal of information before declassification will be a point of contention between now and when the law goes into effect -- next fall at the earliest.

While Nagatsuma's question addressed the handling of information while it is designated as a special state secret, what will happen to information after its special secrets status is lifted?

According to the Public Records and Archives Management Act, the information would be transferred to the National Archives or destroyed with the prime minister's approval. However, this law allows for exceptions if other laws are applicable.

For example, "defense secrets" as stipulated by the 2001 revised Self-Defense Law are exempt from the Public Records Act because of a Defense Ministry directive that all declassified information be destroyed. As a result, at least 40,000 defense secrets files were destroyed between 2007 and 2012.

During Diet deliberations on the state secrets bill, the government claimed that special secrets would be subject to the Public Records Act. It also explained that special secrets whose classification periods last for over 30 years would be transferred to the National Archives, preventing any loopholes as in the case of defense secrets.

However, it has been made clear from the government's response to Nagatsuma that a rule to make possible the destruction of information during its designation as a special state secret could be established. The Cabinet Office, which has jurisdiction over the state secrets law, says that the government's response has at its basis the Defense Ministry's bylaws in which an official in charge of a defense secret is permitted to destroy it if there is adequate reason to judge that it is unavoidable and no other method exists to protect it.

Yukiko Miki, head of the nonprofit organization Access-Info Clearinghouse Japan, which has been monitoring the issue of defense secret disposal, is concerned that the government is envisioning the same rules for special state secrets as for defense secrets.

"If that's the case, there's a danger that information will be destroyed arbitrarily," she warned. Meanwhile, a Cabinet Office official told the Mainichi, "We are not yet at the stage of setting down government ordinances or directives, and cannot yet say whether we will set rules on disposal."

Pact with IAEA

Fukushima Govt. & Fukushima Medical University Signed Secrecy Pact With IAEA
<http://www.fukuleaks.org/web/?p=11993>

January 1st, 2014 |

Tokyo Shimbun is reporting the results of their investigation into the dealings of the Fukushima prefecture government, the medical university and the IAEA. There has been ongoing suspicion about the openness and honesty of what has been ongoing in Japan. Tokyo Shimbun has confirmed that these government entities did sign a secrecy agreement with the IAEA. The Fukushima Medical University has been the main source of all public data on exposure and had been dictating what medical care many in the region were allowed to receive related to radiation issues.

Both the prefecture and the medical university have been the subject of growing distrust from the public due to their efforts to downplay problems and withhold information from the public. Tokyo Shimbun's work has confirmed this problem to be the case. A machine translation of the article is below.

It found that the memorandum of mutual cooperation that connects Fukushima and (IAEA), Fukui prefectures International Atomic Energy Agency, one upon request or province or IAEA, terms that can be private information that you are sharing is included were. For this provision, it is not seen as a problem in

prefectural assembly, there is also the voice of criticism that “in the lead ahead of the particular secret protection law”.

The Memorandum of Understanding with the IAEA, in December last year, Fukushima Prefecture were signed respectively in October this year, Fukui Prefecture.

In Fukushima Prefecture, Prefectural University of Medicine has concluded with the IAEA for the health impact study prefecture, radiation for the management of radioactive waste and decontamination. There are “exemplary arrangements” document as detailed MOU provisions marked to be “to ensure the confidentiality of information designated as confidential by the other party” is included in the document.

I signed a cooperation with the IAEA in relation to human resource development of the nuclear field in Fukui Prefecture, there was a secret language specified in the memorandum.

Both county, you are not information that is secret specified at this stage, but measured data and accident information, for such thyroid cancer in children, IAEA or province side, you secret designated as such as “stir up anxiety of residents” For example, there is a possibility that the information will not be published.

Person in charge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs played a memorandum of adjustment that “because it is negotiated every international, it can not be said either of the IAEA and Japan may or sought secret designation clause” in the interview.

However, according to people familiar with the matter of prefectures, when the exchange memorandums and government agencies in each country, that there are rules that incorporate the wording of the secret specified in the IAEA.

The IAEA has compiled a report and “there was no modulation of Health by exposure” in the Chernobyl nuclear accident.

Muto Ruiko head of the Fukushima nuclear power plant prosecution team is concerned, “there is a precedent that has the hidden information about the health effects of Chernobyl IAEA. Fukushima also become the Ninomai” he said.

See also :

<http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/2012/prn201234.html>

IAEA Press Releases

Press Release 2012/34

IAEA, Fukushima Prefecture Sign Cooperation Memorandum

15 December 2012 | *Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, Japan* -- IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano and the Governor of Fukushima Prefecture, Yuhei Sato, today signed a *Memorandum of Cooperation* confirming their willingness to implement concrete projects to help alleviate the consequences of the accident at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station.

The Memorandum, signed on the sidelines of the three-day *Fukushima Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety*, includes arrangements to promote cooperation in two key areas: one on radiation monitoring and remediation between the IAEA and Fukushima Prefecture, and the other on human health between the IAEA and Fukushima Medical University.

The Memorandum also highlights plans for a training centre in Fukushima Prefecture to help reinforce emergency preparedness and response activities, supported by the Government of Japan and Fukushima Prefecture. An IAEA Response and Assistance Network (RANET) Capacity Building Centre will be designated, with IAEA radiation monitoring equipment to be deployed in case of need, and to provide training in emergency preparedness and response in Japan and the Asia Pacific region.

"With this framework, the wisdom of the international community as well as the IAEA will be utilised in the process of reconstruction in Fukushima," said Japan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Koichiro Gamba, who attended the signing ceremony.

"I'm very much encouraged by the conclusion of this Memorandum and I believe this will serve to promote reconstruction in Fukushima," said Governor Sato. "We will also be able to disseminate to the rest of the world the knowledge and experience to be gained from the activities that we are conducting, and we hope this will be a symbol of Fukushima."

"The IAEA has expertise in the areas of remediation and decontamination, as well as environmental monitoring and human health," said Director General Amano. "It is our hope that we will support Fukushima and at the same time serve as a bridge connecting the Prefecture and the world."

The *Fukushima Ministerial Conference*, which started on Saturday, is organised by the Government of Japan in co-sponsorship with the IAEA.

<http://www.fmu.ac.jp/radiationhealth/>

15 Dec 2012 Fukushima/IAEA MOC was ratified.

<http://www.fmu.ac.jp/radiationhealth/news/20121215-1.html>

Cooperation between Fukushima Medical University and the International Atomic Energy Agency
15 December, 2012

Fukushima Medical University

1. The government of Fukushima Prefecture and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) signed on 15 December 2012, in Koriyama City, Fukushima, on the occasion of the Fukushima Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety, the "Memorandum of Cooperation between Fukushima Prefecture and the International Atomic Energy Agency following the Accident at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station".

2. This Memorandum is made between Fukushima Prefecture and the IAEA in order to confirm the willingness of both sides to implement cooperative activities.

3. Under this Memorandum, "Practical Arrangements between Fukushima Medical University and the International Atomic Energy Agency on Cooperation in the Area of Human Health" are made. The objective of these Practical Arrangements is to set forth the framework for the cooperation and relationship between Fukushima Medical University and the IAEA on cooperation in the area of Human Health. The scope of cooperation is health management survey, capacity building and research, enhancement of public awareness and exchange of expert support and information.

4. Under this Practical Arrangements, 3 projects are proposed.

4.1 Enhancing radiation medicine education by building capacity of health professionals and medical students

4.2 Strengthening research cooperation in radiation disaster medicine including post-traumatic stress disorders

4.3 Development of a specific training package for medical radiation physicists in support to nuclear or radiological emergency situations

Time to react

A year to become politically active

Dec 31, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/12/31/editorials/a-year-to-become-politically-active/#.UsMksbTrXIU>

As Japan greets the new year of 2014, the political situation surrounding the nation's citizens is not bright. This is primarily because the Abe administration and the ruling coalition of the Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito on Dec. 6 forced the state secrets bill through the Diet and enacted it. People face the danger of the law undermining their right to know, freedom of the press and freedoms of thought, conscience and expression.

And this law goes hand in hand with the one that established the National Security Council. Since the NSC law does not require the keeping of minutes of NSC meetings, what the two laws mean is that the prime minister, the chief Cabinet secretary, the foreign minister and the defense minister can secretly make decisions that greatly affect the fate of the nation and all citizens.

This year the fundamental democratic principle that is declared in the preamble of the Constitution — that sovereign power resides with the people — will be tested. It will be all the more important for citizens to carefully monitor the nation's politics and carry out various efforts at the grass-roots level aimed at upholding their sovereignty.

The state secrets law gives the heads of administrative bodies the discretionary power to designate information related to security, diplomacy, counter-intelligence and counterterrorism as special secrets. This power enables the bureaucracy to hide an almost limitless amount of information from the people and their representatives in the Diet. This will have the effect of putting the bureaucracy above the Diet and allowing it to make important decisions, especially in the areas of security and diplomacy, without providing sufficient information to the Diet.

People should realize that the law carries the danger of completely undermining the fundamental principles of the Constitution. Article 41 of the Constitution says: "The Diet shall be the highest organ of state power, and shall be the sole lawmaking organ of the State."

The important task for people as they greet the new year is to brace themselves for protecting the fundamental principles of the Constitution as stated by its preamble and Article 41.

In addition to declaring that sovereign power resides with the people, the preamble of the Constitution says, "Government is a sacred trust of the people, the authority for which is derived from the people, the powers of which are exercised by the representatives of the people, and the benefits of which are enjoyed by the people."

What people saw in 2013 was that the Diet is not fulfilling its duties as stipulated by the Constitution. Clearly the Lower House failed to spend sufficient hours for discussions on the state secrets bill. After the bill was rammed through the Lower House, the situation in the Upper House was worse.

Although many problems were pointed out with regard to the bill during the Lower House discussions, the ruling coalition was obsessed with the idea of hurriedly making the bill into a law.

The Upper House's special committee on the bill spent 23 hours for discussions, only about half the number of hours given to discussions in the Lower House counterpart committee — this despite the fact that the Lower House discussions were inadequate and that the role of the Upper House is to amend the excess or inadequacy of the Lower House and to listen to minority opinions.

Despite this deplorable situation, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on Dec. 4 that adequate discussions were made in the Upper House, and the LPD and New Komeito forced the bill through the Upper House and enacted the bill on Dec. 6.

It is important for people to remember what happened that day and to make efforts to reject the political forces that work to weaken the function of the Diet and corrode the important rights as guaranteed by the Constitution.

The reason that the Abe administration and the ruling coalition made haste in passing the bill is clear. As people's movements to oppose the bill were gaining momentum, they feared that if Diet deliberations on the bill were prolonged, many defects of the bill would become clear to the eyes of people and the bill might fail to be passed by the Diet.

This inversely shows that the powers that be fear people who have the ability to see through the essence of the matter. This is all the more reason why the people must continue to closely examine what bureaucrats and politicians do and to manifest their opinions through daily activities including sending letters, issuing statements, making speeches, organizing study meetings, taking part in demonstrations and casting their votes in elections.

With only the support of about a quarter of all the voters, the LDP and New Komeito gained the majority in the Upper House in the July election. This was made possible because some 48 percent of eligible voters did not bother to participate.

People should realize that abstention is tantamount to giving carte blanche to the parties that win an election. Although there will be no scheduled Diet elections in 2014, it should be a year in which people discard their political apathy. They can express their political will in local elections, including the Tokyo gubernatorial election in February, and through various grassroots activities.

This year, the Abe administration will try to scrap the long-established weapons-export ban and to discard the government's long-standing constitutional interpretation that Japan cannot exercise the right to collective self-defense.

These moves could directly involve Japan in conflicts abroad, possibly including combat missions of the Self-Defense Forces in foreign countries. Abe's ultimate goal is to change the war-renouncing Article 9 of the Constitution.

In view of these important moves, people cannot afford to be indifferent to politics. This year they must closely watch politics and express their opinions.

The Abe administration's economic policy appears to have somewhat brightened the nation's economy — at least temporarily. But in fiscal 2014, the financial burden people must shoulder will increase as exemplified by the consumption tax hike from April. The danger of economic bubbles cannot be excluded because the main pillar of Abenomics is to increase the nation's monetary base in an unprecedented manner.

The administration is also pushing the Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade scheme. But this is primarily an attempt to place the interests of international businesses above the interests of sovereign states. People need to carefully examine whether these moves will really improve their welfare and to take concrete civic actions in protest of such policies if they believe the opposite will be the case.

December 30, 2013

Shoddy work to cut costs and save time

Worker aghast at shoddy work on Fukushima radioactive water storage tanks

January 04, 2014

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201401040008>

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

URUMA, Okinawa Prefecture--Yoshitatsu Uechi recalls with disgust the disregard for worker safety, the makeshift plans and the cost-cutting measures, including the use of adhesive tape on key equipment, at his job last year.

He said an emphasis on saving time and expenses was clear when he helped to build storage tanks for radioactive water accumulating at the site of Japan's worst-ever nuclear accident.

"I couldn't believe that such slipshod work was being done, even if it was part of stopgap measures," Uechi told The Asahi Shimbun.

He was one of 17 workers from Okinawa Prefecture who were sent to the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on June 28, 2012. The 48-year-old from Uruma said he worked on foundations and storage tank assembly between July 2 and Dec. 6, 2012.

He said he was sent to various places at the site, including "H3," an area now known as the spot where high radiation levels have been found due to leaks of radioactive water from the storage tanks.

The leaking tanks are just part of the problem of contaminated water that continues to build up and leak into the ocean from the plant.

One rainy day in late October, Uechi and a colleague were told to wear yellow raincoats on top of their protective gear and head to the "E" area close to H3. They were instructed to cover the openings of five or six storage tanks that lacked their top lids.

Uechi climbed to the top of a nearly 10-meter-tall storage tank and found white adhesive tape covering an opening about 30 centimeters across. The tape was all that separated Uechi and the surface of radioactive water only 50 cm below.

After using a blade to remove the tape, Uechi said his legs trembled at the sight of shiny raindrops hitting the water surface.

He applied a sealing agent on the opening, fit a disk-shaped steel lid he had brought with him, and quickly fastened it with bolts.

Uechi said he had been instructed to use four bolts, but he saw that the component had eight bolt holes. Workers were told to keep away from the radioactive water storage tanks, which had high radiation levels, even on the outside.

“I wore a raincoat even on sunny days to block the radiation when I had to go near highly radioactive water,” Uechi said.

His seasoned colleagues told him that the use of adhesive tape was one of the makeshift measures devised on the site to deal with the sharp increase in the stockpile of radioactive water.

But he said he was surrounded by signs of shoddy work to slash costs and time requirements. For example, wire nets were used instead of reinforcing bars during the placement of concrete for storage tank foundations.

And to save on the sealing agent used to join metal sheets of the storage tanks, waterproof sheets were applied along the joints inside flange-type cylindrical tanks. Some of these tanks were later found to be leaking radioactive water.

Uechi said the tip of a special clamping bolt snapped and fell into an opening between the bottom and foundation of a storage tank, possibly causing damage.

Rain and melting snow had washed away the anti-corrosive agent applied around clamping bolts on a bottom plate, reducing its sealing effect, he said.

And many second-hand materials were in use, Uechi added.

The prime contractor for the work project was Taisei Corp., one of Japan’s leading general contractors.

“We decline to comment on individual work projects,” a Taisei representative said. “We are implementing and supervising work projects in an appropriate manner.”

Uechi said he was hired by a construction company, a third-tier subcontractor of Taisei, based in Yonabaru, Okinawa Prefecture.

He received work instructions from foremen and supervisors of Taisei's first-tier and second-tier subcontractors.

Uechi said his job contract was revised in mid-August, after he raised questions about the ambiguity of the wording, so he was hired by the second-tier subcontractor afterward.

TEPCO has a new chairman

January 7, 2013

Abe meets next TEPCO chairman

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140107_41.html



Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has asked the next chairman of Tokyo Electric Power Company to make the most of its ability and resources to handle the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

Abe met Fumio Sudo, who was chosen on Tuesday to be TEPCO's chairman from April.

Abe said all TEPCO workers should take to heart the fact that the utility exists to pay compensation to those affected by the accident, to decommission reactors at the plant, and to supply power in a stable way.

He asked Sudo to introduce competitive management methods and not be complacent about the status of a local monopoly like before.

Sudo told reporters after the meeting that the biggest problem with TEPCO's management is that it lacks the idea of global competition.

He said Japan's power rates are more than double those in the United States and South Korea, and that this should be changed by all means.

Jan. 7, 2014 - Updated 10:33 UTC

TEPCO new chairman chosen

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140107_35.html

The operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant is getting a new chairman. The board of directors at Tokyo Electric Power Company has chosen an outside director Fumio Sudo for the top post.

Sudo will replace the current chairman Kazuhiko Shimokobe. Shimokobe expressed his intention to step down last month after the utility submitted a new business plan to the government.

Sudo joined Kawasaki Steel in 1964. In 2005, he became president of JFE Holdings, which was set up through Kawasaki's merger with another steelmaker, NKK. He has been an outside director for TEPCO since 2012.

In drafting the company's business plan, **Sudo proposed steps to streamline operations and boost profits.**

He also requested that the government shoulder part of the cost for decontamination at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Sudo will officially assume the post on April 1st.

Jan. 7, 2014 - Updated 07:57 UTC

TEPCO tries to restore public trust

January 9, 2014

TEPCO withheld Fukushima radioactive water measurements for 6 months

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201401090060>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tokyo Electric Power Co. has withheld 140 measurements of radioactive strontium levels taken in groundwater and the port of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant between June and November last year.

TEPCO has been releasing the combined levels of all radioactive substances, including strontium, that emit beta rays, at the crippled nuclear plant. But strontium levels exceeded the all-beta readings in some instances, leading the utility to decide they were “wrong” and to withhold them from public releases, TEPCO officials said Jan. 8.

Previously, TEPCO officials said they had not released the data because the numbers were not confirmed.

Company officials on Jan. 8 insisted the utility had no intention to conceal information. They said they did not disclose the data simply because of inconsistencies in the information.

They said TEPCO will release correct readings after determining the cause of the discrepancies by the end of this month

"Does anyone in authority tell the truth about Fukushima?"

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/fukushima-meltdowns-a-global-conspiracy-of-denial/5363827>



Fukushima Meltdowns: A Global Conspiracy of Denial

By William Boardman

Global Research, January 05, 2014

Does anyone in authority anywhere tell the truth about Fukushima?

If there is any government or non-government authority in the world that is addressing the disaster at Fukushima openly, directly, honestly, and effectively, it's not apparent to the outside observer what entity that might be.

There is instead an apparent global conspiracy of authorities of all sorts to deny to the public reliably accurate, comprehensible, independently verifiable (where possible), and comprehensive information about not only the condition of the Fukushima power plant itself and its surrounding communities, but about the unceasing, uncontrolled release of radioactive debris into the air and water, creating a constantly increasing risk of growing harm to the global community.

While the risk may still be miniscule in most places, the range of risk rises to lethal in Fukushima itself. With the radioactive waste of four nuclear reactors (three of them in meltdown) under uncertain control for almost three years now, the risk of lethal exposure is very real for plant workers, and may decrease with distance from the plant, but may be calculable for anyone on the planet. No one seems to know. No one seems to have done the calculation. No one with access to the necessary information (assuming it exists) seems to want to do the calculation.

There is no moral excuse for this international collusion. The excuses are political or economic or social, but none of them excuses any authority for withholding or lying about information that has potentially universal and destructive impact on everyone alive today and everyone to be born for some unknown generations.

Japanese authorities may be the worst current offenders against the truth, as well as the health and safety of their people. Now the Japanese government has passed a harsh state secrets law that threatens to reduce or eliminate reliable information about Fukushima. The U.S. government officially applauded this heightened secrecy, while continuing its own tight control on nuclear information. Japanese authorities are already attacking their own people in defense of nuclear power: not only under-measuring and ignoring varieties of radioactive threat, but even withholding the iodine pills in 2011 that might have mitigated the growing epidemic of thyroid issues today. Failing to confront Fukushima honestly, the Japanese are laying the basis for what could amount to a radiological sneak attack on the rest of the world.

Just because no one seems to know what to do about Fukushima is no excuse to go on lying about and/or denying the dimensions of reality, whatever they might be.

There are hundreds, probably thousands of people with little or no authority who have long struggled to create a realistic, rational perspective on nuclear threats. The fundamental barrier to knowing the scale of the Fukushima disaster is just that: the scale of the Fukushima disaster.

Chernobyl 1986 and Fukushima 2011 are not really comparable

Chernobyl is the closest precedent to Fukushima, and it's not very close. Chernobyl at the time of the 1986 electric failure and explosion had four operating reactors and two more under construction. The Chernobyl accident involved one reactor meltdown. Other reactors kept operating for some time after the accident. The reactor meltdown was eventually entombed, containing the meltdown and reducing the risk. Until Fukushima, Chernobyl was considered the worst nuclear power accident in history, and it is still far from over (albeit largely contained for the time being). The Chernobyl Exclusion Zone of roughly 1,000 square miles remains one of the most radioactive areas in the world and the clean-up is not even expected to be complete before 2065.

At the time of the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami, the Fukushima plant had six operating reactors. Three of them went into meltdown and a fourth was left with a heavily laden fuel pool teetering a hundred feet above the ground. Two other reactors were undamaged and have been shut down. Radiation levels remain lethal in each of the melted-down reactors, where the meltdowns appear to be held in check by water that is pumped into the reactors to keep them cool. In the process, the water gets irradiated and that which is not collected on site in leaking tanks flows steadily into the Pacific Ocean. Within the first two weeks, Fukushima radiation was comparable to Chernobyl's and while the levels have gone down, they remain elevated.

The plant's corporate owner, Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), in turn effectively owned by the Japanese government after a 2012 nationalization, began removing more than 1,500 fuel rod assemblies from the teetering fuel pool in November, a delicate process expected to take a year or more. There are additional fuel pools attached to each of the melted down reactors and a much larger general fuel pool, all of which contain nuclear fuel rod assemblies that are secure only as long as TEPCO continues to cool them. The Fukushima Exclusion Zone, a 12-mile radius around the nuclear plant, is about 500 square miles (much of it ocean); little specific information about the exclusion zone is easily available, but media coverage in the form of disaster tourism is plentiful, including a Google Street View interactive display.

Despite their significant differences as disasters, Chernobyl and Fukushima are both rated at 7 – a “major accident” on the International Nuclear Event Scale designed in 1990 by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). That is the highest rating on the scale, a reflection of the inherent denial that colors most official nuclear thinking. Designed by nuclear “experts” after Chernobyl, **the scale can't imagine a worse accident than Chernobyl which, for all its intensity, was effectively over as an accident in a**

relatively short period of time. At Fukushima, by contrast, the initial set of events was less acute than Chernobyl, but almost three years later they continue without any resolution likely soon. Additionally Fukushima has three reactor meltdowns and thousands of precarious fuel rod assemblies in uncertain pools, any of which could produce a new crisis that would put Fukushima clearly off the scale.

And then there's groundwater. Groundwater was not a problem at Chernobyl. Groundwater is a huge problem at the Fukushima plant that was built at the seashore, on a former riverbed, over an active aquifer. In a short video, nuclear engineer Arnie Gundersen makes clear why groundwater makes Fukushima so hard to clean up, and why radiation levels there will likely remain dangerous for another hundred years

Fukushima Unit #3 activity led to some panic-driven reporting in 2013

The Japanese government and nuclear power industry have a history of not telling the truth about nuclear accidents dating back at least to 1995, as reported by New Scientist and Rachel Maddow, among others. Despite Japan's history of nuclear dishonesty, Japanese authorities remain in total control of the Fukushima site and most of the information about it, without significant objection from most of the world's governments, media, and other power brokers, whose reputation for honesty in nuclear matters is almost as bad as Japan's. In such a context of no context, the public is vulnerable to reports like this from the Turner Radio Network (TRN) on December 28:

**** NEWS FLASH – URGENT ** STEAM SUDDENLY EMANATING FROM FUKUSHIMA REACTOR # 3 – WEST COAST OF NORTH AMERICA SHOULD BEGIN PREPARATIONS FOR POSSIBLE RADIATION CLOUD WITHIN 3 TO 5 DAYS**

Five days after this story was posted, the “radiation cloud” had not developed despite the story's assertion that: “Experts say this could be the beginning of a ‘spent fuel pool criticality (meltdown)’ involving up to 89 TONS of nuclear fuel burning up into the atmosphere and heading to North America.” The story named no “experts” and provided links only to TEPCO announcements in Japanese. The bulk of the story reads like an infomercial for “protective” gear of various sorts that TRN makes a point of saying it does NOT sell. Despite such obvious warning signs, others – such as The Ecologist and Gizmodo – reported the threat of “another meltdown” at Fukushima Unit #3 as imminent.

Clarification and reassurance quickly started chasing the “new meltdown” rumor around the Internet. ENENEWS (Energy News) promptly posted the TEPCO reports in English, demonstrating that there was nothing “sudden” about the steam releases, they've been happening more or less daily since 2011, but condensation caused by cold weather makes them visible. At FAIREWINDS (Energy Education), Arnie Gundersen posted on January 1:

“... the Internet has been flooded with conjecture claiming that Fukushima Daiichi Unit 3 is ready to explode.... Our research, and discussions with other scientists, confirms that what we are seeing is a phenomenon that has been occurring at the Daiichi site since the March 2011 accident.... While the plants

are shutdown in nuke speak, there is no method of achieving cold shut down in any nuclear reactor. While the reactor can stop generating the actual nuclear chain reaction, **the atoms left over from the original nuclear chain reaction continue to give off heat that is called the decay of the radioactive rubble (fission products).... constantly releasing moisture (steam) and radioactive products into the environment.**" [emphasis added]

In other words, Fukushima Unit #3 continues to leak radioactivity into both air and water, as Units #1 and #2 presumably do as well. But as Gundersen explains, the level of radioactivity has declined sharply without becoming benign:

"When Unit 3 was operating, it was producing more than 2,000 megawatts of heat from the nuclear fission process (chain reaction in the reactor). Immediately after the earthquake and tsunami, it shut down and the chain reaction stopped, but Unit 3 was still producing about 160 megawatts of decay heat. Now, 30 months later, it is still producing slightly less than 1 megawatt (one million watts) of decay heat.... 1 megawatt of decay heat is a lot of heat even today, and it is creating radioactive steam, but it is not a new phenomenon."

Reassurances about Fukushima are as misleading as scare stories

The reassuring aspects of the condition of Unit #3 -- radioactive releases are not new, they're less intense than they once were, the nuclear waste is cooling -- while true enough, provide only a false sense of comfort. Also true: radiation is released almost continuously, the releases are uncontrolled, no one seems to be measuring the releases, no one seems to be tracking the releases, no one is assessing accumulation of the releases. And while it's true that the waste is cooling and decaying, it's also true that a loss of coolant could lead to another uncontrolled chain reaction. ("Fukushima Daiichi Unit 3 is not going to explode," says Gundersen in a headline, but he can't know that with certainty.)

For the near future, what all that means, in effect, is that the world has to accept chronic radiation releases from Fukushima as the price for avoiding another catastrophic release. And even then, it's not a sure thing.

But there's another aspect of Fukushima Unit #3 that's even less reassuring. Unit #3 is the one Fukushima reactor that was running on Mixed oxide fuel, or MOX fuel, in its fuel rods. MOX fuel typically uses Plutonium mixed with one or more forms of Uranium. Using Plutonium in fuel rods adds to their toxicity in the event of a meltdown. In part because Plutonium-239 has a half-life of 240,000 years and can be used to make nuclear weapons of "dirty bombs," its use in commercial reactors remains both limited and controversial. Because it contains Plutonium, MOX fuel is more toxic than other nuclear fuel and will burn at lower temperatures. As Natural Resources News reported in 2011:

"The mixed oxide fuel rods used in the compromised number three reactor at the Fukushima Daiichi complex contain enough plutonium to threaten public health with the possibility of inhalation of airborne

plutonium particles.... Plutonium is at its most dangerous when it is inhaled and gets into the lungs. The effect on the human body is to vastly increase the chance of developing fatal cancers.”

Reportedly, TEPCO plans don't call for the removal of the MOX fuel in Unit #3 for another decade or more. Fuel removal from Units #1, #2, and #3 is complicated by lethal radiation levels at all three reactors, as well as TEPCO's inability so far to locate the three melted cores with any precision.

There is ample reason to hope that Fukushima, despite the complex of uncontrollable and deteriorating factors, will not get worse, because even the Japanese don't want that. But there is little reason to expect anything but worsening conditions, slowly or suddenly, for years and years to come. And there is even less reason to expect anyone in authority anywhere to be more than minimally and belatedly truthful about an industry they continue to protect, no matter how many people it damages or kills.

The perfect paradigm of that ruthlessly cynical nuclear mentality is the current Japanese practice of recruiting homeless people to work at Fukushima in high level radiation areas where someone with something to lose might not be willing to go for minimum wage.

TEPCO's financial plan "built on shaky ground"

January 9, 2014

Tepco's flawed turnaround plan

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/01/09/editorials/tepcos-flawed-turnaround-plan/#.Us_x97TrV1s

Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s proposed new financial turnaround plan is built on shaky ground since it continues to rely on the restart of the idled reactors at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture, where local authorities remain wary of restarting operations while the contaminated-water mess continues at the utility's crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Tepco's scenario in its previous plan compiled in May 2012 proved to be pie in the sky, as it was built on the assumption that the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, the world's largest in terms of output capacity, would be reactivated in April 2013 — which did not happen. The Nuclear Regulation Authority's screening of Tepco's applications to resume the operation of reactors Nos. 6 and 7 at the plant began in November after a two-month delay, and it remains unclear how long the process will take.

The utility, which also needs massive financial support from the government, should review the plan and draw up a more credible scenario in which the company can regain profitability through greater efficiency of operation — without relying on the restart of its nuclear power plants.

After the March 2011 meltdowns at Fukushima No. 1, Tepco was effectively placed under state control in 2012 as the government injected ¥1 trillion into the embattled utility through the state-backed Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund and obtained a majority of the company's shares with voting rights. A mechanism was created for the fund to lend up to ¥5 trillion in interest-free loans to Tepco to pay for compensating victims of the nuclear disaster and cover the cost of decontaminating areas contaminated by radioactive fallout. Still, Tepco has been asking for increased support from the government on the grounds that such costs proved larger than expected and are too much for the company alone to shoulder. The new turnaround plan, submitted by Tepco and the fund in late December for government approval, calls for raising the ceiling on interest-free loans to ¥9 trillion, and assumes that the state will cover the expense for additional decontamination work and ¥1.1 trillion in construction and maintenance costs of a temporary storage for contaminated soil.

If the plan is approved, the government will be more deeply involved in the work to clean up the mess from the meltdowns, while placing a cap on Tepco's financial burden so that its rehabilitation can move forward. Increased government support means greater use of taxpayer money. If it is going to approve the new plan, the government needs to publicly explain why.

The turnaround plan meanwhile assumes that the reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant — currently all idled — will be restarted beginning in July. While noting that ¥100 billion to ¥200 billion in annual pretax profits can be expected for eight years beginning in fiscal 2015 if all seven reactors are restarted, it points to the possibility of an additional hike in electricity charges of up to 10 percent this year if none of the reactors is restarted.

The new plan, effectively a joint product of Tepco and the government, comes on the heels of the Abe administration's draft basic energy policy, which calls nuclear energy an "important base-load power source that serves as a foundation" for the nation's energy supply stability — a clear turnaround from the previous Democratic Party of Japan-led administration's policy of seeking a phaseout of nuclear power generation in Japan by the 2030s.

It is ironic that the Tepco rehabilitation plan, on one hand, calls for additional public financial support to clean up the mess from the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima plant and, on the other, presumes that the restart of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant will rebuild the utility's finances.

Niigata Gov. Hirohiko Izumida, whose consent will be necessary for restarting the plant, remains opposed on the grounds that thorough examination of the Fukushima plant disaster needs to come first. The NRA says the safety screening of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant could be suspended if a serious problem emerges in the ongoing efforts to manage the aftermath of the Fukushima plant meltdowns.

Power companies say the huge cost of imported fuel for thermal power generation to make up for the suspended nuclear power generation weighs heavily on their finances, and they have cited this as the main reason for raising electricity rates since the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe says the nation is losing trillions of yen each year on additional fuel imports and that nuclear power is an economically advantageous source of energy that will be essential to keep the Japanese economy competitive.

Still, Abe's new energy plan seems oblivious to the huge cost of a nuclear disaster like the Fukushima No. 1 accident. Tepco's rehabilitation plan itself testifies to the costs — so huge that even the giant utility is unable to cover them on its own, thus requiring the injection of taxpayer money.

Tepco's new rehabilitation plan calls for a ¥4.8 trillion reduction in its expenses over 10 years through such measures as introduction of more competitive bidding for materials procurement and voluntary retirement programs for 2,000 employees from the group workforce in fiscal 2014.

Tepco says it will reorganize itself into a holding company system and separate its power generation, transmission and retail businesses into three separate companies by April 2016, ahead of the schedule set by the power industry reform law enacted in 2013. It also plans to embark on the electricity retail business in parts of Japan that are currently serviced by other regional power monopolies when the second phase of the reform to liberalize electricity retail starts in 2016.

While further streamlining its operations, Tepco should explore these new avenues of business growth, rather than seek a return to its old model that depended on nuclear power for profitability.

TEPCO paid far too much for goods and services

January 10, 2013

Tepco overpaying to procure goods, services: contract-screening panel

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/01/10/national/tepc-overpaying-to-procure-goods-services-contract-screening-panel/#.Us_wu7TrV1s

Kyodo

An in-house Tepco panel has found that the financially troubled utility paid **two to five times more than reasonable levels in buying goods and services to run its operations.**

The panel's investigation found that Tokyo Electric Power Co. came up with a quote of ¥21 million for work at one of its nuclear power plants that the panel said could be reduced by ¥10 million.

It also estimated that work for laying underground cables could be reduced by as much as 33 percent by opening the bid to more businesses.

The panel even found a case where a quote for daily wages of an employee was inflated to ¥49,000 from an original estimate of ¥12,000 as a result of farming out the work to multiple layers of subcontractors.

he panel even found a case where a quote for daily wages of an employee was inflated to ¥49,000 from an original estimate of ¥12,000 as a result of farming out the work to multiple layers of subcontractors.

The panel, made up of experts hired from outside, is tasked with investigating contracts worth ¥1 billion or more at the utility as it struggles to contain the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant catastrophe. Since October 2012, the panel has helped achieve cost cuts of around ¥17 billion, according to Tepco.

“As the utility has received government funds and asked the public to share the burden, it needs to slim down even further,” panel Chairman Sakon Uda said.

Under its restructuring plan, Tepco aims to achieve ¥4.82 trillion in cost reductions between fiscal 2013 and 2022 through such measures as opening at least 60 percent of procurement to competitive bidding.

[Waste site referendum
NARAHARA, Fukushima Pref.

Jiji

A group of Fukushima residents in the fallout-hit town of Naraha on Friday requested that a local ordinance be drafted to hold a referendum on accepting interim nuclear waste storage in the municipality.

Such a facility would be a disincentive for young residents to return, said Keiichi Matsumoto, who is leading the group. Matsumoto, 65, stressed that residents should be given an opportunity to make a decision on the issue.

The group issued the request directly to Naraha Mayor Yukie Matsumoto. The mayor will convene a municipal assembly within 20 days and submit a draft ordinance to enable the proposed vote along with his own opinion on the ordinance.

Last month, the group presented a petition for such an ordinance to the municipal board of election. The board confirmed there were 2,151 valid signatures, far more than the 126 (one-50th of the voting population) required for an ordinance.

Naraha is one of the municipalities the central government has asked to host interim facilities for storing radioactive soil and other waste.

The Naraha government is ready to consider accepting an interim facility for low-level radioactive waste but not high-level contaminated soil.]

Nuke industry recruits

January 12, 2013

Nuclear industry holds recruiting event in Tokyo

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140112_20.html

A nuclear industry organization held a recruiting event in Tokyo on Sunday.

Students who will graduate in the spring of 2015 gathered for the event featuring 22 companies and organizations. They included utility firms and reactor manufacturers.

The annual event is held in Tokyo and Osaka. It attracted 420 people, slightly more than the 388 who came last year, but still about one-fifth of the number before the nuclear accident in Fukushima.

Some companies are visiting universities around the country to recruit students.

A participant from a trading firm selling radiological equipment says he would like to recruit enough people to continue the business. He said the situation has become more difficult as fewer young people are studying subjects related to nuclear power generation.

Takuya Hattori heads the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum, which hosted the event. He says the industry needs to secure personnel, regardless of the government's nuclear policy.

He says a key issue is whether the industry can show it has an appealing future.

A 23-year-old student studying nuclear engineering at a graduate school in Tokyo says he wants to work for a plant maker that manufactures reactors to support the decommissioning in Fukushima and to develop equipment that secures nuclear safety.

Another 23-year-old student, who is studying radiation at a graduate school in Tokyo and is from Fukushima, says he felt powerless when the nuclear accident occurred.

He said his parents don't want him to work in the industry, but he wants to be involved in the decommissioning work and contribute to the reconstruction of his home prefecture.

A 23-year-old woman, who is studying the removal of radioactive substances and is also from Fukushima, says she was shocked by the accident and started to study the subject in graduate school.

She said she wants to enter a company that is involved in decontamination so that she can help Fukushima.

Jan. 12, 2014 - Updated 13:39 UTC

"A step back about 20 years" (Japan's energy plan)

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/01/12/commentary/japan-goes-back-to-the-future-to-affirm-energy-foundation/#.UtLOkbSnGSp>

Japan goes back to the future to affirm energy 'foundation'

by Philip White

Jan 12, 2014

ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA – On Dec. 6 the Japanese government released a new draft Basic Energy Plan for public comment. This will replace the 2010 BEP, which is still legally current despite the fact that its foundations were blown away by the March 11, 2011, nuclear accident at the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

In September 2012, the then Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) government issued an "Innovative Strategy for Energy and the Environment," which set the unprecedented goal of phasing out nuclear power by 2039. But this did not have the same legal status as the BEP, and when the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) won back power in the December 2012 election, it declared that it would review the DPJ's strategy from scratch, stating that it did not support a nuclear phase-out.

The recently released draft BEP goes as close as possible to preserving the pre-Fukushima nuclear status quo, but with all nuclear power plants currently closed down and public opinion still strongly in favor of a nuclear phase out, it was unable to set ambitious targets for nuclear energy.

The 2010 BEP aimed for 50 percent of electricity generation from nuclear power by 2030, with at least 14 new nuclear power plants being constructed in that time, but the recently released draft eschews targets altogether, settling instead for qualitative statements affirming the continuing role of nuclear power. It states that nuclear energy is an "important baseload power source that serves as a foundation" for the stability of Japan's energy supply.

The word "foundation" was added for emphasis after the draft was initially released, even though one of the drafting committee members pointed out that over-emphasis reduces credibility.

An aspect of the DPJ's "Innovative Strategy" that attracted criticism from all sides was the nuclear fuel-cycle policy. The strategy purported to maintain the existing policy, which meant reprocessing all spent

nuclear fuel to separate plutonium, at the same time as phasing out the proposed means of consuming that plutonium, namely using it as fuel in nuclear reactors (be they standard light-water reactors or fast-breeder reactors). Besides domestic criticism of this contradiction, it was also criticized by officials in the U.S. government who were concerned about the proliferation implications of more plutonium stockpiles.

Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Toshimitsu Motegi jumped on this contradiction during his Dec. 6 press conference announcing the draft BEP. He implied that the new draft resolved this problem because it states that nuclear power plants will continue to operate, but in fact the draft gives no indication of what steps will be taken to ensure that Japan's plutonium stockpile does not grow.

Japan now has 44 tons of separated plutonium (enough to make over 5,000 nuclear weapons), 34.9 tons stored in Europe and 9.3 tons stored in Japan.

Given the push to restart the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant, the very limited capacity to consume plutonium even if permission is given to restart some of Japan's idled nuclear reactors, and the fact that Japan does not yet have a fuel fabrication plant designed to manufacture plutonium-based fuel for light-water reactors, it is inevitable that Japan's in-country plutonium stockpile will grow if reprocessing resumes.

Even more back to the future than the draft BEP contents was how the BEP was produced. After the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant accident, the DPJ government commenced a review of energy and environment policy. After deliberations in a committee that included more or less equal numbers of nuclear critics, proponents and neutral people, in June 2012 three scenarios were announced — based on 0 percent, 15 percent and 20 to 25 percent of electricity generation from nuclear energy. In July-August, these scenarios were put to a broad national debate, the outcome of which was that a clear majority of the public supported a nuclear phase-out. The national debate played a crucial role in pushing the DPJ government to support a nuclear phase out in its "Innovative Strategy."

Besides repudiating the DPJ's goal of phasing out nuclear energy, the LDP government also revamped the policy-drafting committee, drastically reducing the number of nuclear critics. The chairman, Akio Mimura, who had played a problematic role in the DPJ review, was retained. He became even more outspoken in his support of nuclear energy and did not hesitate to make disparaging remarks about the contributions of the two remaining nuclear critics on the committee.

But the clearest evidence of the reversion to the old ways was the manner in which public comments on the draft BEP were called. The draft was produced by the secretariat (provided by the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy) without consultation with committee members.

It was said to be based on the committee's discussions, but there was no indication of how members' views were reflected. When it was presented to the committee on Dec. 6, many of the members said they had not even had time to read it, yet it was released for public comment on the same day.

At the following meeting, held Dec. 13, a draft slightly amended on the basis of comments at the previous meeting was tabled, but the deadline for public comments was only extended two days to Jan. 6. Chairman Mimura spoke as if the committee would probably not reconvene before a Cabinet decision was made on the BEP sometime in January.

Presumably some formal response to the public comments will be produced, but it seems that the government does not regard it as necessary for the committee to be given a chance to comment on the public comments. Apparently there are no plans for public hearings to be held.

From a process perspective, this represents **a step back about 20 years**. The first official example of public participation in Japan's nuclear energy policymaking process occurred in 1994. Before that, there was no public participation and policymaking committees were held in secret. A major step toward greater public participation and disclosure of information occurred after the December 1995 sodium leak and fire at the Monju fast breeder reactor. Although public participation was not conducted in good faith, at least lip service was paid. It seems that the current government has decided that it doesn't even need to pay lip service.

No doubt this is partly due to the LDP government's determination to totally repudiate the DPJ government's record. A precedent was established with the DPJ's 2012 national debate on energy policy. For the first time the public was allowed to exert influence on energy policy. But for the nuclear industry this was a precedent they did not want repeated ever again.

Some LDP politicians support a phase-out of nuclear energy, and popular former LDP Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has come out strongly in favor of a nuclear phase out, but the current LDP hierarchy has been working overtime to protect the nuclear industry.

What with rescuing Tokyo Electric Power Co., whose management led to the Fukushima nuclear disaster, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe acting as chief salesman for nuclear exports, and now this gung-ho approach to energy policymaking, it is back to the future turbocharged.

Philip White is a Ph.D. student at Adelaide University's Center for Asian Studies. He was working as international liaison officer for the Tokyo-based Citizens' Nuclear Information Center at the time of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant accident.

Gov't approves TEPCO's business plan

January 15, 2013

Industry minister approves TEPCO's revival plan based on reactor restart

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201401150089

REUTERS

The trade ministry on Jan. 15 approved a revival plan for Tokyo Electric Power Co., the utility responsible for the Fukushima nuclear disaster, its second attempt at restoring its battered finances.

The plan hinges on TEPCO restarting its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant to cut fossil fuel costs, a contentious undertaking staunchly opposed by the local governor.

An earlier plan by TEPCO outlining a revival after its Fukushima plant was hit by a massive earthquake and tsunami in 2011, triggering triple meltdowns at the site, had to be torn up because it could not restart Kashiwazaki.

"As for the restart of Kashiwazaki-Kariwa ... this is simply an assumption built into the financial plan," industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi said as he gave formal approval of the plan to TEPCO President Naomi Hirose.

The previous revival plan revolved around a Kashiwazaki restart in early 2013. The new plan envisages a restart of two reactors at the station in July.

Motegi and Hirose said there may be a time lag between the plan's assumption and any restarts.

The recovery of Fukushima Prefecture, dealing with compensation for those who lost homes and businesses and decommissioning the damaged plant are national priorities, Motegi told Hirose.

"TEPCO will throw all available resources at taking responsibility for Fukushima. We will compensate every last person and the company has many things to do in order for residents to return quickly," Hirose said.

The company, which is majority owned by the government after an earlier bailout, said in the plan it may increase electricity prices if there are long delays in the restart schedule.

The new plan sees deeper cost cuts and more staff reductions than in the previous version. TEPCO says it is aiming to report recurring profit of 167.7 billion yen (\$1.62 billion) in the year through March 2015.

The utility said it would seek savings on fuel purchases of 650 billion yen annually by buying supplies in partnership with other companies.

POLITICAL DEBATE

The disaster at Fukushima, the worst nuclear crisis since Chernobyl in 1986, eventually brought about the halt of all nuclear power plants in Japan so they could be vetted under tougher new standards.

Opposition to nuclear power remains strong in the country and is set to become a major issue in an election next month for governorship of metropolitan Tokyo, which owns a stake in TEPCO.

Most candidates are opposed to restarting nuclear power plants and one, former prime minister Morihiro Hosokawa has received the strong backing from Junichiro Koizumi, one of Japan's most popular leaders, who ruled between 2001 and 2006.

In the nearly three years since the disaster, the utility has been plagued by a string of setbacks at the Fukushima station north of Tokyo, including leaks of highly radioactive water last year, prompting the government to step in with more support.

The local governor in Niigata, where Kashiwazaki is located, has been a vocal opponent of TEPCO's management and has questioned whether the company has the ability to operate a nuclear station, following the failings in its preparation and response to the disaster. He has publicly called for the utility's liquidation.

Govt. approves TEPCO's 10-year business plan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140115_39.html

Japan's government has approved a 10-year business plan from Tokyo Electric Power Company that relies on restarting nuclear reactors to turn its business around.

Industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi on Wednesday gave approval of the plan to TEPCO President Naomi Hirose. The utility was effectively put under state control after the 2011 nuclear crisis at its Fukushima Daiichi plant.

The chairman of the steering committee for the state-backed fund for nuclear accident compensation, Akio Harada, was also present.

Motegi told Hirose that the Japanese people are taking a critical look at the company. He said TEPCO must make efforts at reform with a resolve to be reborn as a new company.

Hirose replied that he regards the plan as a promise to the people. He said the utility will use all its management resources to fulfill its responsibilities related to the accident.

Under the plan, TEPCO hopes to begin restarting reactors in stages at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata Prefecture from July.

The utility envisions earning an annual pretax profit of between 950 million and 1.4 billion dollars by resuming nuclear power generation and rebuilding aging thermal power plants.

The utility says it will then gradually lower electricity fees by up to 9.6 billion dollars annually over the following decade.

The firm plans to set aside 19 billion dollars to create a task force to deal with contaminated water and to dismantle reactors at the Fukushima plant.

The business plan also says profits from sales of TEPCO shares held by the state-backed compensation fund will be used for decontamination efforts.

The utility plans to close all 10 of its branch offices in its service area and to reduce its group workforce by 2,000 employees.

TEPCO says these efforts will cut costs by about 46 billion dollars, helping the company become a competitive business.

TEPCO's plan " a pie in the sky idea"

January 16, 2014

Niigata governor calls TEPCO's turnaround plan a 'pie in the sky'

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201401160065>

Government officials in Niigata Prefecture criticized Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s rebuilding plan that includes bringing idled nuclear reactors back online.

They questioned whether the utility could implement the plan according to schedule and raised doubts about TEPCO's commitment to safety.

TEPCO's plan, approved by the central government on Jan. 15, calls for restarting four reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture. The utility aims to resume operations at the plant's No. 6 and 7 reactors as early as July.

Niigata Governor Hirohiko Izumida bluntly called the plan "a pie in the sky idea."

Despite his critical stance, Izumida met with TEPCO President Naomi Hirose on Jan. 16 to hear how the company plans to rebound from the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

"Shareholders and banks have not taken responsibility (for the accident), and it is a ridiculous plan from a safety standpoint," Izumida said at the meeting.

The governor has never hidden his distrust of the utility. He strongly objected when TEPCO announced plans in July 2013 to submit an application to the Nuclear Regulation Authority for checks to determine if the No. 6 and 7 reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant complied with the government's new safety standards.

Izumida was incensed because the utility failed to notify the Niigata prefectural government beforehand that it was planning to submit the application, part of the process toward resuming operations at the two reactors.

Although the governor did conditionally approve the filing of the application in September, he has long insisted that he would only consent to the resumption of reactor operations after the investigation and review of the Fukushima nuclear accident are completed.

Izumida has been especially critical of the fact that TEPCO has yet to clearly explain why it took nearly two months after the onset of the nuclear disaster to admit that meltdowns had occurred at the Fukushima plant.

“A major point of the review of the accident is to determine if (TEPCO) is a company that can be trusted,” Izumida said Jan. 15.

For its part, TEPCO is hoping that the NRA will soon determine the facility complies with the stricter safety standards so that the two reactors can be restarted in July or August.

The utility also hopes to bring back online the No. 1 and 5 reactors by February 2015 after safety upgrades are finished.

The mayors of the two municipalities that host the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant also made clear they need more reassurances before giving their consent to the resumption of operations.

“A major precondition will be the implementation of measures to secure the safety of the plant,” said Kashiwazaki Mayor Hiroshi Aida.

Kariwa Mayor Hiroo Shinada said TEPCO’s plan will not automatically lead to reactor restarts. “The rebuilding plan is the basis for injecting public funds by the central government, while the resumption of operations at the plant is a completely different issue,” he said.

In Fukushima Prefecture, officials were focusing on another measure in TEPCO’s turnaround plan to prevent highly radioactive water from leaking into the groundwater and ocean at the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

The plan calls for purifying all water contaminated by radioactive materials, with the exception of tritium, by the end of fiscal 2014.

“We would welcome any measure that contributes to the stability of the Fukushima No. 1 plant,” Tetsu Nozaki, head of the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations, said.

The federation has postponed plans to resume fishing due to repeated discoveries that contaminated water was reaching the ocean.

In August 2013, about 300 tons of highly radioactive water was found to have leaked from storage tanks at the Fukushima plant. That forced the postponement of fishing trials off the coast of Iwaki, which would have been the first attempt to resume fishing operations since the start of the Fukushima nuclear accident.

“If the contaminated water can truly be controlled, that would lead to a resumption of the fishing industry,” Nozaki said. “I hope they take measures to prevent contaminated water, be it from the rain or groundwater, from flowing into the ocean.”

Niigata governor criticizes TEPCO business plan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140115_25.html

The governor of Niigata Prefecture, which hosts a nuclear plant run by Tokyo Electric Power Company, has criticized the utility's 10-year business plan.

Tokyo Electric, or TEPCO, says it hopes to revive itself as a profitable company. The firm must also deal with the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Under the plan, TEPCO hopes to resume operations of reactors at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in the prefecture on and after July.

Niigata Governor Hirohiko Izumida said on Wednesday that the plan appears impossible to realize.

He said a company that has yet to sum up the 2011 nuclear disaster at the Fukushima plant is unqualified to run nuclear reactors.

Izumida said he plans to meet TEPCO President Naomi Hirose on Thursday.

The governor said he will tell Hirose that the firm should fully verify the Fukushima plant accident. He also hinted that it's too early to discuss whether to restart nuclear reactors.

Jan. 15, 2014 - Updated 06:21 UTC

Antinuke lawyer refused taxi ride to Monju reactor

January 16, 2014

Taxi company under fire for refusing ride to anti-nuclear lawmaker

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201401160046

By SAWAAKI HIKITA/ Staff Writer

The transport ministry has admonished a taxi company in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, for denying service to a Liberal Democratic Party lawmaker due to his opposition to nuclear power.

On Jan. 7, an aide to Masatoshi Akimoto, a newly-elected Lower House lawmaker from Chiba's No. 9 constituency, called the taxi company to request a car so his boss could visit the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor in Tsuruga for an inspection.

The employee in charge of dispatching taxis used the Internet to look into Akimoto's stance on nuclear energy issues. The employee then told the aide the taxi company's main customers are associated with the nuclear power industry. He then said, "We are rejecting people who take an anti-nuclear stance (and are seeking to abolish nuclear power plants)."

The transport ministry called the denial of service unlawful after being contacted by Akimoto. Ministry officials told the company its policy was in violation of the Road Transportation Law, which stipulates that taxi companies are required to accept all customers, with a few exceptions. The company was instructed to change its policy.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga also criticized the taxi company at a Jan. 15 news conference, saying, "There is not justification whatsoever for what happened."

It is extremely unusual for a taxi company to refuse fares on the basis of a person's stance on a political issue.

The taxi company later told The Asahi Shimbun, "The employee in charge of dispatching taxis apparently thought that by accepting customers who take an anti-nuclear stance, our company will lose jobs."

Taxi firm in 'nuclear city' refuses to provide car to anti-nuclear lawmaker

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140115p2a00m0na004000c.html>

TSURUGA, Fukui -- An employee of a taxi company here refused to provide a car to Liberal Democratic Party House of Representatives legislator Masatoshi Akimoto because the ruling party lawmaker stands against nuclear power, it has been learned.

According to Akimoto and the taxi firm, the lawmaker's secretary called the company on Jan. 7 to make a reservation for a taxi which Akimoto wanted to use for his tour of nuclear facilities in the city sometime in the second half of this month.

A company official in charge later found through the Internet that Akimoto was in fact insisting on breaking with nuclear power generation. The official then called the lawmaker's office to say that the company was not in a position to provide taxi services to anti-nuclear people because many people related to the nuclear industry use taxis there. The city of Tsuruga hosts the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor and the Tsuruga Nuclear Power Plant.

The taxi company apologized to Akimoto although it said its employee had acted on his own judgment. The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism's Chubu District Transport Bureau in Nagoya confirmed the fact and urged the taxi company to prevent similar misdeeds.

Akimoto advocates a policy of gradually reducing the country's reliance on nuclear power and withdrawing from the nuclear fuel cycle program.

The company told the Mainichi Shimbun, "It is not our company's policy to refuse to take reservations. There was a lack of guidance for employees." Akimoto said, "That's something that should never happen."

The Nuclear Regulation Authority has recognized that the Tsuruga nuclear plant sits on an active fault, while the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor has had a string of problems including skipping on equipment inspections. Therefore, there are no prospects that the nuclear facilities will be reactivated in the near future. The situation is such that the regional economy in Tsuruga, which is dependent on nuclear power projects, has slipped into stagnation.

January 15, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

TEPCO rejects arbitrator's proposal for compensation

January 15, 2014

TEPCO rejects arbitration body's settlement plan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140115_33.html

The operator of the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant has reportedly rejected an arbitrator's proposal to settle compensation claims by evacuees over their health concerns.

A group of evacuees from Iitate, a village located near the plant, told reporters on Wednesday that Tokyo Electric Power Company had told them it cannot accept the settlement.

They quoted the utility as saying that the grounds for the settlement are not clear.

About 180 former residents of the village's Nagadoro district filed claims with the Center for Settlement of Fukushima Nuclear Damage Claims, which was set up by the science ministry.

They are seeking compensation for the anxiety they've experienced over potential health problems due to radiation exposure. They say they were exposed to radiation for longer than necessary because officials

were late in issuing an evacuation order for the district.

The arbitrator decided last year to recommend that the utility compensate the claimants. It began presenting specific settlement proposals to the villagers last month.

Lawyers for the residents say TEPCO should accept the settlement because the utility earlier promised to respect the arbitrator's proposals.

TEPCO replied that it is trying to confirm the center's views on the proposal and that it will take swift action based on the findings

TEPCO's business plan & safety

January 16, 2014

Niigata governor criticizes TEPCO business plan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140116_31.html

The governor of the prefecture that hosts Tokyo Electric Power Company's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant has criticized the utility's turnaround plan for failing to put top priority on safety.

Niigata Governor Hirohiko Izumida made the criticism when the firm's president Naomi Hirose visited him on Thursday to explain the 10-year business plan.

Izumida said the company fails to fully look into the accident at its Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, and that the plan puts safety considerations on the back burner.

The central government approved the plan on the previous day. Its main pillar is restarting reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in stages starting in July, to regain the company's profitability.

Hirose told the governor that the timing of the restart was set only tentatively to draft the earnings plan. He said it never represents a formal schedule.

Izumida said in response that it was regrettable that the utility made no consultation with the prefecture in deciding on a plan that affects the plant's safety.

The governor said Tokyo Electric faces financial difficulty because it caused the accident. He said it's essential to fully examine the disaster in efforts to build a system of corporate governance to prevent a recurrence. Izumida later told reporters that he will keep watch on how the company scrutinizes the Fukushima crisis.

Hirose said the firm will do what should be done, including a probe into Fukushima and formulation of a plan to prevent disasters and evacuate neighborhood residents during emergencies.

Jan. 16, 2014 - Updated 10:28 UTC

Alternative Dispute Resolution & compensation

January 18, 2014

Lawyers probe TEPCO's snubbing of out-of-court settlement proposals

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140118p2a00m0na014000c.html>

The Fukushima Bar Association (FBA) has begun investigating Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)'s refusal to accept non-binding out-of-court settlement proposals to resolve monetary disputes with its employees.

The proposals are being offered by a governmental alternative dispute resolution (ADR) entity set up to handle disputes over compensation for the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster. For residents to get compensation from TEPCO, first they make a request to the power company, which calculates how much they can receive. Residents who find this amount unreasonable can take their cases to the ADR entity.

The ADR group is a sub-organization of a committee that decides on the national government's policy on nuclear disaster compensation. The group's lawyers hear the arguments of both sides in each dispute before proposing a settlement.

Though the entity's proposals for settlement disputes are not legally binding, TEPCO has said it will respect them -- one of the "three vows" it made concerning compensation under a plan released Jan. 15. However, despite this vow, its actions until now indicate it has taken quite the opposite stance.

On Jan. 4, the Mainichi Shimbun reported that TEPCO had rejected a ruling by the ADR entity over a dispute between the company and its employees regarding compensation payments for the nuclear disaster. TEPCO was in effect demanding the return of a portion of some employees' compensation payments, but the ADR entity rejected TEPCO's arguments and recommended a resolution in which the company would instead pay millions of yen more in compensation.

Following this news, the FBA decided to begin an investigation, but it is not the FBA's first such move. In September last year, the association released a statement in the name of its chairman demanding the government strongly urge TEPCO to follow the settlements proposed by the ADR entity.

On Jan. 15, the bar association sent documents to 177 members that read in part, "If the situation is as it has been reported, nothing has been done (by the government to urge TEPCO to follow the proposals)." The documents ask for any information regarding instances of TEPCO rejecting the ADR entity's proposals.

Meanwhile, the Mainichi Shimbun learned from a source about two more cases of TEPCO rejecting settlement proposals, both involving employees working at or near the nuclear plant. Their compensation payments have been cut even though their homes are in areas restricted due to radiation contamination, forcing them to continue living away from their homes.

TEPCO's refusals to follow the ADR entity's proposals have not been limited to disputes with its employees either, as one case involves a non-employee in Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture.

"When TEPCO refuses a settlement proposal, the disaster victims have the large burden of filing suits forced upon them," said Yuji Wakasugi, vice chairman of the FBA. "We will look at the results of our investigation and consider whether we need to act further on this issue."

The Mainichi Shimbun asked TEPCO for the number of ADR entity proposals it has rejected, but a representative of the company's public relations department would only say there were "multiple" cases.
January 18, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

TEPCO's promises

January 21, 2014

Fukushima Daiichi NPS Prompt Report 2014

Fukushima Daiichi NPS Prompt Report (Jan 21,2014)Recent topics:TEPCO ANNOUNCES SWEEPING NEW PLAN WITH GOVERNMENT FOR FUKUSHIMA RENEWAL, COMPENSATION, AND REORGANIZATION

http://www.tepco.co.jp/en/press/corp-com/release/2014/1233729_5892.html

TOKYO-A sweeping new plan that will provide for a decades-long Fukushima cleanup, compensate victims, and put Tokyo's electric utility on a solid financial footing was announced by the Tokyo Electric Power Company on January 15.

The plan was assembled by TEPCO and Japan's government, with the cooperation of a consortium of financial institutions that will provide credit and liquidity over the next several years. It calls for ultimately returning TEPCO to the private capital markets, easing the burden on Japan's taxpayers, while boosting compensation to victims of the March 2011 disaster and bolstering cleanup efforts.

It also calls for creation of a new entity within TEPCO that will be exclusively focused on the Fukushima decommissioning and decontamination activity. The unit will incorporate experts from outside the company, including international experts.

"This plan is a truly national, and in some ways international, effort that will address the human, environmental, and economic challenges that lie ahead," said TEPCO President Naomi Hirose. "The plan provides for a better future for the people of Fukushima, a durable structure for the decommissioning work, and a path to financial independence for our company so that we can continue to serve the people of Japan while minimizing the burden on the public."

TEPCO needs long-term growth to continuously generate resources for fulfilling its responsibility in Fukushima. TEPCO itself will cut 1.4 trillion yen additionally in expenses and invest 750 billion yen over 10 years. The plan also calls for financial institutions to provide 2 trillion yen in credit to support investment for long-term growth. The plan will provide TEPCO with a holding company structure in April 2016 that will enable TEPCO to address both responsibility in Fukushima and competitiveness to survive in the fully liberalized electricity market.

As part of the plan, TEPCO pledges to ensure that every eligible individual will receive compensation "down to the last person," with total compensation exceeding 5 trillion yen. It also pledges to make the compensation accurately and promptly, and to defer to the decisions of mediators.

At the Fukushima Daiichi plant itself, which was crippled by a tsunami following the March 2011 earthquake, the plan calls for additional resources and major improvements in water management, including cleaning of all contaminated water (except Tritium) within the next fiscal year. And it sets an ambitious goal of removing the nuclear fuel debris from at least one of damaged reactors by the first half of 2020. The plan incorporates the company's recently announced decision to turn undamaged units 5 and 6 into research centers that will enhance the ability to proceed with the cleanup and add to the overall decommissioning capabilities of the new entity.

A detailed summary of the plan may be downloaded at http://www.tepco.co.jp/en/press/corp-com/release/2014/1233624_5892.html.

President Hirose's comment for the release of the plan may be seen at <http://www.tepco.co.jp/en/corpinfo/overview/individual02-e.html>

TEPCO, Inc. is a provider of electricity to the Kanto region, which includes Tokyo and Yokohama. The company is headquartered in Tokyo. The Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station was struck by a tsunami after an earthquake that occurred in March 2011. For more information, please go to <http://www.tepco.co.jp/en/index-e.html>

Compensation: \$40 billion

21.01.2014_No19 / News in Brief

Tepco Expects Fukushima Compensation To Be USD 40 Billion

<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2014/01/21/tepco-expects-fukushima-compensation-to-be-usd-40-billion>

Unplanned Events & Incidents

21 Jan (NucNet): Tokyo Electric Power Corporation says it intends to “bolster” efforts to award compensation to those affected by the March 2011 Fukushima-Daiichi accident with total payouts expected to be in the region of 40 billion US dollars (USD) (29 billion euros).

In documents posted in English on its website, Tepco also said that as part of a new comprehensive business plan, it will improve the regime it has established for rebuilding the area around the nuclear station.

The utility, now under government control, will increase the number of personnel involved in the rehabilitation of Fukushima prefecture and create an internal decommissioning company to handle all decommissioning issues at the facility.

Decommissioning costs have been put at around USD 20 billion, the plan reveals.

Tepco said it intends to create employment in Fukushima by building a coal-fired thermal power plant and a number of research and development facilities.

The plan also involves pursuing the restart of at least two reactor units at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power station in northern Niigata prefecture.

The plan is a trilateral partnership between Japan’s central government, Tepco and financial institutions.

It focuses on – and substantially increases – compensation. It also addresses the decommissioning of Fukushima-Daiichi, nuclear safety and Tepco’s future business operations.

An agreement between Tepco and its biggest lenders includes more than USD 9.6 billion in cost cuts.

The 'New Comprehensive Special Business Plan' is online in English:

www.tepco.co.jp/en/press/corp-com/release/betu14_e/images/140115e0205.pdf

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TEPCO sells hospital to real estate developer for 10 billion yen

January 24, 2014

Tepco selling hospital to Tokyo Tatemono

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/01/24/business/tepco-selling-hospital-to-tokyo-tatemono/#.UuJhbLQo-aQ>

JJI, Kyodo

Tokyo Electric Power Co. has reached a deal to sell an affiliated hospital to major real estate developer Tokyo Tatemono Co. for ¥10 billion.

The building and land in the Shinanomachi district of Shinjuku Ward owned by Tokyo Denryoku Hospital will be transferred to Tokyo Tatemono on March 31.

The building is likely to be demolished because Tokyo Tatemono is considering residential and commercial use for the site.

Tepco initially planned to keep the hospital even after the March 2011 triple meltdown crisis started at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

But the utility decided to sell the facility in June 2012 when then-Vice Tokyo Gov. Naoki Inose strongly demanded its sale at the firm's general shareholder meeting. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government is a major shareholder of Tepco.

The hospital, built in 1979, stands on a 5,609-sq.-meter site. Only Tepco employees and former employees can use the hospital, but its occupancy rate was only 30 percent.

Scandal-tainted hospital chain Tokushukai had planned to acquire the hospital and Tokushukai founder Torao Tokuda told Inose about it in November 2012.

Tokushukai joined bidding for the hospital sale but withdrew after the Tokyo District Public Prosecutor's Office raided the group last September over its suspected illegal electioneering.

Inose, who was elected Tokyo governor in December 2012, stepped down from the post last month following the revelation he had received ¥50 million from the scandal-hit group.

Prosecutors have been investigating whether the ¥50 million was in exchange for Inose's favorable treatment for Tokushukai's attempt to acquire the hospital.

IAEA satisfied

January 24, 2014
No26 / News in Brief

IAEA Report Praises Japan's Efforts To Reduce Residual Radiation Doses

<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2014/01/24/iaea-report-praises-japan-s-efforts-to-reduce-residual-radiation-doses>

Unplanned Events & Incidents

24 Jan (NucNet): The International Atomic Energy Agency has recognised Japan's efforts to reduce annual residual radiation doses in areas affected by the Fukushima-Daiichi accident to less than one millisievert a year (mSv/yr), but stressed **that this target is a long-term goal and cannot be achieved in a short time or through decontamination work alone.**

The final report of an expert mission that reviewed remediation and reconstruction efforts in Fukushima prefecture says progress has been achieved following the first IAEA remediation mission in October 2011, including the remediation of farmland and forest areas.

But the report says authorities must sustain current public communication efforts and improve them where necessary, especially with a view to explaining to the public that, in remediation situations, any level of individual radiation dose in the range of one to 20 mSv/yr is acceptable and "in line with international standards".

According to the report, Japan has allocated significant resources and is carrying out intense work to remediate areas affected by the Fukushima-Daiichi accident and promote the return of evacuees to their homes.

The report says comprehensive implementation of food safety measures is in place to protect consumers and improve consumer confidence in farm produce, and this is reflected in an increase in the economic value of the crops.

The report welcomes progress by municipalities and the national government in the development and establishment of temporary storage facilities for contaminated materials generated by remediation activities.

It says progress had been made towards the national government's creation of interim storage facilities, with the cooperation of municipalities and local communities.

The IAEA said in a statement that the Japanese authorities provided "comprehensive information" on their remediation programme.

The report is online: www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/fukushima/final_report230114.pdf

Consumer money used by utilities to buy fund-raising party tickets

January 27, 2014

Utilities secretly buy tickets for pro-nuclear minister's fund-raisers

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201401270057

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Using money paid by consumers, nuclear plant operators have secretly bought tickets worth several million yen a year for fund-raising parties of Akira Amari, a pro-nuclear Cabinet minister, since 2006, The Asahi Shimbun learned.

The utilities have kept each ticket purchase at 200,000 yen (\$2,000) or less to prevent their names from appearing in the political fund reports of Amari, the minister in charge of economic revitalization, sources said.

It was already reported that directors of electric power companies have made individual donations to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, but **the utilities were found for the first time to have bought fund-raising party tickets with electricity fees paid by consumers.**

Amari, an LDP lawmaker with economic and industrial interests, exerts strong influence on energy policy and advocates reactivating idled nuclear reactors.

In July, he sought Niigata Governor Hirohiko Izumida's approval of Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s application for safety screening in preparation for restarting two reactors at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant.

Amari's office told The Asahi Shimbun it handles and reports political funds appropriately. It declined to discuss details beyond those entered in reports.

Nine regional utilities that operate nuclear plants bought tickets for Amari's parties in 2006, when he became minister of economy, trade and industry, according to senior officials of electric power companies. The electric power industry falls under the jurisdiction of that minister.

The companies together spent about 1 million yen for each party. Their share was determined based on the size of company operations, the sources said.

The arrangement was maintained for the following years, and affiliates of the utilities sometimes joined.

TEPCO dropped out of the framework after the triple meltdown at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant following the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

But the eight other utilities have continued to spend about the same amount on tickets for Amari's parties, the sources said.

Amari's fund management organization held an average of nine fund-raising functions a year between 2006 and 2012, according to its political fund reports.

The utilities are believed to have spent an average of several million yen a year on more than one party, the sources said.

One official of a utility whose share is 10 percent or less said the company spent about 1 million yen in some years, indicating that the utilities' purchases totaled 10 million yen or so in certain years.

TEPCO initially played a leading role in the joint purchase, and it evaluated Diet members based on their influence on and cooperation with nuclear power policy.

Amari was one of the politicians to whom the nuclear power industry attached priority, and the value of ticket purchases for his fund-raisers was among the largest for lawmakers, the sources said.

The nine utilities declined to comment on individual purchases of party tickets. Kansai Electric Power Co. added that it never buys tickets in cooperation with other utilities.

(This article was written by Takashi Ichida and Hiroo Sunaoshi.)

Toru Nakakita leaves NHK over nukes

January 30, 2014

NHK Asks Expert Not to Talk about N-Power on Radio

<http://jen.jiji.com/jc/eng?g=eco&k=2014013000599>

Tokyo, Jan. 30 (Jiji Press)--A program director at Japan Broadcasting Corp. (NHK) has asked Toyo University Prof. Toru Nakakita not to give his views on nuclear power on radio in order to avoid impacting the upcoming Tokyo gubernatorial election, Nakakita said Thursday.

The director asked Nakakita, 62, to speak about something else in a morning radio program, but he turned down the request and pulled out of the program, according to the professor.

The program in question is a three-hour show aired from 5 a.m. on every weekday.

As Nakakita was scheduled to speak in a short segment on business in Thursday's show, he sent the director a written outline on Wednesday afternoon of what he planned to say.

He wrote he would explain, from the perspective of an economist, that operational costs at nuclear power plants are rising to near the costs of power generation using coal or oil.

(2014/01/30-17:17)

NHK radio regular quits after anti-nuclear commentary nixed

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201401300075

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A veteran radio show commentator quit his job at Japan Broadcasting Corp. (NHK) after the public broadcaster told him to drop the subject of nuclear power during the Tokyo gubernatorial election, sources said.

For about 20 years, Toru Nakakita, a professor of economics at Toyo University, had been in charge of the “Business Outlook” segment of the “Radio Asa Ichiban” show aired weekdays from 5 a.m. to 8 a.m. on NHK Radio Daiichi.

Nakakita said his original manuscript for the Jan. 30 program pointed out the increase in costs for the resumption of nuclear reactor operations, saying “damages to be paid in the wake of a nuclear plant accident are extraordinarily high.”

However, when he showed the manuscript to a program director on the day before the scheduled broadcast, Nakakita was asked to change the theme.

He said that NHK told him not to talk about “nuclear issues during the Tokyo gubernatorial election campaign period.” The election is scheduled for Feb. 9.

“We should have substantial debates precisely because it is the campaign period,” Nakakita said. “NHK reacted with excessive voluntary restraint, which shows a lack of awareness of the issue.”

NHK said its intention was different.

“We did not mean to refrain from broadcasting an anti-nuclear power debate,” an NHK official said. “During the Tokyo gubernatorial election, in which nuclear power generation is a major issue, presenting opinions from both sides is needed to secure impartiality. We asked (Nakakita) to change the subject, judging that the program presented by one person would not meet this goal.”

Nakakita, formerly with the Foreign Ministry, served as the deputy chairman of the Council for the Asian Gateway Initiative in the first Shinzo Abe Cabinet.

Group lawsuit against GE Japan, Hitachi and Toshiba

January 31, 2014

1,400 sue makers of Fukushima nuke reactors

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201401310200>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Hundreds of people filed a group action lawsuit Jan. 30 against the manufacturers of the reactors at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant to apportion blame for the accident that occurred there in March 2011.

In their quest for compensation at the Tokyo District Court, the 1,400 plaintiffs argued that the companies bear responsibility for the emotional distress they suffered after the reactor meltdowns.

The plaintiffs include evacuees from the Fukushima disaster caused by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. They are suing General Electric Japan, Hitachi Ltd. and Toshiba Corp., which produced the reactors used at the facility, even though the nuclear damage compensation facilitation law stipulates that only facility operators have an obligation to pay reparations in the event of an accident.

"Funds for compensation paid by Tokyo Electric Power Co. to disaster victims are originally from electricity charges and taxpayer money," said Akihiro Shima, the plaintiffs' attorney, at a news conference in Tokyo the same day. It is unfair for reactor makers to shoulder no liability, the lawyer added.

Of the plaintiffs, 1,000 are Japanese, including 38 residents of Fukushima Prefecture. The remaining 400 are from South Korea, Taiwan and other countries and regions that have nuclear plants.

The plaintiffs' group argued that they "have suffered emotional pain from radiation exposure" or "were shocked and felt fear over the spread of radioactive substances after watching video footage of the accident."

The complainants insist that the nuclear damage compensation facilitation law is unconstitutional, and therefore invalid, because it prevents people from filing suits that question the responsibility of reactor makers.

One of the plaintiff attorneys emphasizes the lawsuit's significance.

"It is a lawsuit designed to drag the makers of the reactors out of hiding," said Hiroyuki Kawai, who is also representing TEPCO shareholders in a lawsuit they have filed against the utility's executives.

The amount of claimed compensation was set low--just 100 yen (\$1) per person--because the lawsuit is primarily intended to force the reactor makers to accept their responsibility.

January 30, 2014

Lawsuit filed against Fukushima plant makers

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140130_26.html

A group of about 1,400 people has filed a lawsuit against the 3 manufacturers of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear station to seek compensation for the accident at the plant.

The group is demanding that Toshiba, Hitachi and General Electric of the United States pay 100 yen, or about one dollar, to each plaintiff in damages.

The plaintiffs include residents of Fukushima Prefecture and foreign countries.

Japan's Act on Compensation for Nuclear Damages holds only plant operators liable for compensation.

The plaintiffs say the exemption of plant manufacturers violates the Constitution.

They also say the plant makers did not take necessary measures although experts had pointed out the possibility of a major accident.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs said the exemption of manufacturers protects the nuclear plant industry.

They also said they want to expand the group to some 10,000 people.

All 3 firms declined to comment.

Jan. 30, 2014 - Updated 10:20 UTC

TEPCO: 190 billion yen profit in 9 months

February 1, 2014

TEPCO posts profit of 190 billion yen, expects return to black for fiscal 2013

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201402010032>

Electricity rate hikes helped Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant, post an ordinary profit of 189 billion yen (\$1.84 billion) for the first nine months of fiscal 2013.

The company also forecast a 57-billion-yen profit for fiscal 2013, which ends in March.

With its nuclear plants shut down for safety checks, **TEPCO said its fuel costs for thermal power plants totaled 2.07 trillion yen in the April to December period**, a year-on-year increase of 75 billion yen and the first time such expenses have exceeded 2 trillion yen.

But rate hikes increased revenue by 220 billion yen. The company also cut repair expenses by 53 billion yen by deferring work and trimmed personnel costs by 19 billion yen by curbing new hiring.

Changes to accounting rules allowed TEPCO to reduce extraordinary losses over the Jan. 31 delisting of the No. 5 and No. 6 reactors at the Fukushima plant to 40 billion yen. Before the industry ministry revised rules for reactor decommissioning last autumn, the company would have had to book 170 billion yen in one-time charges.

The utility was required to show prospects of an ordinary profit for fiscal 2013 to continue to receive funding from creditors.

Under its new rehabilitation plan approved by the government in January, TEPCO plans to secure a profit in fiscal 2014 on the condition that two reactors restart in summer at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture.

Reactivation, however, is far from guaranteed because nuclear regulators are looking into potential active faults beneath the plant.

Niigata Governor Hirohiko Izumida is also opposed to a restart.

Another secret deal

February 21, 2014

Abe: It was 'mistake' to deny secret nuke pact with U.S.

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201402010028

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said the government should never have denied its secret agreement with Washington that allowed U.S. warships to bring nuclear weapons into Japan.

"I think it was a mistake to keep (the arrangement) from the public," Abe told a Lower House Budget Committee meeting Jan. 31. "I want to show how the government thinks about this issue."

Abe was responding to former Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan, who said, "Successive prime ministers cannot make an excuse if they are criticized for having lied to the public."

Abe's Liberal Democratic Party denied the existence of such an arrangement during its nearly uninterrupted decades-long reign of power until 2009.

In 2010, an expert panel under the DPJ-led government said Tokyo and Washington had "a secret agreement in a broad sense" that allowed U.S. warships carrying nuclear weapons to call on Japanese ports or pass through Japanese territorial waters.

Not on the same wavelength: Pr.Nakakita and NHK

January 31, 2014

Professor cancels radio appearance after NHK declines talk on nuclear power issue

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140131p2a00m0na009000c.html>

Public broadcaster NHK has declined to allow a regular guest on its radio program to talk about nuclear power on the grounds of the upcoming Tokyo gubernatorial election, leading him to cancel his appearance on the program.

Toru Nakakita, 62, a professor of economics at Toyo University, canceled his appearance on an NHK morning radio show after he was asked to change the subject for the program from the nuclear energy issue to something else, it was learned on Jan. 30.

Nakakita is a long-time regular guest on the program, which is titled "Radio Asa Ichiban" and is aired every morning from 5 a.m. Monday through Friday. He has had a monthly slot in the program's segment titled "Business Tenbo" (Business outlook) for more than 20 years. He had been scheduled to appear on the program on Jan. 30 to discuss the cost of restarting nuclear reactors and the risk of accidents at nuclear plants.

However, when he sent his script to NHK the day before his appearance, NHK staff in charge told him, "Please do not take up this subject because it could affect voting behavior."

Nakakita, in turn, insisted repeatedly that he was "not supporting any specific person" in connection with the Feb. 9 Tokyo election. He questioned NHK if he should change part of his script, including a sentence saying, "Economic growth can be achieved even with a zero-nuclear policy" -- a phrase that NHK saw as a problem.

He subsequently received a call from the head of the NHK Radio Center, who told him, "Please talk about the issue as you like after the Tokyo election." Nakakita eventually gave up appearing on the Jan. 30 show.

"Shouldn't we be able to offer materials for discussion and allow voters to make a steady choice all the more because it is during the campaigning period?" questioned Nakakita.

A representative at NHK's public relations department said, "Because the nuclear power issue is one of the points of contention in the gubernatorial race, it is necessary for us to be even fairer during the campaigning period. It was difficult for us to take measures through our production method, so we asked him to change the subject."

Will Japanese power industry ever change?

February 5, 2014

EDITORIAL: Power industry must change its old-fashioned ways

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201402050030>

Will Japan's electric power industry ever change? We fear we sound like a broken record everytime we voice this thought out loud.

Kansai Electric Power Co.'s affiliates and other business partners have been caught rigging bids for power line installation projects ordered by KEPCO.

The Fair Trade Commission has not only issued a cease-and-desist order to the offending businesses and ordered them to pay a surcharge, but has also instructed KEPCO, whose employee allegedly induced or facilitated the violations, to take measures to prevent a recurrence.

In a bid-rigging case such as this, it is unusual for the watchdog body to demand remedial action from the party that ordered the projects.

But KEPCO is not the only utility that has brought disgrace upon itself in this manner. In December, Tokyo Electric Power Co. was also involved in a similar bid-rigging case, in which a TEPCO employee played a role, and ordered by the FTC to clean up its act.

TEPCO and KEPCO are Japan's No. 1 and No. 2 utilities, respectively. We are shocked that both power giants have been engaged in shady deals even after the March 2011 nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

Electric power companies have raised their electricity charges one after another, claiming growing fuel costs for thermal power generation because their nuclear reactors remain offline.

But utilities are allowed to set their electricity rates by applying the so-called full cost pricing method and they enjoy a monopoly in their service areas. As a result, cost-saving has never been a real concern for them. Moreover, they maintain inappropriately close ties with related businesses that provide cushy jobs to their retired executives. This is the nature of the power industry that has been pointed out repeatedly, and bid-rigging only symbolizes the rot.

Refusing to mend their outdated ways, the utilities are calling vociferously for the restart of offline nuclear reactors, suggesting that they will have to raise their charges again if reactors remain idle. This is insane.

In addition to the problems involving private-sector companies, there are issues that have to do with relations of mutual reliance between the electric power industry and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, as recent investigative reporting by The Asahi Shimbun has brought to light.

Here are some facts: The total amount of donations made to the LDP by power company executives in 2012 was 4.3 times more than the previous year; in a bid to get LDP lawmakers to support the construction of new nuclear reactors, the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan provided "model answers" to a questionnaire distributed within the LDP; to financially back Akira Amari, minister in charge of economic revitalization, nine utilities purchased tickets for his fund-raising parties in a way that would not violate the Political Fund Control Law.

The Asahi Shimbun's reports suggest that the close ties between the power industry and the LDP became less obvious in the immediate aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear accident, but the ties were apparently revived upon the LDP's return to power.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has warned Fumio Sudo, who will become TEPCO's chairman in April, against "relapsing to the pre-3/11 smugness arising from regional monopoly."

But if Abe truly means what he says, his ruling party should prove itself to be of a different stripe from the power industry. Specifically, the Abe administration ought to restrict the flow of money from the power industry to the LDP and keep everything transparent and aboveboard.

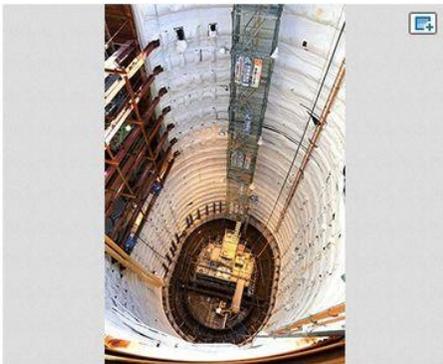
Once that is done, the administration needs to forge ahead with electric power system reforms, enhance supervisory functions of the markets and various regulations, and get the electric power industry to transform itself into a competitive and self-reliant industry.

Economic revitalization is possible only by dismantling the old-fashioned structure of the power industry.

Anti-terrorism and confidential information

Nuke plant operators hush-hush on anti-terrorism measures

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201402050055



Media representatives observe the underground chamber into which venting equipment will be installed at the Hamaoka nuclear plant in December. Reporters were told by Chubu Electric Power Co. not to take photos above their line of vision. (Yuta Takahashi)

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Operators of nuclear power plants say they are restricting media access to some important facilities as part of efforts to thwart terrorist attacks.

Tougher safety standards for nuclear plants that went into effect last July in the aftermath of the 2011 nuclear disaster in Fukushima Prefecture include measures to deal with the threat of terrorist strikes.

Another factor is the controversial state secrets protection law that will take effect later this year. **The utilities are keen to duck any criticism that they are allowing any confidential security information to be disclosed.**

In many cases, the restrictions to information disclosure go beyond what nuclear regulators have said should be kept under wraps.

The new standards require that plant operators install filtered venting equipment designed to lower pressure and filter radioactive substances in the event of serious accidents. That scenario also envisages a 9/11-style terrorist attack using aircraft.

As 2013 came to a close, Tokyo Electric Power Co. decided to deny media access to venting equipment at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture. Although reporters were previously allowed to observe part of the installation process of venting equipment connected to the reactor containment vessel, **the equipment will remain off-limits to the media from now.**

During a Dec. 18 meeting, the Nuclear Regulation Authority decided that it will not publicize information about the alignment of equipment when it conducts inspections of the safety measures implemented by plant operators.

"Releasing alignment maps could provide a source of information for terrorists," said an official with the NRA secretariat.

TEPCO officials said their decision to keep the venting equipment off-limits to the media was in line with the NRA's thinking on the matter.

However, a secretariat official pointed to the differences between inspections in which very specific details may emerge and media coverage and visits.

"The NRA defined the handling of information during inspections," the official said. "We never intended for the decision to allow for the covering up of information in relation to media coverage and visits to the plants."

On Dec. 20, Chubu Electric Power Co. allowed media representatives to observe installation work of venting equipment at its Hamaoka nuclear power plant in Shizuoka Prefecture. Reporters were told not to specify the exact location of a 36-meter-deep underground chamber in their articles.

"Please be careful of the angle of your photos," a utility employee also told the gathered media.

The company said that the venting equipment could become off-limits to the media in the future. Similar media restrictions were made by Chugoku Electric Power Co. last autumn at its Shimane nuclear plant.

When Tohoku Electric Power Co. was installing venting equipment at its nuclear plant last May, it prohibited photographs of the construction and instead provided media organizations with its own photos. In another area, digital cameras brought in by reporters were checked to ensure that no security cameras were included in the shots.

That was a time when discussions were being held on the extent of anti-terrorism measures to be included in the new nuclear safety standards.

"From the standpoint of safety control, we cannot even disclose what types of information are being subject to restrictions," said an official with Hokkaido Electric Power Co.

The nuclear plant operators are also wrestling with how to handle the emergency control rooms that would allow for remote-controlled cooling of reactors. Those rooms were also included in the new safety standards.

Much like the venting equipment, the emergency control rooms will be vital in the event of a serious accident.

The utilities have not yet begun construction of the control rooms and they have not yet decided whether to open such work to the media.

Officials of the electric power companies have also touched upon the state secrets protection law that will go into effect in late 2014.

"If photographing and opening up the plant site to the media is subsequently banned, we would be unable to retract what we have already made available," said a senior official with Chubu Electric. "It would be the electric power companies that would be held responsible should any problem occur. For that reason, we have to aggressively protect our facilities."

One expert said the utilities were taking the opposite course of their Western counterparts.

"Ordinarily, information about safety measures at nuclear plants should be aggressively released. In the West, information is disclosed about the extent to which the plants are being protected to show what is being done to prevent terrorism," said Kenichi Oshima, a professor of environmental economics at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto.

"The equipment will not become stronger just because the information is made confidential," he said. "If such information was kept secret, the concerns of residents would increase because they would not know what measures were being implemented."

(This article was written by So Ouchi, Gento Shibui and Takeshi Narabe.)

Can NHK be trusted?

February 7, 2014

EDITORIAL: NHK governors undermining trust in public broadcaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201402070059>

Writers and scholars are free to embrace and present any idea. But when they take part in running public broadcasts, they need to show a proper sense of balance.

That is why the Broadcast Law stipulates that governors of Japan Broadcasting Corp. (NHK) are required to possess the ability to make "fair judgment concerning public welfare."

In this regard, we strongly doubt that two NHK governors, Naoki Hyakuta and Michiko Hasegawa, meet this requirement.

Hyakuta, a best-selling novelist, not only made a campaign speech for a candidate of the Tokyo gubernatorial race, but he also repeatedly demeaned other candidates by calling them “lowlifes.”

Two months before her appointment as NHK governor, Hasegawa, a Saitama University professor emeritus specializing in comparative ideology and Japanese cultural studies, contributed a piece to a collection of essays paying tribute to Shusuke Nomura, a right-wing activist who shot himself at the president’s office of The Asahi Shimbun in Tokyo in 1993. Her writing has stirred controversy.

The two were appointed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said that making campaign speeches on behalf of candidates and expressing thoughts and beliefs “do not violate the Broadcast Law.” He indicated such acts are not a problem.

However, the law provides such restrictions as limiting the number of governors who belong to the same political party because of the assumed risk that those governors could wield political influence.

For the same reason, the law does not give governors the power to involve themselves in the production of individual programs.

Just because there are no provisions restricting the behavior of governors, it does not mean they can do as they like and ignore their responsibilities as supervisors of the public broadcaster.

The way Hyakuta publicly slandered other candidates is a problem beyond the Broadcast Law. His character and judgment as a decent member of society rather than an NHK governor should be questioned.

Nomura brought pistols into The Asahi Shimbun’s Tokyo head office in 1993, and shot himself to death while talking with the president and other Asahi executives. In her essay, Hasegawa wrote: “Once he (Nomura) chanted “Sumeramikoto iyasaka” (Long live the emperor) three times, (regardless of what the ‘humanity declaration’ and the Japanese Constitution say), the reigning emperor once again became an ‘akitsumikami’ (deity who is a human being).”

Was her appointment appropriate in terms of the requirements for an NHK governor? The administration is urged to clarify its view.

NHK explains on its website what a public broadcaster is. Unlike a state-sponsored broadcaster, which is “run under strong state supervision,” a public broadcaster is “run independent from state control,” according to NHK.

However, NHK’s management structure makes it difficult to maintain its independence from the government. This is because the prime minister appoints governors, and the board of governors has the power to appoint and dismiss the NHK chairman.

That is all the more reason why the administration and NHK need to maintain tension to keep a proper distance from each other and make efforts to restrain themselves to uphold public trust for fairness.

NHK must not undermine the trust that viewers and listeners as well as its staff members have painstakingly built for many years.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Feb. 7

Gov't will form panel on Fukushima information

February 07, 2014

Govt. to form panel on Fukushima plant information

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140207_01.html

The Japanese government will include local residents in a planned panel on how best to inform the public on the status of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Currently, the government and the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, hold news conferences to announce how efforts to scrap reactors and address radioactive wastewater are going at the plant. They also release information on the plant through their websites.

Their announcements have been drawing persistent criticism for using many technical terms and being unhelpful for specific information.

The complaints have prompted the government to set up a panel to determine possible problems with the current information system.

Sources say the panel will include evacuees from the 2011 nuclear disaster, officials from local municipalities, and representatives from farming and fishing groups.

Their first session is scheduled for February 17th in Fukushima City. The panel's meetings will be open to

the public with gallery seats prepared for ordinary citizens.

The government says this is the first time since the nuclear accident that civilians will join a state-established panel on the plant's containment efforts.

Feb. 6, 2014 - Updated 23:26 UTC

Withholding of radiation measures

February 11, 2014



Troubled waters?: A worker holds a fish during an analysis of radioactive materials in the specimen at the Marine Ecology Research Institute's central laboratory in Onjuku, Chiba Prefecture, in December. Leaks of contaminated water into the Pacific Ocean from Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, damaged in the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, have raised questions about the safety of eating seafood caught off Japan. | BLOOMBERG

National

Regulators expected to demand detailed explanation for latest evasion

Tepco hid record-level radiation data last July

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/02/11/national/tepcu-withheld-record-level-radiation-data-last-summer/#.UvpaZIXrV1u>

JJI

Tokyo Electric Power Co. did not tell the public until recently that massively high levels of radiation were found in groundwater collected last July at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, even though the utility was aware of the data that month, according to sources.

Tepco released the data on Feb. 6 showing that the groundwater contained a record 5 million becquerels per liter of radioactive strontium-90.

When Tepco reported the data to the Nuclear Regulation Authority last week, it initially claimed that it had only recently compiled the data, NRA sources said.

However, the embattled utility later corrected the timing, apparently **showing that it had withheld the record readings**, the sources said.

The withholding of the radiation data looks to be the latest in a long line of missteps for the utility, experts said.

Regulators are expected to demand a detailed explanation from Tepco, the sources said.

According to the NRA and other sources, Tepco first said it had detected 900,000 becquerels of beta ray-emitting radioactive materials, including strontium-90, from the groundwater last July.

When the firm later measured levels of strontium-90 alone, it found that the groundwater contained 5 million becquerels.

But Tepco concluded at the time that the data were inaccurate, citing the huge difference in the two measurements, **despite knowing that its method of measuring beta ray-emitting materials could show lower-than-actual levels**, the sources said.

Because the utility has repeatedly changed its explanations, the NRA secretariat has asked it for more detailed information.

Tepco claimed that although the company was aware of the data last July, it released them only recently after its accuracy was finally confirmed this month.

Previous reports said Tepco belatedly revealed last year that some 300 tons of groundwater was flowing into the sea daily, after mixing with radioactive water used to cool the plant's three stricken reactors.

Tepco had been trying to gain the consent of local fisheries groups to discharge excess water into the sea, after promising to reduce its radiation levels.

How good was 3/11 news coverage?

February 11, 2014

Many foreigners in Fukushima fled after crisis, news reporting questioned

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140211p2g00m0dm074000c.html>

SENDAI (Kyodo) -- Many foreign nationals living in Fukushima Prefecture at the time of the March 2011 nuclear crisis say they relocated either to their home countries or within Japan, according to a survey by a nonprofit group.

The Fukushima International Association said its survey also showed that they were troubled by the difference in media coverage between Japan and their home countries and that **most of them relied on TV rather than radio because of language barriers.**

Of the 70 foreigners who were living in the prefecture in late 2012 and interviewed by the association, 51 people (73 percent) said they evacuated. Of them, 29 left Japan for their home countries, while 21 moved out of the prefecture and one within the prefecture.

While simple comparisons are hard to make, this represents a disproportionately high ratio of evacuees when compared with the entire population of the prefecture.

According to the prefectural government, up to around 164,200 people relocated after the crisis, in May 2012, accounting for 8 percent of the overall population of 2 million.

The questionnaire was given to the 70 people interviewed as well as 30 others on other questions. Among them, 53 people had known the prefecture was host to nuclear power stations before the March 11, 2011 quake and tsunami that triggered the nuclear crisis.

At the end of 2010, 11,190 foreign residents were living in the prefecture, with just over 60 percent having either Chinese or Filipino nationalities. The total dropped to 9,489 at the end of June 2013. Of the 100 people surveyed, 88 people said they gathered information from TV when the crisis took place, far more than the 30 who cited radio.

One man said, "Japanese newspapers were slower in providing information than media in my home country and were not trusted very much. I relied on information from my home country."

He also said the community radio service provided instructions for evacuation but it was hard to understand audio information.

Many others had trouble understanding the situation even when they watched television. One person could not understand why the then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano was giving a daily press conference with a "serious look" on TV.

"I learned from television that I probably needed to evacuate. But I was worried, not knowing where the nuclear power plant was and also about radiation," another respondent said.

(Mainichi Japan)

See also:

Many foreigners in Fukushima fled after crisis, news reporting questioned

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/02/11/national/many-foreigners-in-fukushima-fled-after-crisis-news-reporting-questioned/#.UvsnkYXrV1s>

KYODO

- Feb 11, 2014

Sendai – A nonprofit group's interviews with foreign nationals who were living in Fukushima Prefecture at the time the nuclear catastrophe started in March 2011 determined that more than two-thirds left for their home countries or relocated elsewhere in Japan, at least temporarily....

New book on Fukushima disaster (not just a Japanese accident)

February 11, 2014

<http://ecowatch.com/2014/02/11/fukushima-book-warns-next-nuclear-disaster/>

Fukushima Book Warns Complacency Could Lead to Next Nuclear Disaster

<http://ecowatch.com/2014/02/11/fukushima-book-warns-next-nuclear-disaster/>

Union of Concerned Scientists

Today is the official publication date for the book *Fukushima: The Story of a Nuclear Disaster* (New Press, \$27.95), the first comprehensive account of the March 2011 Japanese catastrophe, and it has already elicited glowing reviews. *Kirkus Reviews* called it “a gripping, suspenseful page turner.” *Booklist*, in a starred review, described the book as “thriller-like” and “a cautionary analysis of the perils of nuclear power the world over.” And *Publisher’s Weekly* called it an “eye-opening exposé ...[that] points to the scary fact that America can suffer a Fukushima-type event if critical steps are not taken.”

Co-authored by two of America’s leading nuclear power experts and an award-winning journalist, the book provides the most authoritative analysis to date of what happened during one of the worst nuclear disasters of all time. The book, which took nearly two years to research and write, is based on technical analyses, interviews with the principal players, and information gleaned from thousands of pages of documents obtained from the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and other federal agencies, the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO)—the plant’s owner—and independent Japanese commissions.

The first half of the book provides the riveting details of the March 11, 2011, disaster triggered by the one-two punch of a magnitude 9 earthquake, which caused Fukushima Daiichi’s six boiling water reactors to lose off-site electric power, and a 50-foot tsunami, which knocked out back-up diesel generators supplying power to five of the reactors and much of the facility’s electrical distribution system.

Co-authors **David Lochbaum, director of the Union of Concerned Scientists’ (UCS) Nuclear Safety Project; Edwin Lyman, a UCS senior scientist; and Susan Q. Stranahan, the lead reporter of the Philadelphia Inquirer’s Pulitzer Prize-winning coverage of the Three Mile Island nuclear accident,** take readers on a guided tour of the harrowing events that followed over days, weeks and months. Along the way, they supply lucid explanations of how the disaster happened and how it could have been averted, profiling the people who went to heroic lengths to try to take control of a runaway catastrophe that still reverberates today. Radioactive contamination has displaced more than 80,000 people, the cost of cleanup and victim compensation could swell to \$125 billion, and radioactively contaminated water from the site continues to leak into the ocean. Over time, Fukushima-related cancer deaths are expected to number in the thousands.

But the book is more than a disaster diary. It also provides a clear-eyed look at the Japanese regulatory regime that helped make the disaster all but inevitable, and makes a strong case that U.S. oversight is plagued by the same complacent attitude and undue industry influence. Indeed, **the chapters that focus on the NRC's shortcomings are as disturbing as the Fukushima calamity itself.**

“The NRC hasn’t heeded all the lessons of Fukushima and is slow-walking post-Fukushima regulatory changes,” said Lyman, a physicist. “Likewise, the agency has failed to address a number of longstanding threats, including the risks of overcrowded spent fuel pools, unenforced fire protection standards, and inadequate emergency planning.”

Lyman and his co-authors warn that if NRC commissioners insist on watering down the agency post-Fukushima task force’s recommendations for strengthening safeguards, it will only be a matter of time before a similar event happens in the U.S. They point out that:

- U.S. nuclear plants are vulnerable to catastrophic natural disasters, multiple system failures and terrorist attacks.
- U.S. nuclear plants are not much better equipped than Japanese plants to cope with severe accidents.
- U.S. emergency plans are not designed to protect the public in the aftermath of Fukushima-scale accidents or fully address the problem of long-term land contamination.

“Fukushima wasn’t a ‘Japanese’ nuclear accident,” said Lochbaum, a nuclear engineer who worked in the industry for 17 years before joining the UCS staff. **“It was an accident that happened to occur in Japan. Japanese and U.S. regulators share the same mindset that severe, supposedly ‘low probability’ accidents are unlikely and therefore it is not worth the time and money to protect plants from them.”**

“How many Fukushimas will we have to go through before NRC commissioners get it through their heads that it could happen here?” Lochbaum concluded.

TEPCO criticized by NRA (again)

February 12, 2014

Japan's nuclear regulator raps Fukushima operator over radiation readings

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201402120080>

REUTERS

Japan's nuclear regulator has criticized the operator of the stricken Fukushima plant for incorrectly measuring radiation levels in contaminated groundwater at the site.

Almost three years since the reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, Tokyo Electric Power Co (TEPCO) still lacks basic understanding of measuring and handling radiation, Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) Chairman Shunichi Tanaka said on Feb. 12. The utility has been widely criticized for an inept response to the March 2011 disaster.

TEPCO said last week that groundwater drawn from a monitoring well last July contained a record 5 million becquerels per liter of dangerous radioactive strontium-90--more than five times the total beta radiation reading of 900,000 becquerels per liter recorded in the well, which is around 25 meters from the ocean.

TEPCO said there was a calibration mistake with one machine measuring strontium levels of well water at the plant, and it had also found an error with devices that decipher all-beta radiation.

"Something like this cannot happen ... This (data) is what becomes the basis of various decisions, so they must do their utmost to avoid mistakes in measuring radiation," Tanaka told reporters, though he added the mistake did not pose a serious safety risk at the plant.

The legal limit for releasing strontium 90, which has a half-life of around 29 years, into the sea is 30 becquerels per liter.

A TEPCO spokesman said the utility will re-check all-beta radiation readings of groundwater in light of the record strontium levels.

Last year, radiation leaks, power outages and other mishaps sparked international concern and prompted Japan's government to step in with more funds and support. As part of a turnaround plan approved by the government last month, TEPCO hopes to re-start its biggest nuclear power plant, Kashiwazaki Kariwa, this summer.

TEPCO in November began the hazardous process of removing hundreds of brittle spent fuel rods from the damaged No. 4 reactor building at Fukushima. It said last week it had removed about 9 percent of more than 1,500 unused and spent fuel assemblies in the reactor's storage pool.

DJP: Role of state-backed nuclear crisis fund should be expanded

February 19, 2014

DPJ calls for more power for nuclear crisis fund

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140219_16.html

Japan's main opposition Democratic Party is calling for greater oversight of decommissioning and cleanup at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant by a state-backed nuclear crisis fund. It says this should include powers to investigate the operator's work.

The proposal comes as the government prepares a bill to expand the role of the Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund set up to support Tokyo Electric Power Company after the nuclear accident. The bill would allow the fund to observe work to scrap the damaged reactors and decontaminate radioactive water at the plant.

The DPJ says the Fund should be given more power than the government bill provides for. The party says this will ensure the necessary work at the plant moves forward.

The DPJ proposes that the fund be authorized to investigate TEPCO and that the operator be required to provide information.

It says this will prevent the operator from neglecting its responsibilities on the grounds that its business is suffering.

The proposal also calls for greater financial transparency. It says the basis for calculating the cost of scrapping the reactors should be fully accounted for, to avoid limitless public spending.

It also recommends that the fund establish a mechanism to work closely with international experts and receive technical guidance and advice.

The Democratic Party will submit their proposal to the government on Thursday.

Feb. 19, 2014 - Updated 07:29 UTC

Public hearings on screenings

February 19, 2014

NRA to hold public hearings on nuclear screenings

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140219_24.html

Japan's nuclear regulator says it will set the order of priority for final safety screening at 6 nuclear plants seeking permission to restart reactors.

Members of the Nuclear Regulation Authority met on Wednesday to discuss ways to move forward with

the screening.

The utility companies applied for the required safety checks on the 10 reactors last July.

The NRA has agreed to prioritize the plants for screening and issue a draft report on the results of safety checks at one of the plants.

The report is considered the final step in obtaining NRA approval to restart reactors.

Regulators will first determine whether the utilities' own assessments of ground motion intensity at times of major earthquakes are appropriate.

NRA officials plan to decide in 2 to 3 weeks which plants are ready for final reporting.

They have also agreed to take 4 weeks to seek public opinion on the first draft report. They plan to hold public hearings in municipalities around the nuclear plants, and solicit opinions on technical aspects of the screening.

Feb. 19, 2014 - Updated 07:35 UTC

How independent can NRA be?

February 21, 2014

EDITORIAL: NRA should ignore industry minister's remark on reactor screening

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201402210050>

Industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi made the following comment on the Nuclear Regulation Authority's safety screening process for nuclear power plants, a prerequisite for restarting reactors: "For some plants, a long time has passed since their operators filed applications for screening. If the NRA shows the prospects of the screening, it will be useful for utilities to make plans for future operations."

Motegi's comment is an insult to the purpose of the law on the establishment of the nuclear watchdog that attaches importance to its independence and gives top priority to safety.

We strongly urge the minister to refrain from making such comments that could put pressure on the NRA.

The NRA must not be influenced by outside sources. Its mission is to conduct thorough safety checks from scientific and technical viewpoints without regard to the intentions of power companies and the industry ministry, which are eager to put nuclear power plants back online.

Motegi made the remarks on Feb. 18 in response to Hokkaido Electric Power Co.'s announcement a day earlier that it intends to raise utility charges again.

Last July, as soon as the NRA started screening under its new safety standards, Hokkaido Electric applied for safety checks of the Nos. 1, 2 and 3 reactors at its Tomari nuclear power plant.

In September, the utility raised electricity rates for households by an average 7.73 percent on the premise that the three reactors would be restarted one by one in December and later.

However, this week, the company said it would apply to the industry ministry for another price hike because it was not sure when those reactors will be put back online.

Motegi asked Hokkaido Electric to make efforts to avoid the price hike and suggested that the NRA show the prospects of the screening process.

He said his request was not intended to affect the screening process. But if such prospects are shown, it would benefit the utilities, and the industry minister is in no position to encourage the NRA to do so.

Motegi must not forget that the NRA was established because cozy relations between the former Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency under the industry ministry and the former Nuclear Safety Commission resulted in lax safety regulations.

The biggest factor hampering progress in the screening process lies with the operators of nuclear power plants. The utilities have underestimated the new safety regulation standards, leading to delays in preparing documents for screening their reactors.

Some operators presented half-baked scenarios of natural disasters while others failed to seriously consider an occurrence of a severe accident.

Their approach to the new safety regulation standards raises a key question: Have they really learned lessons from the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant?

The Tomari nuclear power plant, in particular, has had many problems.

In assessing the effectiveness of measures to deal with serious accidents at the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors, Hokkaido Electric used analysis data for the No. 3 reactor, whose structure is different.

The NRA harshly criticized the company's approach, likening it to using a stand-in for an exam. The watchdog said there was no way it could carry out the screening process.

The company's assumptions concerning tsunami were deemed "inappropriate," and its assessment on the impact from volcanic eruptions was "inadequate."

In addition, Hokkaido Electric was required to re-analyze the underground structure of the No. 3 reactor.

Motegi said he should refrain from commenting on why it is taking so much time for the NRA to carry out screenings. What he should do instead is correct the slack attitude of power companies.

Referring to Motegi's comment, NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka said, "We do not regard it as a message to us."

But a day earlier, the deputy secretary-general of the NRA Secretariat, which is in charge of actual screening work, indicated an acceptance of Motegi's suggestion, saying it was "a natural comment as industry minister."

To maintain its independence, the NRA must always take a resolute stand.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Feb. 21

Heard it before

February 23, 2014

NRA official says Fukushima problems raising questions over TEPCO's competence

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140222p2a00m0na002000c.html>

A senior Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) official on Feb. 21 said a string of problems at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant was raising questions over the competence of the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO).

Hideka Morimoto, deputy secretary-general of the NRA secretariat, made the comment at a news conference in reference to troubles including the recent finding that some 100 tons of highly contaminated water had leaked from a storage tank at the plant.

"This will generate controversy over TEPCO's safety culture and its ability to cope as a business operator," he told the news conference.

At the same time, Morimoto said that the agency would strictly handle the safety screening of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant that TEPCO seeks to restart in accordance with the law -- indicating that the screening and the handling of the Fukushima plant would be treated as separate issues.

Meanwhile, Morimoto said that the agency would consult with the International Atomic Energy Agency over whether it is appropriate to grade the Fukushima disaster on the International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale. The NRA secretariat deemed that major leaks of contaminated water that occurred in the summer of last year would comprise a level 3 incident on the scale -- the fifth most serious level. But the Fukushima nuclear disaster as a whole is regarded as a level 7 incident -- the highest rating. This has sparked comments that the ratings lack consistency.

February 22, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

TEPCO, poor management and repeated leaks

February 25, 2014

TEPCO criticized for poor water management that led to 100-ton leak

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140225p2g00m0dm035000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Nuclear regulators on Monday criticized that Tokyo Electric Power Co. may have been able to minimize the 100 tons of toxic water leak from a tank at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex if its water management was sound.

The direct cause of the incident was a wrong valve setting, which led toxic water to be injected into the tank that was nearly full. But Nuclear Regulation Authority Commissioner Toyoshi Fuketa said the plant should have been managed so that leaks are prevented even if valves are controlled erroneously.

TEPCO admitted during a meeting with regulators and experts on Monday that workers at a control room had not been paying much attention to the data of the water level filling the tanks that should have been receiving the toxic water.

"The water transfer operation to a tank area called 'E' started from Feb. 17 and it was going smoothly after that. So the monitoring activities became lax (during the time the wrong tank in the 'H6' area was receiving water)," one of the TEPCO officials said.

But Fuketa criticized, "The failure of checking the water level of the tanks that should have been receiving water was a problem from the viewpoint of preventing the situation from worsening."

According to TEPCO, the water level of the E area tanks was basically flat, even though a pump to send radioactive water was operating.

Meanwhile, an alarm warning of a rise in water level in the H6 area tank was issued Wednesday afternoon, but workers judged that the water-level gauge malfunctioned because of the irregular readings it started to show afterward.

Another NRA official said, "I think it's not right to blame machines (without thorough consideration) when something difficult to understand occurs."

More than nine hours after the alarm went off, workers noticed that the tank in the H6 area was overflowing water.

February 24, 2014

TEPCO official: Change of culture needed

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140224_38.html

A senior official of Tokyo Electric Power Company has apologized for the repeated leaks of contaminated water from tanks at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

TEPCO Managing Executive Officer Takafumi Anegawa was speaking to reporters on Monday after Japan's nuclear regulators criticized the operator for the latest massive leak.

Anegawa said he thinks a change in corporate culture is needed to avoid such repeated mistakes. He said he understands the problems and that **he will do his best to improve the management, but that this takes time.**

Feb. 24, 2014 - Updated 12:04 UTC

Nuclear regulators criticize tainted water leak

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140224_27.html

Japan's nuclear regulators have criticized the operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant for failing to prevent massive leakage of highly radioactive water.

Tokyo Electric Power Company announced last Thursday that 100 tons of water containing record high levels of radioactive substances had overflowed from a storage tank near the No. 4 reactor building.

Company officials on Monday briefed experts of the Nuclear Regulation Authority that the leakage occurred when valves that should have been closed were left open. This allowed tainted water to enter the tank that overflowed. They reported that workers have not been sufficiently monitoring the levels of water inside the tank.

NRA official Toyoshi Fuketa said that water gauges, alarms and other devices have been in place to prevent water leaks but they were not functional.

He asked TEPCO officials to take thorough measures to ensure these devices will fully work.

Another official asked the utility to investigate if there were mishaps by workers. When work to attach number plates on the valves was ongoing, the valves may have been opened.

Feb. 24, 2014 - Updated 10:53 UTC

Govt. to ensure TEPCO reviews steps against leaks

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140224_18.html

The Japanese government says the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant needs to review its measures to prevent radioactive water leaks.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga spoke to reporters on Monday after it was revealed that about 100 tons of highly radioactive water had leaked from a tank near the No. 4 reactor building last week.

Tokyo Electric Power Company has been conducting an in-house investigation to determine whether the leak occurred because someone left valves open. It has been interviewing workers at the plant.

Suga said the leak has stopped and the water had not reached the ocean because no spillways near the tank lead to the sea.

But he said TEPCO should collect the leaked water and contaminated soil.

Suga also said that to prevent similar accidents, the company needs to review its measures based on the tough working environment at the plant and rebuild its organizational structure.

He said the government will try to ensure that TEPCO implements steps to prevent problems, including those resulting from human error.

Feb. 24, 2014 - Updated 05:27 UTC

TEPCO opens control room to media

February 26, 2014

Control room at Fukushima plant shown to media

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140226_34.html

The operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant has opened the central control room for the facility's No.1 and 2 reactors to media for the first time since the 2011 accident.

Tokyo Electric Power Company organized the visit on Wednesday ahead of the 3rd anniversary of the March 11th earthquake and tsunami that cut off power and crippled the plant.

The room between the reactors is where workers struggled to contain the crisis 3 years ago amid rising radiation levels and the impact of a hydrogen explosion at the No. 1 reactor building.

Radiation in the room just after the accident measured one millisievert per hour. The level has fallen to less than one-150th of that figure, but those entering the room are still required to wear full-face masks and other protective gear.

The room has been cleared of debris including ceiling panels and emergency batteries. Scribbled numbers next to a water gauge suggest how workers tried to monitor the reactor's cooling water using flashlights.

Media representatives were also allowed to enter the No. 5 reactor building, which escaped damage, and visit a site for building new types of tainted water storage tanks.

Plant chief Akira Ono said he had wanted to show them the central control room sooner, but could not due to high radiation levels.

Ono also apologized to Fukushima Prefecture residents and others for a recent leak of highly contaminated water from a tank. He pledged efforts to recover the water, find the cause of the leak and take steps to prevent a recurrence.

Feb. 26, 2014 - Updated 11:37 UTC

NRA doubles its staff to ca.1,000

March 3, 2014

NRA welcomes new staff following merger

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140303_24.html

Japan's nuclear regulator has acquired hundreds of employees, including nuclear engineers, by absorbing an institution engaged in nuclear safety.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority held a ceremony on Monday to welcome **more than 380 administrative officials and engineers from the Japan Nuclear Energy Safety Organization.**

The organization was merged into the NRA on Saturday. JNES was an independent corporation that administered the inspection of nuclear power plants and the study of nuclear safety.

NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka said at the ceremony that there are high expectations for the engineers. He called on them to help the NRA become an organization that is trusted by the nation.

With the intake, **the NRA has doubled its staff to about 1,000.** The integration is expected to help the Authority strengthen its capabilities to conduct safety assessments of nuclear power plants.

The NRA also plans to set up a new department to nurture employee expertise.

Mar. 3, 2014 - Updated 08:47 UTC

Similarities between Bikini and Fukushima

March 4, 2014

Students seek out Bikini, Fukushima parallels

by Aiko Kaneshi and Tomomi Miura

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/03/04/national/students-seek-out-bikini-fukushima-parallels/#.UxX7i4XrV1s>

FUKUSHIMA – Sixty years have passed since the U.S. detonated a hydrogen bomb in a test on Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands in 1954, but for one former resident of a town near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the hardships the islanders faced are all too easy to imagine.

Keiko Takahashi, 21, and three other Japanese university students visited the Marshall Islands for the March 1 anniversary of the test. In the lead-up to the weeklong trip, they studied footage and interviewed experts in Japan about the nuclear tests.

The more they studied, the more they saw similarities between how radioactive fallout had affected the islanders and their own communities — residents forced to give up hope of returning to their contaminated hometowns, communities broken apart, and long-lasting health concerns, to name just a few.

In the case of Takahashi's hometown, Okuma, which hosted the nuclear plant, the entire population of about 11,000 remains evacuated almost three years since the Tokyo Electric Power Co. nuclear power plant was crippled in the magnitude-9 earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

While Takahashi lives in a dormitory at Fukushima University, in the city of Fukushima, her five family members currently reside in Iwaki, another city in the prefecture.

Prior to the nuclear plant disaster, her family worked in the forestry industry in Okuma for three generations. As a young child, Takahashi used to stroll around the town with her father, a local history lover, and research local water sources and bridge names for holiday projects in elementary school, she recalled.

"I know it's highly (unlikely) we'll ever go back to Okuma," Takahashi said. "But even though our livelihoods there are gone, we as human beings who have lived there have memories and feelings for the place.

"I want to make sure the history and culture of Okuma are recorded and passed on, so that it will not become just a 'sad town,'" she said.

Through the visit to the Marshall Islands, Takahashi said she wanted to hear the experiences of former residents of the Bikini and Rongelap atolls, whose hometowns are still uninhabitable due to nuclear contamination even six decades later. She says she wants to know how they maintain their bonds and sense of belonging as well as how to pass such relationships on to the younger generation.

Kaede Nagashima, 18, from the city of Fukushima, said she hopes to learn how the local people dealt with concerns about exposure to radiation, given her own struggles over the past three years since the nuclear crisis started.

Another participant, 25-year-old Kai Sato, said, "I want to contemplate what role education can play in order for us to survive and live on, leaving our hometowns behind." Sato, a second-year student at the graduate school of Fukushima University, aims to become an elementary school teacher.

The fourth member of the group, Motoi Aizawa, 22, a first-year student at the graduate school of Waseda University in Tokyo, is not from the disaster-struck area around the Tepco plant but from Shizuoka Prefecture, where the Fukuryu Maru No. 5 — a tuna trawler that was exposed to the 1954 fallout while fishing near Bikini Atoll — came from.

Aizawa said she used to know very little about the Bikini Atoll incident but that since the Fukushima nuclear disaster, she has started researching how tons of tuna caught in the ocean near Bikini in the immediate aftermath of the Fukuryu Maru radiation exposure were sold, despite fears of contamination.

"I want to learn about the current situation regarding nuclear damage on a global scale," she said of the purpose of the trip.

Hiroko Aihara, a freelance journalist from the city of Fukushima who accompanied the students to the Marshall Islands, said, "If we look at history, (the Bikini Atoll incident) 60 years ago and Fukushima are connected along the same lines."

She said she hopes to establish a bond with others around the world who have suffered from nuclear-related incidents by meeting them in person.

Quake or tsunami? Still no consensus

March 5, 2014

THREE YEARS AFTER: Quake or tsunami? Panels at odds over cause of Fukushima nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/analysis/AJ201403050061>

<image: <http://idata.over-blog.com/5/60/51/72/January-2014/isolation-condensators.jpg>>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The thousands of families wanting to know what specifically led to the Fukushima nuclear disaster that turned their lives upside down might have to wait decades for an answer.

The different panels that investigated the cause of the triple meltdown could not even agree on the time the tsunami struck the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on March 11, 2011.

The government and Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the stricken plant, maintain that a tsunami of unforeseeable size was solely to blame. TEPCO also said the accident was inevitable after it started to unfold.

However, a Diet investigation panel raised the possibility that shocks from the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake were also partly responsible, **an argument that could have serious implications for safety measures at nuclear plants and the extent of responsibility of TEPCO and the government.**

Seismic ground motions largely fell within anticipated levels, although they slightly exceeded maximum expected levels at some locations. However, the tsunami heights far outstripped levels envisaged by government regulators.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority and TEPCO are continuing with their respective investigations.

One point of contention concerns workers' testimonies that they saw water leaking near the isolation condensers in the No. 1 reactor building at the time of the accident.

The Diet's Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission said seismic shocks could have damaged a piping system for the isolation condensers, which lost water and were no longer able to sufficiently cool the reactor.

The NRA inspected the site in May 2013 and said the water leaks likely did not come from damaged isolation condensers. The inspectors instead said the water probably sloshed out of a spent fuel storage pool during the shaking from the quake and entered a duct. TEPCO espouses the same theory.

No consensus has been reached on the matter.

"I found (the isolation condensers) were damaged to a lesser extent than I had expected," said Atsuhiko Kosaka, a nuclear safety liaison officer with the NRA secretariat. "But the matter should be studied further."

The tsunami arrival time is also being contested.

The Diet investigation panel said seismic shocks could have damaged at least one of the backup diesel generators for the No. 1 reactor, which it said had stopped operating before the tsunami hit.

A wave gauge installed 1.5 kilometers off the coast of the nuclear plant recorded a second, bigger tsunami wave at 3:35 p.m. The Diet panel argued the tsunami reached the plant compound at 3:37 p.m. or later, after the backup diesel generators stopped working and all power supply was lost.

TEPCO countered that theory by presenting a new statement in October based on a reanalysis of photos of the tsunami and power supply records.

The utility said the camera clock was off by 6.5 minutes or so and argued that the tsunami arrived at 3:36 p.m., around the same time the backup diesel generators went offline. TEPCO concluded the generators stopped working because they were inundated by the tsunami.

COULD MELTDOWN HAVE BEEN AVERTED?

Another question is whether the plant's operators and chief could have prevented the meltdowns of the No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3 reactors if they had made different decisions or taken other measures.

The government's Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations pointed to operations of the high pressure coolant injection (HPCI) system, one of the emergency core cooling systems for the No. 3 reactor.

Operators halted the HPCI system at 2:42 a.m. on March 13 at their own discretion, fearing the system would fail under the abnormal circumstances at the time. They later attempted to reactivate the HPCI system, but to no avail.

The government investigation panel said water injection into the reactor was suspended for nearly seven hours because the operators stopped the HPCI system without securing an alternative means to cool the reactor. The stoppage fueled the progression of the core meltdown process, the panel said.

The government panel also noted that fire engines were late in providing an alternative way to inject water into the reactor.

TEPCO, however, rebutted this theory when it presented new analysis results in December that reversed its previous views.

The utility said the HPCI system was actually injecting less water into the reactor than it had previously believed, causing water levels to drop and the reactor core to melt sooner than earlier thought.

In other words, TEPCO argued that the core meltdown could probably not have been averted even if the workers had kept the HPCI system running at the No. 3 reactor.

The utility also said fire engines were not injecting enough water into the reactors after the cooling systems had stopped.

TEPCO connected fire engine pumps to conduits of the reactor buildings to pump water into the reactors after the cooling systems had failed.

But the utility said part of the water flowed into condensers through branch pipes along the way and never reached the reactors. It never occurred to TEPCO workers at the time that there were such escape routes for the water, the utility added.

“Failures in water injection from the fire engines present a major problem, but in the first place, there should have been an alternative arrangement, alongside the cooling systems, to allow water to be injected into the reactors as soon as the accident started,” said Fumiya Tanabe, a former chief research scientist with the Japan Atomic Energy Research Institute, one of the predecessors of today’s Japan Atomic Energy Agency.

“Such an arrangement could have cut the chain of events that led to the (hydrogen) explosions.”

(This article was written by Akira Hatano and Senior Staff Writer Hisashi Hattori.)

Final report of 3/11 doesn't bring much

March 8, 2014

Nuclear experts issue final Fukushima report

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140308_20.html

A nuclear energy panel has released its final report on the March 2011 accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The Atomic Energy Society of Japan set up the investigation committee in August 2011. It consists of about 40 experts from universities and research institutes.

In a report published on Saturday, the committee calls for enhanced measures to deal with natural disasters and serious accidents.

The report says nuclear energy experts failed to have the results of their studies reflected in measures to guard against unexpectedly serious accidents caused by natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunami.

It also acknowledges that the Atomic Energy Society had little understanding about the role experts should play in enhancing nuclear safety. It says the organization lacked awareness of natural disasters and failed to make sufficient efforts to maintain neutrality.

The report urges the nuclear experts to realize that they would not be qualified to be involved in the atomic energy field if they cannot properly deal with severe accidents or tackle disaster prevention.

The report also includes an analysis made by the committee, based on its own computer simulation, about how the meltdown of the reactors occurred.

The report says the damage caused by the March 11 earthquake was not enough to seriously affect the safety functions of the reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. The findings contradict those of other institutions.

Observers say the panel has failed to fully investigate the disaster by making use of the Atomic Energy Society's human resources and expertise.

They also say the report, published 3 years after the Fukushima accident, sheds little new light on the disaster.

Mar. 8, 2014 - Updated 13:21 UTC

NRA requirements are missing important issues

March 10, 2014

EDITORIAL: Nuclear watchdog should continue with reforms reflecting lessons from Fukushima

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201403100058>

Nuclear power plants in Japan are going through a safety review by the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA), which they must pass to resume their operations. The review process is now approaching its first crucial stage.

The NRA has made progress in narrowing the list of reactors that are likely to meet the new safety standards, and so the nuclear watchdog expects to announce soon the power plants that will be given “priority screening” for a restart.

Politicians eager for restarts tend to call the nation’s new safety regulations “the world’s most stringent.” They sound as if no problems will remain with Japan’s nuclear power plants as long as the safety standards are met.

However, that is not the case.

There are major outstanding issues that are not included in the NRA’s regulatory requirements, such as drawing up evacuation plans by local governments in the vicinity of the plants to prepare for a contingency and finding sites to store spent nuclear fuel for many years. On top of that, the NRA’s safety review process itself is still in the middle of reform.

The NRA’s screening has not yet fully incorporated lessons learned from the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. For example, it does not address such a serious issue as the concentration of many reactors in a relatively narrow area.

CONCENTRATION OF REACTORS NOT ADDRESSED

Let us remind ourselves that the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant released massive amounts of radioactive materials after reactors Nos. 1-3 went into meltdown in rapid succession three years ago. The whole of Japan was plunged into endless terror, not knowing how serious the accident would be. If reactor No. 4’s spent fuel pool overheated, significantly destroying the spent fuel rods, there was a danger that no one would be able to go near the plant to contain the crisis due to alarming levels of radioactive contamination.

If that had occurred, it was possible that reactors No. 5 and No. 6, which were shut down at the time, as well as the four reactors at the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear plant, located only 12 kilometers away, might have also been crippled. In other words, up to 10 reactors at the plants might have released radioactive substances.

This “worst case scenario” was avoided, only due to the fervent efforts by workers at the plants, as well as a stroke of luck that a massive amount of water gushed into reactor No. 4’s spent fuel pool.

Still, the accident sent shock waves through nuclear regulators around the world. Light water reactors, the type most commonly used around the globe, were damaged so severely that they released huge amounts of radiation. In addition, the regulators were made to realize the potential risks of spent fuel pools and building reactors being located in close proximity to each other.

After the Fukushima accident, many countries, including Japan, re-examined their emergency responses to nuclear accidents resulting from natural disasters and began to ask nuclear power operators to come up with countermeasures to deal with a scenario of simultaneous multiple nuclear accidents.

Japan’s nuclear power plants tend to be clustered too close together in narrow areas, far closer than the widespread distribution of nuclear plants in other countries.

The Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata Prefecture has seven reactors. Within Fukui Prefecture, there are 14 reactors, including one prototype fast-breeder reactor. In light of this concentration of reactors, the NRA’s regulation is too mild.

“We are aware of a need to discuss this issue, but have not done it yet,” NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka said. It seems this is because the NRA believes it will be some time until multiple reactors start to operate simultaneously at one site.

However, nuclear plants containing fuel rods are potentially dangerous even if they are not online. Even if only one reactor is running, as long as there are other reactors nearby, there is danger of the damage spreading in the event of an accident. Especially when numerous operators of nuclear power plants are involved, the situation cannot be left in their hands alone.

This is a matter Japan should put a priority on tackling. How does the NRA expect to explain the results of its safety reviews without squarely dealing with the concentration problem?

INSPECTIONS SHOULD BE DONE WITHOUT WARNING

The new regulations have become far more stringent in terms of the equipment that is designed to prepare for natural disasters such as tsunami and earthquakes.

It requires the operator to simulate possible severe accidents and establish a “safety goal” that limits the likelihood of having a core accident at each reactor to once every 10,000 years at most. Under the new requirements, the operator is required to strengthen the structure and equipment of the reactors to that end.

This kind of approach has been adopted widely in the West. In Japan, it was debated for more than a decade, but the “safety myth” of Japanese reactors prevented this from being adopted by nuclear power plant operators.

As far as this numerical safety goal is concerned, Japanese reactors are almost on par with reactors in other countries, but not the best in the world. The operators seem put out at being asked to comply with more requirements in regard to their equipment, but they should consider them the minimum steps in a disaster-prone country such as Japan.

On the other hand, regulation is still weak regarding human factors such as accident response while in operation. Planning against terror attacks only presupposes the possibility of terrorists crashing airplanes into nuclear power plants. A fundamental overhaul is necessary. The NRA should crack down harder, not just inspect the drills, but follow the methods of other countries to conduct on-site, emergency accident or terror attack drills without prior notice.

JAPAN HAS TO CATCH UP FAST

The Fukushima accident occurred under a system of lax regulations that favored the operator. We are a lap behind the Western countries in terms of enforcing stronger regulations, and we need to catch up quickly.

The NRA should make a better effort to explain to the public what it is doing. Granted, the NRA does broadcast its chairman's news conferences and screening meetings via the Internet, but we wonder whether information about its screenings and regulations is reaching the general public. We also urge the NRA to strengthen its involvement in the creation of evacuation programs.

It is also essential that the NRA trains and motivates its staff, who are conducting safety inspections. The nuclear regulation agency, the NRA's secretariat, absorbed the former Japan Nuclear Energy Safety Organization (JNES), which resulted in the number of staff expanding to roughly 1,000. JNES used to be responsible for safety reviews prior to the Fukushima accident and was criticized for being “too close” to

operators. The new agency must alter this mind-set, maintain a healthy distance when dealing with the operators and improve the quality of the regulatory measures.

To achieve this, the NRA must maintain its independence from the nuclear lobby and ensure that the importance of its regulatory actions is understood by all members of its staff.

The Abe administration and the plant operators are trying to rush into restarts. However, the NRA must at all times maintain a draconian standard for its reviews and constantly seek to improve itself.

--The Asahi Shimbun, March 9

Nuclear disaster: A very expensive business

March 11, 2014

Fukushima nuclear disaster taking toll on corporate and family finances

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140311p2a00m0na018000c.html>

Businesses and households in Japan have been forced to shoulder greater financial burdens since the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant as the shutdown of all the country's nuclear reactors and the rising costs of dealing with the atomic disaster have pushed up electricity prices.

The government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe intends to go ahead with reactivation of idled nuclear reactors, but public trust in nuclear power has not been restored and evacuation plans for local residents and other emergency measures have not been fully drawn up based on the assumption that accidents could occur. There are many people who stand against any move to place top priority on near-term economic benefits to reactivate nuclear reactors.

"We will thoroughly examine nuclear reactors based on regulation standards of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) that are the strictest in the world and proceed to reactivate those reactors that are confirmed to be conforming with them," Prime Minister Abe said at a news conference on March 10.

Following the shutdown of the nuclear reactors, utility firms in the country have been operating their thermal power plants at full capacity, resulting in an increase in imports of fossil fuel such as liquefied natural gas (LNG). Japan's imports of fossil fuel stood at 7.1 trillion yen in 2013 -- double the pre-disaster level in 2010 -- due in part to a devaluation of the yen and the rising prices of natural resources. The costs of responding to the Fukushima nuclear disaster, including those for decommissioning the Fukushima nuclear plant, paying compensation and conducting decontamination work, are likely to increase to 11 trillion yen as of now.

Most of the sharp rises in the costs for fuel and handling of the nuclear disaster are to be added to electricity bills. Six power firms, including Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), have already raised electricity charges, and Chubu Electric Power Co. is applying for government permission to raise electricity prices. The average household is expected to spend 7,476 yen in April 2014 -- the average monthly electricity rate charged by nine utility firms across the country (except for the power firm in Okinawa Prefecture) -- a rise of slightly less than 20 percent from the pre-disaster level. Power demand dropped about five percent from the pre-disaster level on the backdrop of not only well-established energy-saving efforts but also from cost-cutting efforts among households and corporations.

The reactivation of nuclear reactors is the last resort for utility firms to curb electricity price hikes. TEPCO anticipates that by reactivating just one nuclear reactor it will improve its earnings by 120 billion yen a year and thus reduce costs such as those for importing LNG. Conversely, if nuclear reactors were to remain offline, utility firms would find it difficult to keep going. As Hokkaido Electric Power Co. has decided to consider raising electricity prices again, other utility firms could also raise electricity charges, threatening to cast a chill over the economy that has been on a recovery track.

Nevertheless, the country remains split over whether to use nuclear power in the future. The Abe administration, which regards the new regulations as "the world's highest standards," wants to give endorsement to the safety of nuclear power. But nuclear consultant Satoru Sato says, "We can't say Japan's safety standards are 'the world's best' because of insufficient standards for anti-terrorism measures and protection against fires. To say they are the world's best will have a negative effect such as causing carelessness."

Efforts have not progressed to deal with the country's nuclear policy based on the assumption that accidents could occur. The government requires 135 municipalities within a 30-kilometer radius from nuclear plants across the country to work out evacuation plans. But according to the NRA secretariat, only 58 of the municipalities, or 40 percent of them, had drawn up such plans as of Jan. 28, underscoring the manifestation of the negative effect stemming from the government's stance to leave the matter to local governments.

The mechanism remains ambiguous as to how the central and local governments should coordinate with one another and make important decisions in emergencies, including a decision to start evacuating. A senior official of a power firm says, "With the current size of our company, it is difficult to secure manpower to deal with an accident." Therefore, it is not clear whether the central and local governments and utilities will actually be able to respond properly in emergencies.

Learning lessons from the Fukushima disaster, the government pledged to make a clean break from the "safety myth" of nuclear power. In reality, however, the government is leaving the job up to the NRA. The

government is far from regaining public trust in nuclear power largely because it has failed to take necessary measures.

March 11, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Fukushima nuclear damage costs are mounting

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140311_26.html

Three years after the earthquake and tsunami that crippled the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, total costs for dealing with the damage are estimated to exceed 11 trillion yen, or 107 billion dollars.

NHK obtained the figure by adding up the latest estimates released by the government and the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company.

The costs include 24 billion dollars for decontamination of areas around the plant, and 11 billion dollars for construction of temporary storage facilities for radioactive waste and debris. 19 billion is earmarked for decommissioning and disposal of contaminated water. Compensation for damages is forecast by TEPCO to exceed 48.5 billion dollars.

Other costs, including those of building public housing for evacuees and ongoing health checks for the people of Fukushima Prefecture, will amount to 5.5 billion dollars.

But the total costs are believed to be far larger than these estimates. That's because the current figures don't include costs for the final disposal of waste from cleanup operations, and expenditures for government personnel who handled the disaster.

Analysts say that costs for decommissioning projects, which would continue for 40 years, and damages paid to residents will inflate the total costs still further.

Mar. 11, 2014 - Updated 09:14 UTC

Learn to answer embarrassing questions

March 10, 2014

<http://ecowatch.com/2014/03/10/leaked-emails-nrcs-fukushima/>

Leaked Emails Expose NRC's Cover-Up of Safety Concerns Days After Fukushima Disaster

Brandon Baker | March 10, 2014 9:37 am

When an earthquake and tsunami struck Fukushima, Japan leading to a nuclear disaster three years ago, U.S. residents wondered if the aging nuclear facilities in their own country were at risk. What they didn't know is that the federal government's nuclear arm worked actively in the days after the incident, trying to cover up the perils that existed in the states.

According to a report from NBC, a U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) campaign to reassure people about nuclear safety standards coincided with agency experts consistently presenting similar questions behind the scenes. Through a Freedom of Information Act request, *NBC* acquired a string of March 2011 emails that clearly show the cover-up.

"While we know more than these say, we're sticking to this story for now," Scott Burnell, an NRC public and media relations manager wrote in one email.

From: Burnell, Scott

Date: Wednesday, March 16, 2011, 11:11 AM

Folks, the expected calls are coming in – We need a better response ASAP!

In the days following the Fukushima disaster, the NRC split its talking points into two segments with different information: "public answer" and "additional technical, non-public information." Here's an example of a question the NRC expected to face, followed by the public and non-public answers:

Q. What happens when/if a plant 'melts down'?

Public Answer: In short, nuclear power plants in the United States are designed to be safe. To prevent the release of radioactive material, there are multiple barriers between the radioactive material and the environment, including the fuel cladding, the heavy steel reactor vessel itself and the containment building, usually a heavily reinforced structure of concrete and steel several feet thick.

Additional, non-technical, non-public information: The melted core may melt through the bottom of the vessel and flow onto the concrete containment floor. The core may melt through the containment liner and release radioactive material to the environment."

One example of a concerted cover-up came five days after the initial reports that an earthquake and tsunami knocked out the power and cooling systems at the six-reactor Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. *MSNBC* used NRC estimates to rank the U.S. nuclear plants that were most at risk if an earthquake

were to hit nearby land. Burnell and members from the NRC's lobbying arm, the Nuclear Energy Institute, emailed staff members with instructions to find errors in the article, but none came up. He also told experts likely to appear on TV how to deny certain claims.

From: Burnell, Scott

Date: Wednesday, March 16, 2011, 6:22 AM

I know you're going to have a cow over this - somewhat inevitable when a reporter new to the subject tries to summarize things. Apart from "you're totally off-base," what specific technical corrections can we ask for??

OPA (Office of Public Affairs) - this is likely to spark a lot of follow-up. The immediate response would be "that's a very incomplete look at the overall research and we continue to believe U.S. reactors are capable of withstanding the strongest earthquake their sites could experience." I'll share whatever we get from the experts.

Former U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu appeared on *CNN* on March 20, 2011 but hesitated when an on-air personality asked him if U.S. nuclear plants could withstand an earthquake that measured 9.0 on the Richter scale. NRC spokesman David McIntyre had his own ideas for how Chu should have handled the question.

From: McIntyre, David

Date: Sunday, March 20, 2011, 10:01:00 AM

He should just say "Yes, it can." Worry about being wrong when it doesn't.

Sorry if I sound cynical.

More than 30 of the country's 100 nuclear power reactors have the same brand of General Electric reactors or containment system that used in Fukushima, according to the *NBC* report. The median reactor age in the U.S. is 34.

The oldest is the Ginna plant near Rochester, N.Y., licensed in 1969. Only four of the reactors began generating power in 1990 or later.

Americans aren't the only ones concerned with old reactors. Last week, 240 Greenpeace activists from national and regional offices took action across Europe to highlight the risk of aging reactors.

Dissenting voices suppressed

March 12, 2014

Source : NBC News

<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/fukushima-anniversary/japans-well-placed-nuclear-power-advocates-swat-away-opponents-n50396>

A good deal of what is said here about Japan and its nuclear village is also true for France and probably for other countries too. (RSDN)

Japan's Well-Placed Nuclear Power Advocates Swat Away Opponents By Douglas Birch, R. Jeffrey Smith and Jake Adelstein, Center for Public Integrity

TOKYO — When Taro Kono was growing up as the son of a major Japanese political party leader, he had what he calls a “fever for the atom.” Like many of his countrymen, he regarded nuclear power plants as his country’s ticket to postwar prosperity, a modern, economical way to meet huge energy needs on an island with few natural resources.

Over the next five decades, pro-nuclear sentiment led Japan to build the world’s third largest fleet of nuclear reactors. Its officials spent more than two decades and \$22 billion building a factory to create plutonium-based nuclear reactor fuel, the largest ever to be subject to international monitoring. The facility is slated for completion in October at Rokkasho on Japan’s northeast coast, kicking off a new phase in the country’s long-term plan to increase energy independence.

By the time Kono was elected to the parliament, known as the Diet, at the age of 33 in 1996, however, he had become a skeptic about the Rokkasho plant. After interrogating scientists and meeting with critics, he

concluded that a vast array of new reactors fueled by its plutonium faced huge technical challenges, posed a major proliferation risk, and probably would not reap the financial benefits claimed by its backers. He told the American ambassador at an embassy dinner in 2008 that its high costs were improperly kept hidden from the public.

But Kono's campaign in Japan against the plant has now been systematically squashed, in what he and his allies depict as a telling illustration of the powerful political forces — cronyism, influence-buying and a stifling of dissenting voices — that have kept the nuclear industry and its backers in the utilities here going strong.

By all accounts, the Japanese nuclear industry's sway and its governmental support remain high, even in the face of technical glitches, huge cost overruns, and accidents like the meltdowns of three reactors at Fukushima three years ago this week — which led to the abrupt closure of all its remaining reactors.

The government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who leads Kono's party, announced in February its support for restarting some reactors and possibly building new ones, designed specifically to burn plutonium-based fuel.

Abe did so with apparent confidence that he has the enduring support — if not of the public — of the so-called “nuclear power village,” a tightly-woven network of regulators, utility industry executives, engineers, labor leaders and local politicians who have become dependent on nuclear power for jobs, income, and prestige.

Kono, a fluent English-speaker who received his undergraduate degree from Georgetown University, said in an interview that he has been talking about nuclear power “for the last 16 to 17 years,” but “no one really paid attention, right?”

Kono was unable to defeat the plutonium fuel program, he said, because its powerful constituency includes not only members of the ruling party, but bureaucrats, media leaders, bankers and academics. The louder he complained, the more these elites turned their backs on him. Just 60 legislators out of 722 in the parliament's lower and upper chambers have joined the anti-nuclear caucus he helped organize.

Industry officials contend that Rokkasho's completion makes sound fiscal sense. Yoshihiko Kawai, president of Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd., the consortium of 85 utilities and other companies that owns the plant, has argued that making new plutonium-based fuels from old reactor fuel — according to the Rokkasho plan — was thrifty, not wasteful. “By directly disposing of spent fuels, we would be just throwing this energy resource away,” he told Plutonium Magazine in 2012.

A broadside over dinner

On a warm, cloudless fall evening in 2008, Kono brought his strong views about the corrupting influence of the “nuclear village” to a dinner at the walled residence of U.S. ambassador to Japan Thomas Schieffer, a longtime friend and former business partner of President George W. Bush.

Schieffer was eager to take the measure of a rising politician who opposed Bush’s plan for wider use of plutonium-based nuclear fuels around the globe, under a program known as Global Nuclear Energy Partnership that envisioned a large role for the Rokkasho plant.

Seated in the small dining room of the residence where Douglas MacArthur met Emperor Hirohito in 1945, Kono attempted to sketch out the institutional reasons why Japan’s bureaucrats and its utilities remained wedded to what he considered an outdated nuclear policy. A confidential embassy summary of the unusual conversation, full of criticism by Kono of his country’s policies, was published by Wikileaks in 2011.

Kono said junior officials in the government, who saw plutonium fuels as a costly technological dead end, were trapped by policies they had inherited from more senior lawmakers whom Japanese culture did not permit them to challenge. He complained that under Japanese parliamentary customs, he could not hire or fire committee staff but often had to rely on bureaucrats loaned from government agencies, all with a vested interest in promoting nuclear power. Any questions he asked were quickly passed back to those agencies.

A desire for the atom

Japan’s appetite for nuclear power seems quixotic for a nation devastated by its dark underside: the plutonium- and uranium-fueled weapons developed by American scientists. **But one lesson its leaders took from the explosions over Nagasaki and Hiroshima was that they should master the technology that defeated them.**

“I saw the mushroom cloud from my naval operation base in Takamatsu,” a young sailor named Yasuhiro Nakasone recalled in his autobiography. Nakasone, who would become Japan’s top science official and then its prime minister from 1982 to 1987, said he concluded that if Japan didn’t use the atom for peaceful purposes, it would “forever be a fourth-rate nation.”

That impulse was nurtured, carefully and secretly, by Washington. A 1954 cable to the director of the CIA — declassified only eight years ago — called for an “atomic peace mission” to Japan by U.S. nuclear scientists and reactor-company officials to overcome prevailing anti-nuclear sentiment and help “revive the hopes of the deflation-oppressed Japanese in reconstructing their economy.”

To carry out what the cable described as “an enlightenment propaganda program,” the agency in particular enlisted the assistance of Matsutarō Shōriki, a former head of the Tokyo police commission in the 1920s who had gone on to become a prominent publisher and broadcaster. The Yomiuri Shimbun, his newspaper, enthusiastically promoted nuclear power and Shōriki himself helped found Japan’s Atomic Industrial Forum, a tight alliance of companies and utilities. He died in 1969.

Beginning in 1966, Japan started building about one reactor a year. From the start, however, Japan planned to use uranium-fueled light-water reactors — the technology in predominant use around the globe — only until it had created a new energy system based on advanced, breeder reactors, so named because they can both consume and produce plutonium in what in principle could be an endless cycle, almost like perpetual-motion machines.

Uranium was initially — and mistakenly — thought to be rare. And breeders, initially predicted to be less costly than conventional reactors, have proven expensive to build, difficult to operate, and hard to secure, provoking France, Britain, and the United States to cut back or close their breeder programs several decades ago.

As a young man, Kono read in his “manga” comic books that breeder reactors were ideal for Japan, because they could provide the country with energy for thousands of years “without having to burn oil,” he wrote in his recent book on the Fukushima disaster. The major Japanese utilities all supported this claim, and helped spread that **word through advertising expenditures that totaled \$27.6 billion over the past four decades, according to a 2013 investigation by the Asahi Shimbun newspaper**, the Center’s partner in this examination of Rokkasho.

Construction of the Rokkasho plant began in 1993 and was initially supposed to be finished by 1997, but technical setbacks and construction problems forced a delay of nearly two decades. Paul Dickman, a senior policy fellow at Argonne National Laboratory in Illinois, the center of U.S. breeder reactor research, said Rokkasho is “a great facility.” But he also said it was a “construction project that’s gone out of control,” because Japan chose to modify an existing French design for such plants, rather than simply copying it.

A dissenting view is suppressed

Throughout Rokkasho's construction, the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has been a bastion of pro-nuclear boosterism. But four officials in its economic and industrial policy bureau dared to challenge orthodoxy in 2004, when they prepared a 26-page Powerpoint entitled "The Unstoppable Nuclear Fuel Cycle" that called the planned plutonium-based nuclear program outdated and its promoters corrupt.

The presentation, obtained by the Center for Public Integrity, said nuclear policymaking was controlled by "those involved with and interested in the nuclear power industry." It noted that four of the Atomic Energy Commission's five members had a professional or financial stake in the industry, presaging a widespread criticism of the organization in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster.

The presentation also predicted that building, operating, and decommissioning the Rokkasho plant would cost almost \$190 billion, and warned that the practicality of building special reactors to burn the fuel it would make "has yet to be proven." In a rush to embrace plutonium recycling, it said, Japan's political leaders had "ignored the lack of conclusive research" and failed to acknowledge technical criticisms.

Although the authors urged that their report be published to encourage a public debate, it was instead suppressed, and they were all swiftly purged from the policy bureau, according to a source with direct information about METI's response. The Mainichi Shimbun newspaper finally disclosed the report's existence in 2012.

Officials with METI declined the Center for Public Integrity's request for an interview.

The AEC meanwhile disregarded the policy bureau's advice, and approved initial testing of the Rokkasho plant in 2006, which contaminated its pipes and equipment with highly radioactive dust, solvents, and other wastes. That ended any hopes of simply mothballing the plant. Any future decommissioning will take decades and cost \$16 billion, according to AEC estimates.

Members of the Liberal Democratic Party, which has ruled Japan since 1955 except for a year in the 1990s and for a three-year period ending in 2012, have been rewarded for their pro-nuclear stance with campaign donations from the 10 giant electrical utilities that control around 96 percent of the nation's power supply.

The largest of these, the Tokyo Electric Power Co., or TEPCO, formally ended its direct corporate donations in 1974. But it systematically encouraged "voluntary" donations by company executives and managers to a fund-raising entity created by the ruling party, according to a 2011 investigation by Asahi. At least 448 Tepco executives donated roughly \$777,000 in total to the entity between 1995 and 2009, according to campaign finance documents obtained by Asahi and shared with the Center.

A TEPCO spokesman told Asahi that the donations were “based on the judgment of the individual and the company is not involved. We do not encourage such donations.” But Tepco executives, in interviews with Asahi reporters, said the company repeatedly stipulated how much they should donate — roughly \$3,900 for top executives, \$3,300 for executive vice presidents, and \$1,700 for managing directors, the newspaper said.

Heaven-sent officials

Tepco’s influence has also been enhanced by its enthusiastic participation in revolving door-employment practices similar to those involving bureaucrats and companies in Washington, D.C.

A METI report in 2011, prepared at the insistence of nuclear opponents in Japan’s tiny Communist Party, said for example that between 1960 and 2011, Tepco hired 68 high-level government officials. From 1980 to late 2011, the report said, four former top-level bureaucrats from METI’s own Agency for Natural Resources and Energy became vice presidents at other electric utilities. The practice is known here by the amusing term, *amakudari*, for appointees who “descended from heaven.”

Tepco officials also regularly move into key regulatory positions, part of a migration known as *ama-agari*, or “ascent to heaven” that has involved dozens of top utility officials. More than 100 such utility executives between 2001 and 2011 were able to keep drawing an industry paycheck while also working part-time for the government, a practice that is legal here, according to a former member of the Japanese Diet Lower House Economy and Industry Committee, who spoke on background. An official working in the Nuclear Regulation Authority’s research division, in an interview, said on condition of anonymity that the *ama-agari* system is “like having cops and thieves working in the same police station.”

Perhaps the most significant instance of *ama-agari* was the Liberal Democratic Party’s appointment in 1998 of Tokio Kano, a longtime TEPCO executive, as chairman of the parliamentary committee that oversees METI and as the parliamentary secretary of science and technology. Both are posts crucial to the nuclear energy industry, and Kano used them to advance legislation enabling plutonium-based fuel to be burned in some standard reactors — not just breeders. He also pushed through a law requiring that all spent nuclear fuel be sent to Rokkasho or similar Japanese plants.

Taro Kono, the industry critic, charged that Kano “acted like the secretary general of whatever committee had anything to do with energy and electricity.” Kono says that when he himself raised objections to nuclear policies during committee meetings, Kano would say “well, there’s a strange voice in this room, but we kind of got unanimous consent” and then proceed.

When Kano retired from the parliament in 2011, he returned to TEPCO — where he had kept an office throughout his work writing legislation — as a special adviser.

Kano declined the Center's request for an interview. But he told Asahi in 2011 he remains convinced that nuclear power is sensible. "Reactors were built because local residents strongly desired them, and it's a fact they generated employment and income," he said. "Some researchers say that low-dose radiation is good for your health. It's a persuasive argument."

Kano separately told The New York Times that year it was "disgusting" that his critics considered him a TEPCO "errand boy" merely because he had the business community's support.

Funds and wastes cement Rokkasho's role

The Aomori region where the Rokkasho plant is located, with a windswept coastline and harsh climate, ranks near the bottom of the nation's 47 prefectures, or statelets, in per capita income. "You can't grow much," says Taro Kono, the anti-nuclear activist lawmaker, who said he understands the plant's local appeal. "It's a tough place to live."

In the 1980s, the central government tried and failed to stimulate Aomori's economy with sugar beet farming and a tank farm for petroleum reserves, both of which faltered. So the nuclear plant's construction, which started in 1993, turned out to be a vital source of jobs, taxes, and even tourism — contributing around 88 percent of the village's total tax revenue in 2012, according to Aomori Prefecture officials. A Japanese study last year said it had boosted per capita income levels by 62 percent.

Moreover, to smooth the way for the plant, the central government pays the village — which has a population of just 12,000 — \$25.9 million in grants yearly under a special nuclear subsidy program created in Tokyo to promote the siting of nuclear energy facilities all over the country. **The grants have amounted to more than \$2,300 annually for every man woman and child in the village**, according to prefecture officials. The village's Chamber of Commerce has reported that roughly 70 percent of the businesses there are now involved with or dependent upon the nuclear industry.

Of course, the downside of the program for local citizens is that Rokkasho has since become a storage site for 3,000 tons of highly radioactive spent fuel from commercial power plants, waiting to be processed into new plutonium. To win the right to do this, **Japan's electric power monopolies 16 years ago pledged that the vast bulk of that spent fuel would be recycled as fuel — or it would be sent back.**

But doing so would swamp spent-fuel pools at reactor sites that are already close to capacity, Japanese officials say, and could doom the Abe government's plans to reopen many of Japan's 50 surviving reactors.

Kono says renegotiating this agreement — which many politicians regard as sacrosanct — is the single biggest challenge to unraveling the plans of the “nuclear village.”

A latent nuclear arsenal?

After the Fukushima disaster, some of Kono's political adversaries embraced another argument in favor of the country's reactors and the Rokkasho plant that may seem surprising to some in the West: Operating these facilities sends a useful signal to would-be aggressors that Japan could quickly develop nuclear arms.

“There's a pro-nuclear power plant argument that we need to keep the nuclear reactor running so that we can pretend that we may have a nuclear weapon one day,” Kono said during the late-night interview in his apartment house.

Shigeru Ishiba, a former defense minister who was Kono's rival for a ruling party leadership post in 2009 and is now its general secretary, caused a stir in October 2011 when he told Sapio, a right-wing magazine, that Japan's commercial nuclear reactors “would allow us to produce a nuclear warhead in a short amount of time.” He added: **“It's a tacit deterrent.”**

Many prominent Japanese officials still want the capability to produce nuclear arms if they were needed, according to Naoto Kan, who held a series of top government financial and strategic policy positions before becoming Japan's prime minister from 2010 to 2011, representing the Democratic Party of Japan — the LDP's main rival. He said the desire for a nuclear weapons capability is an important source of support for Japan's plutonium programs.

“Inside Japan, and that is not only within the Democratic Party of Japan, there are entities who wish to be able to maintain the ability to produce Japan's own plutonium,” Kan said in an interview with the Center for Public Integrity in his parliamentary office. “They do not say it in public, but they wish to have the capability to create nuclear weapons in case of a threat.”

Japan has a pacifist constitution, and a 47-year-old policy of ruling out the production, possession or introduction of nuclear weapons on Japanese soil. It has signed and ratified the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and is a leading advocate of nuclear arms control.

Moreover, all of Japan's existing plutonium stockpile is under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards, while its uranium — a linchpin of any effort to restart the country's civilian reactors — is largely imported.

These large challenges would have to be overcome for Japan to embark on a weapons program, according to Jacques E.C. Hymans at the University of Southern California and other scholars.

But a potential linkage between Rokkasho's product and nuclear weapons has hung over the program from the start. Kumao Kaneko, a 76-year-old former director of the Nuclear Energy Division of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told the Center for Public Integrity that Tokyo pressed the Carter administration in 1977 for permission to start producing plutonium partly to ensure Japan had a weapons option. [Restored this background]

The U.S. has long been concerned about potential development of a Japanese bomb, since Japan has the scientific skills, infrastructure and — most important — the raw explosive material in the form of plutonium, hundreds of pounds of weapons-grade uranium, and the technology to produce more. Washington's worry is that such an arsenal would set off a regional arms race, complicating Japan's relations with its neighbors, some of whom would clamor for a similar capability.

U.S. policymakers have pursued a two-pronged path to blocking that development: Over the past four years, they have quietly brought a stream of Japanese diplomats and military officers into highly restricted U.S. nuclear weapons centers — including the Strategic Command headquarters in Nebraska, a Minuteman missile base in Montana, and a Trident submarine base outside Seattle — to remind them of the robustness of the U.S. nuclear deterrent.

The U.S. also has gently urged Japan to cap or reduce the size of its plutonium stockpile. Its officials have encouraged Japan to reopen its closed reactors, in part so any newly-created plutonium can be burned at the same rate it is being produced. U.S. officials confirm they've also pressed Japan to give up, through repatriation to the United States, some of its existing plutonium stocks before production gets under way.

But the U.S. has not urged Japan to cancel its Rokkasho project, several current and former senior U.S. and Japanese officials said. Authorities say one reason Washington has not offered that advice is that killing it — and all the future nuclear power plants linked to it — would increase Japan's dependence on traditional energy supplies and drive up their price on the world market, adversely impacting the U.S. economy.

“Obviously what is done in the long term at Rokkasho is a decision for the Japanese people, the Japanese government to make,” Deputy Energy Secretary Daniel Poneman said during a July 2012 press conference in Tokyo. He added that “to the extent that there would be paths forward for Rokkasho” that could avoid increasing Japan’s stockpile of plutonium, “that would be a good thing.”

Poneman coupled this, however, with a public pitch for letting Japan use nuclear power to reduce carbon emissions, acknowledging that it is an important tool “for our friends and colleagues in Japan ... who are very worried about climate change.”

Jon Wolfstahl, who until two years ago served as a nonproliferation expert on the staff of Vice President Joe Biden and the White House National Security Council, said many in the administration believed that Japan wouldn’t listen to pleas for canceling Rokkasho, and that insisting on it would only fracture U.S. relations with the country.

“They don’t need the United States to tell them that Rokkasho is a giant waste of money and that there’s no need for them to start marching down this road,” Wolfstahl said. “But I’m not sure there’s much the U.S. could do about it.”

Gary Samore, who directed nuclear proliferation policy at the White House during Obama’s first term, put it more bluntly: “If the Japanese government really decided, ‘yes, we’re going to turn it on,’ then the Obama administration would have to make a decision,” he said.

Either the United States will have to stick “with existing policy, which is not to object,” or it will have to try to persuade Japan to abandon its plutonium manufacturing plan.

Toshihiro Okuyama and Yumi Nakayama, staff writers for the Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun, contributed reporting for this article.

Douglas Birch is a senior writer at the Center for Public Integrity. R. Jeffrey Smith is managing editor for national security at the Center. Jake Adelstein has worked as an investigative journalist in Tokyo since 1993. This story was published by The Center for Public Integrity, a nonprofit, nonpartisan investigative news organization in Washington, D.C.

See:



Cranes swing over Rokkasho's recycleable-fuel storage center during construction in November 2012.
Koji Sasahara/AP

Plutonium fever blossoms in Japan

Cronyism, influence-buying and a stifling of dissenting voices have kept the Japanese nuclear industry going strong after the Fukushima disaster, critics say

By Douglas BirchemailR. Jeffrey SmithemailJake Adelstein

Holding-up radiation results?

March 25, 2014

Gov't team withholds high radiation data on three Fukushima sites

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140325p2a00m0na008000c.html>

A Cabinet Office team has delayed the release of radiation measurements from three Fukushima Prefecture municipalities, and plans to release them later with lower, recalculated results, the Mainichi learned on March 24.

The three municipalities are currently covered by evacuation orders imposed after the March 2011 Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdowns -- evacuation orders the government plans to lift in the near future. According to one source, the original measurements were higher than expected, prompting the Cabinet Office team -- set up to support victims of the nuclear disaster -- to hold the results back over worries they would discourage residents from returning.

The Mainichi has acquired documents drawn up in November last year detailing the radiation measurements and intended for release. The documents, however, were never made public.

According to this and other sources, the measurements were taken in September last year in the city of Tamura's Miyakoji district, the village of Kawauchi and the village of Iitate by the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA) and the National Institute of Radiological Sciences (NIRS), using new dosimeters.

The measurements were taken by leaving the dosimeters for several days indoors and outdoors at schools, houses and other buildings, as well as in plastic boxes set up on farmland and in the wilderness. The data was given to the Cabinet Office team in mid-October. Most radiation measurements have been done from the air, and the Cabinet Office team wanted to compare results taken on the ground with these measurements and make radiation estimates by job type -- such as farmer or forestry worker -- and the assumption that people would spend eight hours outdoors and 16 indoors per day.

According to an inside source, the Cabinet Office team had noticed that measurements taken with older dosimeters distributed by Fukushima Prefecture municipalities to residents showed radiation measurements much lower than those recorded by aerial surveys. The Cabinet Office team had planned to release the latest measurements at meetings held by a Nuclear Regulation Authority team -- comprising national government officials, experts and prefectural residents -- between September and November last year, putting special emphasis on how low the figures were.

The new results, however, were significantly higher than expected, with the largest gap coming in Kawauchi. There, the Cabinet Office team had predicted radiation doses of 1-2 millisieverts per day, but the data showed doses at between 2.6 and 6.6 millisieverts. Cabinet Office team members apparently said that the numbers would "have a huge impact" and "we will need to explain them to the local municipalities," and release of the results was put off.

At the request of the Cabinet Office team, the JAEA and NIRS then recalculated the results by ditching the assumption that people would be outside eight hours a day, using instead 2010 statistics on how people spent their time collected by public broadcaster NHK. Under these new assumptions, a farmer was now expected to spend around six hours a day outdoors. The new, lower radiation exposure results were submitted to the Cabinet Office team this month and are scheduled to be released soon to the three municipalities concerned.

Atsuo Tamura, an official on the Cabinet Office team, admitted the team had drawn up the unreleased documents and that the radiation results had been recalculated, but denied it was hiding anything, saying, "We did not hold the results back because they were too high. We did so because it was necessary to look into whether the assumptions for residents' lifestyle patterns matched reality."

However, associate professor of radiation and hygiene Shinzo Kimura of Dokkyo Medical University told the Mainichi, "The assumption of eight hours a day outside, 16 hours inside is commonly used, and it is strange to change it. I can't see it as anything but them fiddling with the numbers to make them come out as they wanted."

The Miyakoji district of Tamura is set to have its evacuation order lifted on April 1, and the eastern part of Kawauchi is expected to have its evacuation order lifted sometime during the 2014 fiscal year.

March 25, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Holding-up radiation results (2)

March 27, 2014

Withholding of radiation readings exposes gov't push for evacuees' return

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140327p2a00m0na009000c.html>

Recent revelations that a Cabinet Office team delayed the release of radiation measurements from three Fukushima Prefecture areas, planning to release them with lower, recalculated results, have exposed a government push to have residents' return to nuclear disaster-hit areas.

Experts have raised questions about the government's move, suggesting that officials intended to send residents back to those areas from the outset and that they manipulated data to achieve that purpose.

The three areas -- the Miyakoji district of the city of Tamura, the village of Kawauchi and the village of Iitate -- remain subject to evacuation orders imposed after the 2011 Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdowns. The government plans to lift these orders in the near future. According to one source familiar with the measurement process, the original radiation exposure readings from new, individual dosimeters were higher than expected, prompting the Cabinet Office team to withhold the results. Officials feared the higher readings would discourage residents from returning.

The measurements were taken in September last year by the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA) and the National Institute of Radiological Sciences (NIRS) at the request of the Cabinet Office team, which was set up to support nuclear disaster victims. Team members initially intended to release the measurements during meetings of a Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) review panel between September and November last year. However, the measurements provided at an Oct. 3 meeting were not these results, but data from a fiscal 2012 survey using conventional dosimeters distributed to residents by six Fukushima Prefecture municipalities. The average radiation exposure doses in that survey were 0.2 to 0.7 millisieverts per year -- significantly lower than the estimates based on aerial surveys, which ranged from 0.7 to 2.9 millisieverts per year.

Yuichi Moriguchi, a professor at the University of Tokyo who serves as a member of the NRA panel, criticized the move by the Cabinet Office team, saying at the meeting that the data could mislead residents to think that the actual exposure doses would be one-fourth of the estimates based on aerial surveys. He warned that residents might suspect officials had underlying intentions. In response, Atsuo Tamura, an official with the Cabinet Office team, stated, "We wanted to show that the data for individual doses ranged in distribution, even within the same areas."

According to sources familiar with the matter, officials had initially expected that substantially low doses would be recorded even with the new dosimeters, which are capable of keeping track of exposure doses on an hourly basis, and had planned to release the results of the September 2013 measurements using the new dosimeters to highlight the safety of the areas. However, some of the results were higher than what they had expected.

When Moriguchi was shown the unreleased documents, which the Mainichi has acquired, he commented that the estimates based on the measurements using new dosimeters were "exactly what were expected."

"There seems to be no particular problem. I don't understand why they withheld the figures. At the meeting, I sensed that officials wanted to make radiation doses appear low through the use of individual dosimeters. Things have gone just as I suspected," he said.

Juichi Ide, an official with the Kawauchi Village Office, said, "I don't remember receiving any report on the survey results. We want to see the data because some residents allowed us to use their homes for the

survey. If they withheld the results simply because the radiation doses were high, that would be shocking."

Most of the Cabinet Office team members are employees of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. They apparently had expected that the new dosimeters would serve as the trump card in promoting evacuees' return to their hometown.

According to sources familiar with the surveys, the Cabinet Office team commissioned the JAEA and NIRS to take measurements in June last year. Although the Cabinet Office team had originally requested a survey in six municipalities within areas preparing for the lifting of evacuation orders, the measurements were conducted in only three of the six municipalities in a rush to obtain results. The JAEA and the NIRS took measurements over several days in each of the three municipalities between early and mid-September last year and submitted the results to the Cabinet Office team in mid-October.

NIRS official Masami Torikoshi, who oversaw the survey, said workers were under pressure to quickly produce results ahead of the NRA review panel meeting. Tamura of the Cabinet Office team, however, denied having applied any pressure, saying, "Releasing the survey results at the NRA panel was just one option, and we didn't ask them to produce results in time for that." However, Tamura admitted that he had rushed to compile documents intended for release to submit them to the NRA panel. The panel is tasked with discussing measures for residents' return.

The government is promoting residents' return to areas where annual exposure doses are below 20 millisieverts, but it has yet to win their confidence -- a factor in its high expectations for dosimeter readings in line with the readings it had hoped to see. Polls have found that a majority of residents uphold radiation levels to be under 1 millisievert per year -- the government-designated limit for general members of the public.

While the government officially decided on March 10 that the evacuation order on the Miyakoji district of the city of Tamura would be lifted on April 1, a 72-year-old woman evacuated from the area told the Mainichi, "Even if I return, I won't be able to pick mountain vegetables. There are only few people who are rejoiced (over the decision). But it's hard for me to say, 'I don't want to return to my hometown.'"

The woman continued, "We see radiation measurements being conducted everywhere, but hardly any results. They probably show only what's convenient for them. I don't think the measurements are conducted in order to protect us."

March 27, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

see also :

March 25, 2014

Gov't team withholds high radiation data on three Fukushima sites

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140325p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Japan's management of plutonium

March 26, 2014

Abe defends Japan's management of weapons-grade plutonium

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140326p2g00m0dm055000c.html>

THE HAGUE (Kyodo) -- Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Tuesday defended Japan's management of nuclear materials including weapons-grade plutonium, dismissing concern that a massive amount of nuclear substances could be used for non-civilian purposes.

"The International Atomic Energy Agency has concluded that all the plutonium in Japan is for peaceful purposes under its safeguards," Abe told a press conference on the final day of the Nuclear Security Summit in The Hague.

"We voluntarily have disclosed information about our management of plutonium and the information is more detailed than advised in international guidelines," he said.

In responding to a question on why Japan retains as much as 9 tons of plutonium, Abe said, "We made it very clear this time that **we will stick to the principle of having no plutonium that does not have a specified use.**"

According to the governmental Japan Atomic Energy Commission, Japan retains 9 tons of plutonium in domestic facilities and 35 tons of plutonium in Britain and France.

During the summit in the Dutch city, Japan and the United States announced an agreement in which Tokyo will return hundreds of kilograms of highly enriched uranium and weapons-grade plutonium that U.S. President Barack Obama said would be "enough for a dozen nuclear weapons."

The materials, provided by the United States for research during the Cold War era, are kept in a research facility in Tokaimura, northeast of Tokyo.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry said it "welcomes" Japan's agreement with the United States, describing it as the first step in the right direction.

Ministry spokesman Hong Lei, however, called for further action, saying, "**Japan still stockpiles other sensitive nuclear materials, which far exceed its actual normal needs.**" China earlier expressed concern that Japan's nuclear stockpile poses a proliferation risk as it could be used for weapons.

Japan reached the agreement with the United States as part of efforts to reduce global stockpiles of nuclear materials, a main theme of the biennial summit which was launched in 2010 at the initiative of Obama.

Obama described Japan's decision to reduce its stock of nuclear materials as "a major commitment" during a joint press conference with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte to wrap up the summit.

Abe pointed to Japan's measures against possible nuclear terrorism such as round-the-clock police guard at atomic power plants and regular deployments of Coast Guard vessels in waters near nuclear plants, which are typically built near the coast.

March 26, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Tohoku Electric sues TEPCO for compensation

March 28, 2014

Tohoku Electric seeks damages from TEPCO for Fukushima disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201403280043>

By MIHO TANAKA/ Staff Writer

SENDAI--Tohoku Electric Power Co. said March 27 it will seek compensation from Tokyo Electric Power Co. **for damages caused by the Fukushima nuclear disaster.**

The Sendai-based regional utility said it will send TEPCO an initial bill of 170 million yen (\$1.67 million) by the end of this month to cover expenses for relocating Tohoku Electric facilities out of evacuation zones in Fukushima Prefecture, and for the purchase of protective gear to guard against radiation.

"We are sending our first bill because certain progress has been made--three years since the onset of the disaster--in TEPCO's compensation payments to residents," Makoto Kaiwa, Tohoku Electric president, said at a March 27 news conference.

The initial bill will be followed by **further demands for redress to cover operational losses, including lost sales of electric power due to the evacuation of residents and stagnated economic activity**, Tohoku Electric officials added.

The continuing disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant prompted Tohoku Electric in March 2013 to cancel its project to build a Namie-Odaka nuclear power plant, which would have straddled the municipalities of Namie and Minami-Soma in Fukushima Prefecture.

But Tohoku Electric said it has no plan to seek a sum of more than 18 billion yen, invested in the Namie-Odaka project, in damages from TEPCO.

Kaiwa said it would be difficult from a legal viewpoint to seek damages for the abandoned Namie-Odaka project.

"We decided to recall the project after considering all elements at hand, including public sentiment in the prefecture and the incomplete acquisition of all land plots at the plant site," he said.

"We will deal appropriately with the demands," TEPCO said in a statement.

David Mc Neill on fallout measurements

March 16, 2014

Concerns Over Measurement of Fukushima Fallout

By DAVID MCNEILL | THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION MARCH 16, 2014

Photo



A decontamination worker at the entrance of Futaba, an abandoned town near the Fukushima nuclear plant. Credit Toru Hanai/Reuters

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/17/world/asia/concerns-over-measurement-of-fukushima-fallout.html?_r=0

TOKYO — In the chaotic, fearful weeks after the Fukushima nuclear crisis began, in March 2011, researchers struggled to measure the radioactive fallout unleashed on the public. Michio Aoyama’s initial findings were more startling than most. As a senior scientist at the Japanese government’s Meteorological Research Institute, he said levels of radioactive cesium 137 in the surface water of the Pacific Ocean could be 10,000 times as high as contamination after Chernobyl, the world’s worst nuclear accident.

Two months later, as Mr. Aoyama prepared to publish his findings in a short, nonpeer-reviewed article for Nature, the director general of the institute called with an unusual demand — that Mr. Aoyama remove his own name from the paper.

“He said there were points he didn’t understand, or want to understand,” the researcher recalled. “I was later told that he did not want to say that Fukushima radioactivity was worse than Chernobyl.” The head of the institute, who has since retired, declined to comment for this article. Mr. Aoyama asked for his name to be removed, he said, and the article was not published.

The pressure he felt is not unusual — only his decision to speak about it. Off the record, university researchers in Japan say that even now, three years after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi

plant, they feel under pressure to play down the impact of the disaster. Some say they cannot get funds or university support for their work. In several cases, the professors say, they have been obstructed or told to steer clear of data that might cause public “concern.”

“Getting involved in this sort of research is dangerous politically,” said Joji Otaki, a biologist at Japan’s Ryukyu University who has written papers suggesting that radioactivity at Fukushima has triggered inherited deformities in a species of butterfly. His research is paid for through private donations, including crowdfunding, a sign, he said, that the public supports his work. “It’s an exceptional situation,” he said.

The precise health impact of the Fukushima disaster is disputed. The government has defined mandatory evacuation zones around the Daiichi plant as areas where cumulative dose levels might reach 20 millisieverts per year, the typical worldwide limit for nuclear-power-plant workers. The limit recommended by the International Commission on Radiological Protection is one millisievert per year for the public, though some scientists argue that below 100 millisieverts the threat of increased cancers is negligible.

In an effort to lower radiation and persuade about 155,000 people to return home, the government is trying to decontaminate a large area by scraping away millions of tons of radioactive dirt and storing it in temporary dumps. Experts at Japan’s National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology put the cost of this project at \$50 billion — widely considered an underestimate.

The chance to study in this real-life laboratory has drawn a small number of researchers from around the world. Timothy A. Mousseau, a professor of biological sciences at the University of South Carolina who has written widely on Chernobyl, studies the impact of radiation on bird and insect life. He has published papers suggesting abnormalities and defects in some Fukushima species. But he said his three research excursions to Japan had been difficult.

In one case, a Japanese professor and two postdoctoral students dropped out of a joint research paper, telling him they could not risk association with his findings. “They felt it was too provocative and controversial,” he said, “and the postdocs were worried it could hamper their future job prospects.”

Mr. Mousseau is careful to avoid comparisons with the Soviet Union, which arrested and even imprisoned scientists who studied Chernobyl. Nevertheless, he finds the lukewarm support for studies in Japan troubling: “It’s pretty clear that there is self-censorship or professors have been warned by their superiors that they must be very, very careful,” he said.

The “more insidious censorship” is the lack of funding at a national level for these kinds of studies, he added. “They’re putting trillions of yen into moving dirt around and almost nothing into environmental assessment.”

Long before an earthquake and tsunami triggered the Fukushima meltdown, critics questioned the influence of Japan's powerful nuclear lobby over the country's top universities. Some professors say their careers have been hobbled because they expressed doubts about the nation's nuclear policy and the coalition of bureaucrats, industrialists, politicians and elite academics who created it.

Mr. Aoyama, who now works at Fukushima University, sees no evidence of an organized conspiracy in the lack of openness about radiation levels — just official timidity. Despite the problems with his *Nature* article, he has written or co-written eight published papers since 2011 on coastal water pollution and other radiation-linked themes.

But stories of problems with Fukushima-related research are common, he said, including accounts of several professors' being told not to measure radiation in the surrounding prefectures. "There are so many issues in our community," he said. "The key phrase is 'don't cause panic.'"

He is also critical of the flood of false rumors circulating about the reach of Fukushima's radioactive payload.

Ken Buesseler, a senior scientist at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution's department of marine chemistry and geochemistry, in Massachusetts, who has worked with Mr. Aoyama, said he has spent much of his professional energy fighting the rumor mill. The cause is not helped, he added, by institutional attempts to gag Japanese professors.

"Researchers are told not to talk to the press, or they don't feel comfortable about talking to the press without permission," Mr. Buesseler said. A veteran of three post-earthquake research trips to Japan, he wants the authorities to put more money into investigating the impact on the food chain of Fukushima's release of cesium and strontium. "Why isn't the Japanese government paying for this, since they have most to gain?"

One reason, critics say, is that after a period of national soul searching, when it looked as if Japan might scrap its commercial reactors, the government is again supporting nuclear power. Since the conservative Liberal Democrats returned to power, in late 2012, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has begun trying to sell Japan's nuclear technology abroad.

Much of the government funding for academic research in Japan is funneled through either the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science or the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Proposals are screened by government officials and reviewed by an academic committee.

Yusuke Shoji, a spokesman for the ministry, cannot say how many proposals for studying the impact of radiation had been greenlighted, but he insists that the application system is fair. “The screening is conducted by peer review, so we don’t direct or don’t favor one particular research field,” he said. “We assess applications purely from the scientific point of view.” The Japan Society also says its applications process is not politicized.

Professors, meanwhile, say that rather than simply defend what is a piecemeal approach to studying the disaster, the government should take the lead in creating a large, publicly financed project.

“If we’ve ever going to make any headway into the environmental impact of these disasters, statistical power, scientific power, is what counts,” said Mr. Mousseau of the University of South Carolina. “We get at it with massive replication, by going to hundreds of locations. That costs money.”

Correction: March 17, 2014

An earlier version of the headline with this article misstated the actions of the Japanese government. There are deep differences over how to determine the health impact of the Fukushima disaster. The authorities are not “squelching” efforts to measure the effects of the accident.

Lifting evacuation orders means less compensation to pay

April 2, 2014

Gov't eyes swift lifting of Fukushima evacuation orders to limit damages payouts

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140402p2a00m0na011000c.html>

The government is set to make all-out efforts to lift its evacuation orders for municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture as quickly as possible in a bid to hold down the amounts of compensation for damages from the 2011 nuclear crisis.

About 80,000 residents of areas for which evacuation orders have not been lifted are taking shelter elsewhere.

Reconstruction Minister Takumi Nemoto said at a news conference after a Cabinet meeting on April 1, "There is a need for us to use all our resources to lift evacuation orders for as many areas as possible where people can return home early." Nemoto made the statement in response to a proposal presented to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe by the ruling coalition's "Headquarters for Accelerating Reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake." The government intends to lift evacuation orders for as many areas as possible during the so-called "intensive reconstruction period" through fiscal 2015.

And yet, at least some of the municipalities that still have evacuation areas are reluctant to accept the government's move.

The government pays 100,000 yen each every month to those people who have been forced to evacuate from areas around the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant to compensate for their psychological pain. But the government will stop such payments to residents of both "residential restriction zones" and "zones being prepared for the lifting of evacuation orders" one year after the evacuation order is lifted for them. **In other words, the earlier the government lifts the evacuation order, the smaller the amounts of compensation it needs to pay.**

Naraha, where most of its area has been designated as a "zone being prepared for the lifting of evacuation orders," is taking precautions against the government's plan, saying, "For those municipalities that were forced to evacuate in their entirety, the longer the evacuation period becomes, the longer it will take to reconstruct them. It is too hasty and unrealistic to think they will be restored in one year and discontinue (compensation payments)." An official of the Katsurao Municipal Government said, "The residents are divided over the compensation issue. We want the government to continue to extend support in one form or another until each one of the residents puts their lives in order."

Yoshiaki Nakagawa, an official in charge of decontamination at the Iitate Municipal Government, said, "As for our return to the village, decontamination is important. When the residents return, the living conditions for such things as farming, medical institutions and shopping must be in place." The local government plans to set the timing of lifting the evacuation order in line with the reality. Therefore, it is considering lifting the evacuation order in March 2016 -- one year later than the date proposed by the central government.

April 02, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

New boss at TEPCO to take up challenges

April 2, 2014

New Tepco chief ready to face challenges

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/04/02/national/new-tepco-chief-ready-to-face-challenges/#.UzwjDlfi91s>

Sudo brings risk management skills to nation's toughest job

by Sayuri Daimon
Staff Writer

When Kazuhiko Shimokobe signaled late last year his intention to step down as chairman of Tokyo Electric Power Co., as the company and the government were forging a new 10-year business plan, officials knew it would be difficult to find a successor.

“As we tried to compile the plan, all of the outside directors felt we were really facing an extremely difficult environment. At that point, I’m sure nobody, including myself, wanted to continue serving as an outside director beyond June this year,” recalled Fumio Sudo, who on Tuesday took over as chairman of Tepco.

Skyrocketing compensation payments and costs for decontamination work, and the continuous increase of radioactive water at Fukushima No. 1 are just a few reasons why few people were eager to lead the embattled company.

In the end it was Sudo, a former president of steel maker JFE Holdings Inc., who was tapped to take over from Shimokobe, a lawyer who was brought in from the outside in June 2012 to serve as chairman.

Though initially reluctant, Sudo decided that steadily implementing the business plan and tackling all the problems bedeviling Tepco would result not only in reviving the utility but also in rebuilding Japan, he said.

“Considering the urgent need, I thought I had to push myself and take on this responsibility,” Sudo told The Japan Times in an interview last Thursday.

The revised business plan, which took effect this month, includes measures to increase government bond issuance to ¥9 trillion from ¥5 trillion to help Tepco pay compensation to victims of the nuclear crisis and to reduce costs by ¥4.8 trillion over the next 10 years.

It also seeks to reactivate two of the reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa power plant in Niigata Prefecture, in July and August, to reduce the heavy cost of importing fossil fuels for thermal power generation.

Sudo, who led Kawasaki Steel Corp. to consolidate with NKK Corp. to create JFE Holdings in 2002, said that the huge debt held by Japan Airlines and the old Japanese National Railways were limited and the figures were clear, but how much money Tepco will need for compensation and other costs in the coming years is uncertain.

Under the new turnaround plan, Tepco estimates that its compensation payments will reach roughly ¥4.9 trillion.

“Even skilled corporate managers can’t see the end to the problem,” Sudo said. “But even as this situation continues, we must face the challenge directly. At least the roles of the government and financial institutions are becoming clear now.”

But he admitted that there are problems that will not be easy to resolve, such as the seemingly nonstop glitches and mistakes plaguing Fukushima No. 1 and the lack of experienced workers there.

“We have 4,000 to 5,000 people working (at Fukushima No. 1) every day, but only about 1,000 are Tepco employees. The rest are third- and fourth-level subcontractors from across the country,” the chairman said.

“There is an annual radiation exposure limit for each person. Wearing bulky protective gear, workers have difficulty communicating with other workers only 5 meters away. . . . And under such circumstances, supervisors also face a tough time managing the workers.”

Though the utility conducts training for workers, their allowable radiation exposure reaches the limit in half a year and experienced workers have to leave.

Tepco has no choice but to ask subcontractors to continue looking for new — and inexperienced — workers.

Emphasizing the importance of risk management skills, he recalled his experience in the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995.

He was deputy head of Kawasaki Steel's Chiba steel plant. Under him was the Nishinomiya plant in Hyogo Prefecture.

As soon as he heard the news that morning that shinkansen operations were suspended, he ordered his staff to purchase all available seats on flights between Tokyo and Osaka. He also chartered two helicopters.

"I've gone through such crises, but there aren't many people who have experienced a serious accident in the field. . . . Without such experience, I know it's not easy to maintain operations," he said.

Saddled with trillions of yen in compensation payments, Tepco also needs to improve its financial standing. The company has already received a ¥1 trillion capital injection from the government-backed Nuclear Damage Liability Facilitation Fund, which effectively left it under government control.

The 73-year-old Sudo said Tepco will have to change, especially in terms of cost management.

For example, Tepco's 92 power-generating units are now competing with each other to be the most cost-efficient, and the new transparency means it's clear to see how they rank against each other.

The major challenge Tepco faces, according to Sudo, is whether it can regain the public trust it lost in the Fukushima debacle.

"To do that, Prime Minister (Shinzo) Abe ordered us to work hard to pay compensation to the victims in Fukushima, to decommission the nuclear reactors there and at the same time ensure a steady supply of electricity in the Kanto region. I totally agree with him."

Sudo added that Tepco's in-house company in charge of the decades-long decommissioning of Fukushima No. 1 will tap nuclear power experts from the private sector, including Toshiba Corp., Hitachi Ltd. and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Ltd.

But Sudo, meanwhile, insists the government needs to decide the country's energy policy going forward.

Since the nuclear crisis started, policy has flip-flopped as the parties in power changed. Under the 2010 plan, nuclear power was to generate 53 percent of the nation's electricity by 2030, but with the 2011 Fukushima disaster, that target was put on hold.

Under the Democratic Party of Japan, the government announced in 2012 that nuclear power would be completely phased out by 2030.

The current ruling bloc, made up of the Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito, has yet to set new concrete goals for the energy mix.

“We are mere players,” Sudo said. “The government should decide the percentage of Japan’s energy supply to be generated by nuclear power and how many years nuclear power plants should operate. The government must decide whether it is 40 years, 50 years or 35 years.”

Monju - more cheating

April 11, 2014

Inspection report falsification suspected at Monju fast-breeder

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140411p2g00m0dm036000c.html>

TSURUGA, Japan (Kyodo) -- The operator of the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor in Fukui Prefecture is suspected of falsifying its inspection report to regulators as they later found new pieces of equipment that had not been inspected there, Nuclear Regulation Authority sources said Thursday.

The Japan Atomic Energy Agency's Monju reactor -- which is designed to use extracted plutonium and uranium to produce more fuel than it consumes, while generating electricity -- has been effectively banned from operating since last May following the revelation of lax safety inspections at the facility in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture.

The discovery and the agency's alleged failure to report it to the regulators are all but certain to keep the reactor from operating for an extended period of time although the Monju project is expected to remain alive under the government energy policy to be finalized soon.

In November 2012, Monju reactor equipment was found not to have been inspected in about 10,000 cases.

The operator said in its report last September that while it had failed to inspect reactor equipment in about 14,000 cases, it finished inspecting all pieces of equipment, or roughly 47,500 in all, that were subject to its investigation, including those which had not been inspected previously.

But when the regulators inspected about 80 pieces of reactor equipment last month, at least nine that were related to the Monju reactor's secondary cooling circuit had not been inspected by the operator, the sources said. The operator had not reported it.

The operator has acknowledged its failure to report, according to the sources. An official of the operator declined to comment on the matter, however.

The sources said the operator also made improper corrections in its inspection records in more than 100 sections, a deviation from the operator's internal regulation.

While the regulators had planned to inspect 700 pieces of equipment last month, they stopped doing so after inspecting about 80 of them, because they found many that had not been inspected and many corrections in the operator's inspection records.

The Monju project has been regarded as central to realizing the country's ideal nuclear fuel cycle, which aims to reprocess spent nuclear fuel and reuse the extracted plutonium and uranium as reactor fuel.

But the reactor has remained largely offline since first achieving criticality in 1994 due to a series of problems, casting doubt on the project's viability.

April 11, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

New textbooks very silent about Fukushima disaster

April 10, 2014

Fukushima accident mentioned in only 1 elementary school science textbook

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201404100036

By TSUYOSHI NAGANO/ Staff Writer

Only one of the six science textbooks approved for use at elementary schools from the next academic year covers the issue of the Fukushima nuclear accident triggered by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster.

The textbooks are the first to be screened and approved by the education ministry since the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The results of the screening were announced April 4.

Five of the six publishers considered taking up the topic, but four eventually gave up. This was mainly because the word “atom” is not included in the education ministry’s curriculum guidelines for science in elementary school, making teaching how a nuclear plant works even harder than it is.

An editor at one publisher also said, “We could not deal with the issue negatively when our textbook is used in some municipalities hosting a nuclear plant.”

Even the science textbook from Dainippon Tosho Publishing Co., the only one that covers the accident, simply wrote: “The earthquake off the Pacific coast of the Tohoku region triggered an accident at a nuclear power plant.” The textbook mentioned effective use of resources as a lesson from the accident.

One publisher, though, tried hard to include an analysis of radiation in its science textbook for sixth graders.

“(Radiation) is an issue we will face for years,” said Takahiro Yano, editor in chief of the elementary school science textbooks division at Gakko Tosho Co. “We thought that if it is a science textbook, the issue should be included.”

But as the word “radiation” is also not included in the guidelines, publishers cannot take up the issue directly.

Under the circumstances, Gakko Tosho tried to include an explanation of radiation at the bottom of a one-page column on the life of Marie Curie, a Polish-born physicist and chemist who conducted pioneering research on radiation.

The publisher tried to relate the column with the guidelines and included two lines on a water solution--which is taught under the guidelines for sixth-graders--because Curie used a water solution in her study.

However, the textbook failed to pass the ministry’s screening.

“There is no appropriate relation with the curriculum guidelines,” the education ministry’s comment said.

The publisher finally gave up on including the column after repeated discussions did not change the ministry's view.

Nuclear future: Who will be responsible for what?

April 12, 2014



Gov't, energy industry squabble over who will take responsibility for nuclear accidents
<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140412p2a00m0na017000c.html>

In this collage, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, top; Chairman of the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan Makoto Yagi, left; and Chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority Shunichi Tanaka, right, are seen, with Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai Nuclear Power Plant in Kagoshima Prefecture in the background. (Mainichi)

The government has decided on its first basic energy plan since the Fukushima nuclear disaster and is again pushing to make nuclear power a crucial part of it. But it's unclear who will handle the decisions to reactivate individual nuclear plants or respond in the event of another nuclear disaster.

The energy plan, passed by the Cabinet on April 11, makes reviving nuclear power a national policy. Under the plan, energy companies will continue to own nuclear plants and be held responsible if a disaster occurs.

Previously, the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan (FEPC) had no major objections to a completely free energy market. But in November last year, after seeing an outline of the new energy plan and its onus on utilities, the federation did an about-face. Energy companies represented by the federation were reluctant to face increased competition from a free energy market on top of the potential costs of a nuclear disaster.

In February this year, lawmakers hailing from the Kansai region and backed by the FEPC opposed a free energy market during a meeting on revisions to the Electricity Business Act at the Liberal Democratic Party headquarters. They argued that a stable energy supply should be the top priority.

The federation took into account the huge cost of dealing with a nuclear disaster as a private operator -- as highlighted by the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO).

The Fukushima disaster has already cost around 11 trillion yen in compensation and costs for decontamination, reactor decommissioning and countermeasures against contaminated water. Yet the figure is likely to rise further. The national government contributed around 1 trillion yen to TEPCO not long after the disaster, and it has spent additional funds combating contaminated water, but it has not provided other forms of support. Meanwhile, the government has left the issue of its responsibility for the nuclear disaster untouched, even though nuclear power was part of the national energy strategy.

Just after the March 2011 disaster, TEPCO officials warned fellow utility J-Power about the dangers of becoming a nuclear power plant operator. J-Power's first plant, the Oma Nuclear Power Plant, is under construction in Aomori Prefecture.

"It's no good to have a nuclear power plant. If an accident happens, your company will be done for," a TEPCO official told the utility.

Facing a government that has avoided taking direct responsibility for the nuclear disaster though it is empowered to set energy policy, electric companies have been trying to win concessions in that policy. They threaten to obstruct efforts to free up the energy market, resisting the separation of power generation and transmission.

At the same time, utilities hope to amend the Atomic Energy Damage Compensation Law -- which does not limit compensation required of energy companies -- to place the responsibility for paying for a nuclear disaster in the government's hands once the damage reaches a certain level.

However, a senior government economic affairs official argues, "Energy companies have said both now and in the past that 'Nuclear power is cheap.' If that's the case, they should do their work without government help."

The differing stances show that despite the national government steering its policy toward nuclear power, the question of whether responsibility for a nuclear accident falls on the government or energy companies remains clouded.

Similarly, though the government takes a proactive attitude towards reactivating nuclear plants in its basic energy plan, it says decisions to reactivate reactors will be based on Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) standards.

Yet NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka has repeatedly said the NRA will not intervene in societal, popular or government decisions. As such, it is unclear who will give the go-ahead to restart nuclear plants and who will assume responsibility for them.

April 12, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

"Disaster and change in Japan" - Richard Samuels

April 9, 2014

Post-Fukushima reform throws up a few surprises

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2014/04/09/voices/post-fukushima-reform-throws-up-a-few-surprises/#.U0pfDledHQg>

by Gianni Simone
Special To The Japan Times

*The magnitude-9 earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan on March 11, 2011, devastated the northeast, killing more than 15,000 people and causing level 7 meltdowns at three reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Observers believed the sheer size of the catastrophe and its subsequent effects provided the country with an opportunity to reform and turn the page on two decades of political, social and economic crisis. In his 2013 book "3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan," **Richard Samuels**, director of the MIT Japan Program, chronicles the 18 months that followed the disaster and explains why this opportunity for change wasn't followed by substantial progress. Here, Samuels expands on some of the issues he examined in his book:*

Your book was published on the second anniversary of 3/11, and you actually submitted your manuscript in 2012. Considering what's happened in Japan since the book has come out, would you write the same book now?

In certain areas there have been more changes than I had first observed, particularly in the energy sector, where it seems there's going to be major restructuring. Really large vertically integrated utilities are going to be broken up, at least to a certain degree, in favor of smaller and smarter utilities. We will see nuclear power return, but nothing like the ambitious plans the government initially had. Secondly, the regulatory body seems to have more traction than anybody expected.

On the security side, we have seen changes in security environment and policy but rather than 3/11, they are linked to two other things: one is China's provocations in the China Sea; the other is the election of (Prime Minister Shinzo) Abe, who is more ambitious on the military side. On the local government side, we have seen local governments around Japan help Tohoku by sending their officials to the disaster area. Even though their number is declining, there are still 1,500 local government officials from around Japan in Tohoku. This has been a very important development. Surprisingly, though, we have seen dissatisfaction among the Japanese not only toward the central government but even their local leaders, particularly in Tohoku. As a consequence, local mayors have been thrown out of office one after the other in subsequent elections. These are the developments I didn't anticipate in my book.

How do you judge the Democratic Party of Japan? Do you think it was incompetent or just very unlucky, or maybe a little bit of both?

They were certainly unlucky. We can't do a final analysis yet, particularly about (then-Prime Minister Naoto) Kan's management of the crisis. He was already under enormous pressure to leave because his party was revolting around him — even before 3/11. So he became the chief villain. The question is, does he really deserve it? I think probably not. Mistakes were made, that's for sure, but before he agreed to leave the leadership he held the party and the government hostage to pass the supplementary budget in order to provide the necessary resources. This was important leadership, especially for someone who was leaving the scene. I think there will be a reevaluation of his role.

On the other side, we have a Liberal Democratic Party that comes under criticism in your book.

In my book there is a critique of the LDP as having colluded with the utilities, the bureaucrats and the academics on the energy issue. It was too cozy a relationship, especially when you have both regulation and promotion of nuclear power in the same ministry. On the other hand, even the DPJ was very pro-nuclear both before and after the catastrophe. So it's not as if one party was in favor and the other was against.

Were you surprised by the results of the political elections in December 2012, and the way the LDP won?

Yes, I was. Everybody saw the polls according to which people were overwhelmingly opposed to nuclear power, and then the elections saw the biggest pro-nuclear party triumph. This suggests a couple of things. One is that people don't always vote on their poll preferences. There are other issues, and Abe was very successful running on an economic platform. The Japanese may have disliked nuclear power but they hated an economic lethargy even more. What's more, 10 million less voters cast ballots in 2012 compared to the previous poll — the lowest turnout ever in a national postwar election. This shows that people had lost confidence in the government.

The fact that people went into the streets again to protest the situation after so many years of lethargy can be seen as an important development. What are your thoughts on this?

That's true, but don't forget it took a long time for those groups to get going. Then the DPJ backed off and embraced the zero option. But when the DPJ disappeared, so did the protests. Now they only draw dozens, maybe a couple of hundred people, once or twice a month, whereas they were drawing hundreds of thousands every Friday night during the 2012 summer. So it's true that robust political mobilization was back for the first time in two generations but, still, it wasn't sustained.

Regarding security policy, what is Japan's current position in relation to the U.S. on one side and other Asian countries on the other?

Well, the U.S. is Japan's military ally, and both governments have consistently tried to reinforce an alliance that proved very successful during 3/11 when the Japanese public finally came to believe in its importance and efficacy. As you know, Japan right now has a difficult relationship not only with China and North Korea, but even with South Korea, which is troubling. What's in question sometimes is whether the U.S. is repositioning toward the Far East in the face of a more powerful China.

In the past, Abe has explicitly targeted Article 9 of the Constitution and the LDP has generally moved away from the country's postwar pacifism.

When Abe tried to do this in 2007 he was met with a vigorous public pushback, so he has given up on changing Article 9 and is now moving toward reinterpreting the article. This doesn't require a change in the Constitution but only a declaration by the government that the implementation of Article 9 allows other kinds of capabilities, particularly regarding collective self-defense. An actual constitutional change would be a much more difficult legal obstacle and would face more public opposition.

Abe's visit to Yasukuni Shrine in December was met with international criticism. Do you think the government will ever agree on establishing an alternative secular war memorial?

That's actually the U.S. government's clear preference, because both the Yasukuni narrative about the war crimes trials and the version of Japanese history presented at the Yushukan (the military and war museum located within Yasukuni Shrine) are repugnant to all the countries. Abe blatantly ignored all that and went anyway. This is not the work of a realist but of an ideologue. What is striking about the visit is that in the months before, Japan had the sympathy of the world. China was seen as provocative — a would-be hegemon and a bully — while Japan was seen as a victim. But what Abe did changed everything and called attention on Japan's inability to come to grips with its war responsibilities. This is a problem for the Japan-U.S. relationship.

How do you judge Abe's decision?

Well, if you look at this from his point of view, he's held the door open to China for over a year. He was ready to talk and they didn't come. So given his ideology he was fairly patient, but he decided at the end of the day that he wanted to do this, thinking that their relations couldn't get any worse because they were already screwed up.

Do you think that the opposition parties have a chance to win the next Lower House elections?

Absolutely not. The LDP is divided on some issues, including nuclear power, so we may see some fighting about that. However public support for the DPJ now stands at 6 percent. Unless the party is reborn somehow or there is a reconfiguration of party structure it really has no challenge to the LDP right now. New Komeito has a stable base but it's not going to either grow or shrink. The Communist Party is in single digits. The Restoration Party never really got the traction people expected. Your Party didn't go anywhere. They are all in single digits. However, the LDP only has 37-40 percent of the public's favor, so they will need to build a coalition to reach a majority, which means they must convince New Komeito.

This interview first appeared translated in French in Zoom Japon. Foreign Agenda offers a space for opinion on Thursdays. Comments and ideas: community@japantimes.co.jp

A breach of freedom of information

April 15, 2014

Hyogo blocks release of nuke crisis study data

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/04/15/national/hyogo-blocks-release-of-nuke-crisis-study-data/#.U01Kilfi91s>

by Eric Johnston
Staff Writer

Hyogo officials are blocking the release of data from a simulation run last year predicting what would happen to surrounding prefectures in the event of a meltdown crisis at one of Fukui Prefecture's four atomic plants.

Citizens' groups said Tuesday they were told by Hyogo officials earlier this month that the data would be released before May along with data from a new simulation the prefecture is conducting.

The backtrack on the data release has raised concerns that the prefecture is trying to downplay the possibility of a worst-case scenario for disaster planning purposes.

Hyogo officials weren't immediately available for comment.

Last year, Hyogo Prefecture did a study of the effects of a meltdown disaster at Fukui's four nuclear power plants, in Takahama, Oi, Mihama and Tsuruga, that plotted the possible directions of radiation plumes in the event of a Fukushima-like calamity.

The results showed that, depending on wind direction and weather, the city of Sasayama could receive a maximum radiation dosage of 167 millisieverts over a seven-day period, which is especially risky for children and more than three times higher than the International Atomic Energy Agency's standard for dispensing iodine tablets.

In the worst-case scenario, Kobe could receive a maximum radiation dose of 62 millisieverts over a week, while other Hyogo towns could see levels of between 50 and 100 millisieverts, also over a one-week period.

While Hyogo released the results of what could happen inside the prefecture, it did not make public what might happen in neighboring prefectures. Concerned this would make it more difficult for localities to draw up emergency plans and for a coordinated, Kansai-wide response, anti-nuclear activists and other citizens pressed Hyogo to release the entire study.

Hyogo Prefecture resident Juro Yamamoto filed a freedom of information request in February for the release of all simulation data on Fukui, Kyoto and Shiga prefectures. The request was granted, in writing, by Hyogo Gov. Toshizo Ido's office on March 7.

However, the information has yet to be made public. Yamamoto called on prefectural officials Tuesday to release it immediately.

"When I spoke to prefectural officials in charge of disaster planning, I was told that the data couldn't be released right away and to wait. Then, on Thursday, I was told that the data would be released along with new simulation results. The information is supposed to be released within 15 days of the approval, but not to release it after that is a violation of the freedom of information ordinance," he said in an official appeal to the governor Tuesday.

Far more contaminated than first announced

April 12, 2014

August water leak at No. 1 far more toxic than announced: Tepco

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/04/12/national/august-water-leak-at-no-1-far-more-toxic-than-announced-tepco/#.U0wJnFfi91s>

Kyodo

Tokyo Electric Power Co. said Friday that toxic water found to have leaked last August at one of the huge tanks at the accident-hit Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant was far more contaminated than initially announced.

After recalculating the radiation level, Tepco said **the water contained 280 million becquerels per liter of beta ray-emitting radioactive materials such as strontium-90, instead of 80 million becquerels.**

A total of 300 tons of toxic water was found to have leaked at that time, part of which is believed to have flowed into the adjacent Pacific Ocean. The Nuclear Regulation Authority assessed the severity of the incident to be level 3 on an eight-point international scale.

Tepco decided to review data on 173 water samples it took until last October, as it found readings may be lower than actual figures due to improper measurement formulas.

As for 104 samples, Tepco analyzed them again as it had kept them. But the utility did not have the remaining 69 samples, including the water that leaked, so it calculated the radiation level by using a theoretical formula.

Conflicting interests keep energy policy uncertain

April 15, 2014

Nuclear power's share in new energy policy remains clouded as interests clash

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140415p2a00m0na010000c.html>

Despite the government releasing a basic energy plan on April 11, it has foregone setting goals for the share of nuclear power, renewable energy and other power sources, as competing interests keep the future of Japan's energy policy uncertain.

Policymakers from both the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and New Komeito had aimed to put numerical targets for renewable energy into the basic energy plan, but were stymied by hardline opposition from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. The reason for the opposition: should there be a spread of renewable energy, which is comparatively expensive, it would lead to higher energy bills that would put pressure on household budgets and corporate profits.

The new energy plan calls nuclear power an "important base load power supply" and paves the way for the resumption of idled reactors, replacing aging plants, and even the construction of new plants. One reason for the government promoting nuclear power in this way is that, should resumption of idled reactors continue to be delayed, causing higher energy bills and setting the economy on a downward path, it will affect the administration's public support. The government worried that if it did not highlight the importance of nuclear power, atomic energy might be scrapped completely amidst the backlash that has followed the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry's desire to keep the nuclear industry alive is also evident.

So how should the nuclear industry be kept alive? One plan that has been secretly discussed within the government and the energy industry is using public money as well as funds contributed by the power industry to buy energy produced from nuclear sources at a set rate under a system similar to the fixed-income tariff system introduced to help spread renewable energy.

However, there is strong criticism within the government that introducing an energy-buying system that ensures the profits of energy companies that own nuclear plants would, in the words of one senior industry ministry official, "only make the criticism of nuclear power stronger."

Meanwhile, a senior official of the industry ministry has argued for nuclear energy as a necessary source of power in the event that oil or gas imports are cut off. However, an executive at one power company expressed doubt about that argument. It is all but impossible that the share of nuclear power in the nation's energy supply will reach 30 percent like before the nuclear disaster, and the executive says, "If it's only accounting for 10 or 20 percent, its value as a secure energy source declines."

Furthermore, Kyushu Electric's Sendai Power Plant in Kagoshima Prefecture is the top candidate for having its reactors restarted, but Kyushu Electric is doubtful about the government's commitment to nuclear power. A senior executive at Kyushu Electric Power Co. says, "It is the national government that has decided that nuclear energy is important, but when nuclear power became a talking point in the Tokyo gubernatorial election, the government forestalled deciding on the energy plan. There is no way the government is prepared to assume the responsibility of promoting nuclear power."

However, problems do not stop with nuclear power. An LDP meeting evaluating the basic energy plan was full of Diet members representing renewable energy interests like biomass and hydroelectric power,

and rumors have abounded in the LDP that an influential Diet member and former minister of economy, trade and industry has gone from supporting nuclear power to supporting renewable energy and was trying to get numerical targets for renewable energy into the energy plan. Just like with nuclear power, political gains and losses come into play with the corporations and interest groups associated with different kinds of renewable energy.

Regarding a decision on the so-called "best mix" of energy sources the government is aiming for, Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Toshimitsu Motegi said, "It is not something that will take as long as two or three years." However, with a solution to the contaminated water issue at the Fukushima plant still elusive and the damaged reputation of nuclear power, deciding on an energy ratio for atomic energy will prove difficult. Should discussions on the energy policy end in coordination between conflicting interests, it could leave serious problems in the future.

Reduce the role of Atomic Energy Commission

April 18, 2014

Govt. approves bill to limit nuclear panel's role

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140418_26.html

Japan's government has approved a bill that would limit the role of an advisory panel that has served to promote nuclear energy for over half a century.

The bill that won Cabinet endorsement on Friday would revise the law governing the Atomic Energy Commission, whose chief duty is to compile the nation's nuclear energy policy.

The commission's role came under review following disclosures 2 years ago that it held secret meetings only with pro-nuclear parties -- including power utilities and bureaucrats -- during the course of compiling the policy.

The government's bill says the commission will no longer draw up the policy and will instead offer its basic ideas on nuclear energy.

Its role would be limited to solving problems related to nuclear power, such as how to deal with radioactive waste and what do to with the damaged Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

The number of commissioners would be reduced from 5 to 3, and a new code of conduct would be introduced to ensure neutrality and transparency.

Once the bill is enacted, the commission's chair and members will be appointed following Diet approval.

Apr. 18, 2014 - Updated 06:42 UTC

Radiation information: Why the secrecy?

April 19, 2014

EDITORIAL: Fukushima and the world benefit from full disclosure of radiation information

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201404190033>

What should policymakers think about the effects of exposure to low levels of radiation in areas affected by the Fukushima nuclear disaster?

The fact that there is an insufficient amount of established scientific knowledge about the effects of low-dose radiation makes it all the more important for the government to offer detailed explanations and disclose all relevant information when it adopts policy measures to deal with the problem.

The government recently released the findings from a survey it conducted to assess the relation between dose estimates based on air dose rates and actual individual radiation doses at various locations in Fukushima Prefecture.

The survey was aimed at obtaining data about radiation doses under circumstances that are similar to actual living conditions, instead of mechanical estimates, in evacuated areas where it is difficult to take actual measurements due to high levels of radiation.

The survey results clearly indicate a strong correlation between data obtained with measuring equipment shaped like the human body and integral individual doses estimated from air dose rates.

Residents in evacuated areas face the decision of whether or not to return to their homes when the evacuation order for their communities is lifted. They are keen to know the actual dose of radiation they would receive when they return to their towns and villages rather than the air dose level.

As the government will consider lifting evacuation orders for specific areas, establishing a reliable formula for estimating actual individual radiation doses is vital for residents in deciding whether or not to return to their communities. The survey is a welcome first step in the effort.

However, the government carried out the survey without announcing it, raising suspicions that it had been hiding the information because the results were undesirable.

The decision to do the survey was made last summer. But the government didn't disclose any information about it during meetings on the return of evacuees to their homes held with the Nuclear Regulation Authority, nor in meetings with residents of the city of Tamura to discuss the lifting of the evacuation order for a district in the city.

Why the secrecy?

Explaining its failure to inform the public about the survey, the government says it took time to ensure that its formula for making estimates was scientifically correct. The government also says it didn't plan to publish any interim report on the survey.

But there is strong public distrust of the government's stance toward disclosure of information concerning the devastating nuclear accident. This is partly due to the chaotic state of affairs during evacuations caused by poor information disclosure.

If the survey was designed to provide useful information for evacuees, the government should have made it widely known that it was conducting the survey. It also should have disclosed information on a timely basis about progress and prospects even before all the data had been accumulated.

There is a global trend toward greater disclosure of data held by governments, with due care to protect individual information, for the purpose of developing better policies.

Data about the Fukushima meltdowns is among the most valuable information held by Japan, and it should be shared publicly with the rest of the world.

Not much is known about the effects of exposure to low-dose radiation. It is also true that there are various views and opinions about such exposure itself.

Under the guiding principle of putting priority on the interests of residents, the government should spare no effort to ensure that important knowledge and information about the disaster--reviewed and assessed by experts both at home and abroad--will be shared by the entire public.

--The Asahi Shimbun, April 19

Motegi on the defensive over radiation survey results

April 19, 2014

Minister sorry for delay in releasing survey results on radiation exposure

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201404190048>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Industry minister Toshimitsu Motegi apologized April 18 for a six-month delay in releasing the results of a survey in Fukushima Prefecture about the amount of radiation each resident will likely be exposed to per year.

"I am sorry for any anxiety I might have caused," Motegi said at a news conference held after a Cabinet meeting.

In a separate news conference, Atsuo Tamura, counselor of the Cabinet Office, which commissioned two organizations to conduct the survey, explained that bureaucrats shared the results of the survey but decided to refrain from releasing them publicly without consulting Motegi or other politicians in high-ranking positions.

In July 2013, the Cabinet Office's team in charge of assisting the lives of nuclear disaster victims asked the National Institute of Radiological Sciences and the Japan Atomic Energy Agency to look at the situation in the municipalities of Kawauchi, Iitate and Tamura, which included zones being prepared for the lifting of evacuation orders.

From August to September, the two organizations measured radiation doses in the air at farmland, forests, homes and schools, and also checked readings of dosimeters carried by some people. As a result, they concluded that the radiation dose each individual is likely to be exposed to is about 70 percent of the airborne dose.

Taking lifestyle patterns and other factors into account, they estimated the radiation dose for individuals in various occupations.

The survey results were submitted to the government on Oct. 11 last year. At the time, a council of experts attached to the Nuclear Regulation Authority was considering changing the method to measure radiation doses, from one based on airborne radiation to readings found on dosimeters carried by local residents.

However, the government failed to inform the NRA council that it was doing the survey.

“That was because the survey had not been completely finished,” an official of the Cabinet Office said.

The government finally released the results of the survey on April 18.

On April 1, the government lifted its evacuation order in the Miyakoji district in Tamura, which was also covered by the survey.

“If the government had released the survey results immediately, local governments and residents would have been able to think about and work out measures to deal with the radiation (in more detail),” said Shinzo Kimura, an associate professor at Dokkyo Medical University, who is well-versed in measures against radiation.

Some residents were also unhappy about the delay in releasing the survey findings.

“The industry ministry still has a tendency to cover up (important information),” said Upper House lawmaker Teruhiko Mashiko of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan who represents Fukushima Prefecture.

The government is planning to lift its evacuation order in a district of Kawauchi as early as July. However, the survey showed that the estimated radiation dose for each farmer there stood at 3 millisieverts a year, higher than the government’s long-term goal of 1 millisievert a year.

The government is leaning toward dosimeter readings rather than airborne levels as a long-term goal as part of moves to make decommissioning work easier.

If radiation doses are estimated using dosimeter readings, then acceptable airborne radiation doses would increase by 40 percent.

However, a high-ranking Japan Atomic Energy Agency official said that is not feasible.

"It will be impossible to do so (from a scientific viewpoint)," said Takuma Momose, who was involved in the survey.

Only adults were subject to the latest survey. For future surveys, however, the government is considering estimating the radiation dose each child is likely to be exposed to over the course of a year.

(This article was compiled from reports by Shinichi Sekine, Miki Aoki and Asako Myoraku.)

Motegi denies hiding radiation report around Fukushima plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140418p2g00m0dm082000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Industry Minister Toshimitsu Motegi on Friday denied that the government hid for six months the outcome of a radiation study around the crisis-hit Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex, but apologized for having given "the impression" that the outcome announcement delayed.

An interim report on the study on radiation measurement with dosimeters carried by individuals was compiled in October, showing that the radiation level in some areas in the city of Tamura and other villages is beyond 1 millisievert per year -- a level the government is eventually seeking to achieve in contaminated areas.

But the report was not made public before April 1 when the government lifted for the first time an evacuation order imposed on an area within a 20-kilometer radius of the Fukushima plant. The area was a district in Tamura.

"Some media have reported as if the government hid information or manipulated data, but that is not a fact," said the economy, trade and industry minister, who is also in charge of issues to assist people affected by the nuclear crisis.

But he also said, "I feel sorry for stirring concerns among people who got the impression that our information provision was delayed."

A government team decided to conduct the radiation study at 43 points in Tamura and the villages of Kawauchi and Iitate last July, hoping to address concerns among evacuees seeking to return to their

homes. The study found that individual dose levels were above the usual-time limit of 1 millisievert per year at 27 measurement points.

The interim report was posted on the website of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry on Monday, April 19, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Stop lying about safety standards, says Izumida

April 23, 2014

Niigata governor: State must stop lying about nuclear safety standards

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201404230062>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The governor of Niigata Prefecture said the central government must stop spreading the lie that its new safety requirements for nuclear power plants are “the world’s strictest standards.”

Hirohiko Izumida said the government’s new setup for nuclear power facilities is filled with holes, fails to address unexpected developments and puts the onus on local governments to protect residents in the event of a nuclear accident.

“Although (the new requirements) do not measure up to international standards, (the central government) is not working to change the current situation,” Izumida said in a recent interview with The Asahi Shimbun. “(The state) is lying by insisting that it has done what it has not done.”

Niigata Prefecture is home to seven idled reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant. Tokyo Electric Power Co. is seeking approval to restart reactors there.

TEPCO is also the operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which suffered a triple meltdown after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami knocked out power at the site.

In light of the nuclear accident, the Abe administration last year introduced tougher safety standards for nuclear power facilities. The new requirements are intended to strengthen measures to prevent serious accidents from natural and other disasters. For example, utilities are now required to have more than one power source at their nuclear facilities.

Currently, the nation's 48 reactors are all offline.

Utilities have submitted applications to the Nuclear Regulation Authority to restart 17 reactors under the new safety standards. The screening for Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai plant in Kagoshima Prefecture could be completed before this summer.

However, Izumida said those reactors cannot be considered "safe" even if the NRA concludes that they meet the new standards.

"The standards assume that nuclear accidents are inevitable, and meeting the standards alone would not assure the safety of residents," he said.

The Niigata governor said local governments, therefore, must prepare to protect their citizens in the case of emergencies, including devising effective evacuation plans on their own.

"If local governments fail to properly address an emergency situation, they will not be able to secure the safety of residents," Izumida said.

However, he said current laws and regulations make it difficult for local authorities to compile viable plans.

In talks with former U.S. nuclear regulatory chief Gregory Jaczko last month, the Niigata governor said local authorities cannot develop effective evacuation plans unless the central government reviews its entire framework related to disaster management.

Izumida also told The Asahi Shimbun that it will be particularly difficult for local governments to respond to simultaneous multiple disasters.

He said residents using roads to flee from a nuclear disaster following an earthquake and tsunami could end up stuck due to damage or congestion and be exposed to radiation for a longer period. As a solution, Izumida proposed building nuclear shelters in citizens' homes.

The governor also criticized the central government's stance toward nuclear facility management, arguing that the Abe administration has not taken "human factors" into consideration.

"(The state) believes that just examining the performance of equipment is sufficient to confirm safety," Izumida said. "It does not consider what to do when something unexpected happens."

The governor said many unknowns remain, including who will work at a highly contaminated nuclear plant site following a serious accident.

He also questioned the current system that allows plant operators to decide whether to cool reactors with seawater, which will ruin the reactors and cause heavy financial damage.

(This article was written by Emiko Inagaki and Atsushi Nagata.)

Can utilities fund political parties?

April 22, 2014

Nine utilities buy fund-raising party tickets for Aso

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201404220044

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Nine operators of nuclear plants have bought tickets to Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso's fund-raising parties for at least 10 years but avoided having their names listed in his political fund reports, The Asahi Shimbun learned.

The electric power companies each limited their spending per party to 200,000 yen (\$1,950) or less.

Any sum over 200,000 yen must be entered into a politician's political fund reports under the Political Fund Control Law.

Similar payments by utilities were revealed in an Asahi Shimbun report in January concerning fund-raising tickets for Akira Amari, a pro-nuclear Cabinet minister who is in charge of economic revitalization.

In response to an inquiry by The Asahi Shimbun, an official with Aso's office said, "We handled the political fund reports properly based on the Political Fund Control Law."

The nine utilities, regional monopolies that derive their revenues from electricity rates paid by consumers, want to restart their idled reactors. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is currently seeking to promote nuclear power despite continued anti-nuclear sentiment among the public following the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

According to senior executives with the utilities, **the nine companies spent about 1 million yen together for each of Aso's fund-raising parties.** They divvied up their share based on the size of their business operations.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and the largest of all the utilities, halted its purchases after the 2011 triple meltdown at the plant.

But the other companies have continued to spend amounts similar to those before the nuclear accident.

Political fund reports of several entities linked to Aso showed that he held an average of three fund-raising parties a year between 2000 and 2012.

The combined purchase by the utilities is estimated to average several million yen a year. The nine utilities declined to discuss details of their individual purchases.

An official of Kansai Electric Power Co., the second largest and most reliant on nuclear power of all utilities, said, "(Kansai Electric) does not buy tickets in collaboration with other companies."

Aso, 73, who doubles as finance minister and has enormous clout in crafting the nation's energy policy, is closely associated with Fukuoka-based Kyushu Electric Power Co., the fourth largest utility after TEPCO, Kansai Electric and Chubu Electric Power Co.

Aso is from Fukuoka Prefecture and used to run a core company of the family's Aso group before he turned to politics.

Kyushu Electric's Sendai nuclear power plant in Kagoshima Prefecture is widely expected to be the first nuclear power plant to go back online, possibly in summer.

“Trust in the electric power company is high in the local region,” Aso said at a news conference on April 18, referring to the Sendai nuclear plant.

(This article was written by Takashi Ichida, Hiroo Sunaoshi and Kamome Fujimori.)

Fukushima radiation is killing children

<http://enenews.com/former-official-fukushima-radiation-killing-children-heart-problems-asthma-leukemia-terrible-going-authorities-hiding-truth-world-need-admit-many-people-dying-video>

Former Official: Fukushima radiation is killing children... heart problems, leukemia, thyroid — Terrible things are going on — Authorities hiding truth from world — We need to admit many people are dying, but we’re not allowed to say that (VIDEO)

Published: April 21st, 2014 at 7:16 am ET

By ENENews

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmrSZv_zkrk

Interview with Katsutaka Idogawa, former mayor of Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, April 21, 2014:

At 9:30 in

- *Katsutaka Idogawa, former mayor of Futaba in Fukushima Prefecture:* There are still about 2 million people living in the prefecture, who have all sorts of medical issues. The authorities claim this has nothing to do with the radiation fallout from Fukushima. I demanded that the authorities substantiate their claim in writing, but they ignored my request. There are some terrible things going on in Fukushima. [...] The biggest problem is that there is no one to help us. [...] I talked to local authorities in different places in Fukushima, but no one would listen to me. They believe what the government says, while in reality radiation is still there — and it is killing children. They are dying of heart conditions, asthma, leukemia, thyroid complications. Lots of kids are extremely exhausted after school, others are simply unable to attend PE classes. But the authorities are still hiding the truth from us, and I don’t know why. Don’t they have children of their own? It hurts so much to know they can’t protect our children.

At 22:30 in

- *Sophie Shevardnadze, host:* The United Nations report on the radiation fallout from Fukushima says no radiation-related deaths or acute diseases have been observed among the workers and the general public exposed. So it’s not that dangerous after all? Or is there not enough information available to make proper assessments?
- *Idogawa:* This report is completely false. The report was made by a representative of Japan – Professor Hayano. Representing Japan, he lied to the whole world from the UN podium. It’s a real

shame that the authorities hide the truth from the whole world, from the UN. We need to admit that actually many people are dying, we are not allowed to say that [...]

Watch the interview here

TEPCO & public trust

April 24, 2014

Rebuilding trust in Tepco

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/04/24/commentary/japan-commentary/rebuilding-trust-tepco/#.U1jyBlfi91s>

by Christopher Hobson
Special To The Japan Times

“The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” is a famous poem by Goethe, perhaps better known in Japan for its appearance in Disney’s “Fantasia.” In the story, the sorcerer departs, leaving the apprentice to do the chores. Tired of doing them, the apprentice tries to use his magic to get the broom to do the work. The apprentice soon finds himself in trouble, unable to control the magic he has unleashed. The broom continues to bring more and more water, and the place starts to flood. Just as the situation begins to appear hopeless, the sorcerer returns and stops the spell, preventing a disaster.

At the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the Tokyo Electric Power Co. now finds itself in an uncannily similar situation to the foolish sorcerer’s apprentice. In its desire for maximizing profits, it took shortcuts and did not invest sufficiently in safety. On March 11, 2011, Tepco discovered the consequences of playing with forces it could not completely control. And like Goethe’s story, Tepco is threatened by a seemingly never-ending stream of water, much of it is contaminated. Unfortunately for Tepco, and the rest of us, there is no master sorcerer who can stop the flow of water.

Given the sheer volume of water that Tepco is dealing with, as well as the high-pressure conditions in which they have been operating, it is hardly surprising that there have been repeated problems with water leaks.

As many of the storage tanks were hastily constructed, and water continues to build up day by day, there will surely be more problems in the future. At present, 1,000 tanks hold 440,000 tons of contaminated water, and workers aim to double the storage capacity by 2016. With so much water being stored, future mishaps are all but inevitable.

It is in this context that the manager of the plant, Akira Ono, recently acknowledged to reporters that “it’s embarrassing to admit that there are certain parts of the site where we don’t have full control.” After appearing in a Reuters report reprinted in The Japan Times, this statement presented itself as yet another reason to attack Tepco: their own plant manager admitting they are not in control of the plant! Yet do we really need more reasons to criticize Tepco? Their bumbling, incompetent, self-centered mismanagement of Fukushima No. 1 has ensured them a permanent place in Japan’s corporate hall of shame.

Rather than being used to lambast Tepco once again, Ono’s admission should actually be seen as a positive step forward. This may seem counterintuitive, but stating that Tepco is not in complete control of the plant is doing nothing more than confirming a very obvious reality.

It is precisely Tepco’s continual assurances that everything is fine, and Prime Minister’s Shinzo Abe’s exaggerated claims to Olympic officials in Buenos Aires, that generate more skepticism among the public. Even Goethe’s apprentice acknowledged the situation was beyond what he could handle. Continuing to pretend that the situation at Fukushima is under control when it so blatantly is not is reminiscent of Monty Python’s skit involving the deluded Black Knight: “It’s just a flesh wound!” (It’s just a small leak, it won’t happen again).

Until now, whenever there is a problem at the plant — no matter how big or small — a media frenzy soon occurs, which is inevitably followed by Tepco issuing an apology and an assurance that the problem will be fixed. Not only does this cycle continue to provoke more concern in much of the general public, it also results in confusion about the kind of risks that exist at the plant.

For most people, who lack the scientific knowledge to properly assess what is going on, any leak or problem at the plant generates fear and worry. This response is completely understandable considering Tepco’s woeful record of transparency.

A much better approach would be for Tepco to be more up front and honest in explaining the situation at the plant. This is perhaps the only way that it might be able to begin rebuilding some degree of trust with the public.

This trust is vital for differentiating between risks. Until Tepco can prove itself to be more transparent and believable in its explanations of what is happening at the plant, it is understandable that most people will not believe any claims that a problem is “small” even if it happens to be the truth.

Decommissioning of the plant is expected to take 30 to 40 years, and many serious challenges lie ahead. There will be more leaks and problems at the No. 1 plant. There will also have to be the controlled release

of contaminated water into the ocean. Public support and understanding will be needed through these difficult processes.

For this to happen, Tepco needs to begin to rebuild its credibility with the public in the same way that Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority has tried to demonstrate its independence and strict approach to safety.

Tepco's regaining the trust of Japan's public is just as difficult a task as resolving the technical challenges in decommissioning the plant. The only way this might happen is by the rest of Tepco following the lead of Ono and beginning to be more honest and transparent about the problems in Fukushima.

Christopher Hobson is an assistant professor of political science at Waseda University, and a visiting research fellow at United Nations University.

Information concealed even before secrets law

April 29, 2014

Ahead of secrets law, information concealed on nuclear facilities

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201404290064



A rally is held in front of the head office of Kansai Electric Power Co. in Osaka to protest the restart of nuclear reactors on April 11. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Kiyohiko Yamada has studied the situation surrounding the problem-plagued nuclear fuel reprocessing plant in Aomori Prefecture for a quarter-century, but the information he recently saw was perhaps the most startling.

“Why are there so many blacked-out parts?” Yamada, 57, who lives in Misawa, Aomori Prefecture, said he thought when he viewed the website of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA).

The page was an application form for construction work submitted to the government in January by Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd. (JNFL), the operator of the reprocessing plant in Rokkasho, next to Misawa.

The JNFL had censored the names of all the buildings described in the form, months before the state secrets protection law was enacted in December last year in the name of protecting national security.

The law, which covers nuclear facilities, has been criticized as vaguely worded and a potential tool to conceal embarrassing information among those in power. Violators of the law could face prison terms.

Anti-nuclear activists fear current actions, including the concealment of information and harassment, could portend things to come when the secrets law actually does take effect by December this year.

A sense of secrecy even surrounds certain pro-nuclear movements.

“Going ahead of the law, the government started concealing information in an arbitrary manner,” said Yamada, who started monitoring the Rokkasho reprocessing plant, which will extract plutonium from spent nuclear fuel, 25 years ago using disclosed information. “I wonder whether the information I have collected is regarded as state secrets subject to the law and I will be punished.”

In mid-March, Asahi Shimbun reporters visited a reading room of the NRA in Tokyo’s Roppongi district and checked six installments of JNFL’s applications. The names of the buildings were redacted in all of the forms.

Each application consisted of many detailed documents. The pages with the concealed portions were new and had apparently replaced older versions.

According to NRA officials, the old pages were replaced around summer 2013, when discussions on the state secrets protection bill had already started.

Government officials in charge of the issue explained in the Diet that blueprints of nuclear power-related facilities were not subject to protection under the secrets law, but information related to security of those facilities was covered.

The NRA and the JNFL stopped concealing the names of the buildings in the application forms this month after being asked by the reporters why such information had been redacted.

‘I JUST WANTED TO ASK A QUESTION’

In Fukushima Prefecture, home of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, emotions still run high over the issue of nuclear energy.

In July 2013, Ruri Sasaki was waiting in front of JR Fukushima Station in the prefectural capital, where pro-nuclear Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was scheduled to give a speech for a candidate in the Upper House election.

The 41-year-old homemaker from Nihonmatsu, also in Fukushima Prefecture, carried a board that read: "I have a question for the prime minister. Are you for or against the decommissioning of nuclear power plants?"

Sasaki hoped Abe would make his stance clear if he noticed the board. But several men surrounded her, and one of them told her, "This is not a place to ask questions."

They confiscated her board and repeatedly demanded her name and address.

Fearing for her safety, she fled to her car. Tears welled up in her eyes, and she was unable to drive for a while.

One of the men was a secretary to a Lower House member of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. "We wanted to avoid confusion in a place where the prime minister came," he later said.

When Sasaki was talking with the men, she took a video of the quarrel with her mobile phone. She later posted it on the YouTube video-sharing site.

Comments came in from people throughout the country. One of them read, "It is an oppression of freedom of expression."

However, unfounded rumors about Sasaki began to spread in her hometown.

Neighbors whispered that she went to Fukushima city to complain to the prime minister. Others said she had joined a political activist organization.

Despite those experiences, Sasaki said she believes she will try to raise a board again if the opportunity arises.

“I just wanted to ask a question. Unless I express my opinions with courage, I will become a sheep to those in power,” she said.

WORKSHOP ON RADIATION EDUCATION

In March, when Asahi Shimbun reporters were viewing the censored NRA documents in Tokyo, a letter arrived at a junior high school in Osaka about a workshop for teachers on radiation education.

The summer program was scheduled to be held at a private university in Osaka Prefecture.

Two names in the letter were listed as the workshop organizers: the university and Kansai Genshiryoku Kondankai (Council on nuclear power in the Kansai region).

According to participants of last year’s workshop, about 20 people took part in the two-day, one-night program. They observed nuclear reactors, learned about radiation and then discussed how to teach classes about the information.

The participants were given transportation allowances, and their accommodation and food expenses were covered.

“Kansai Genshiryoku Kondankai is shouldering all of those costs,” said a professor of the private university.

The workshop started for junior high school teachers in summer 2012, a year and a few months after the accident started at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The secretariat of Kansai Genshiryoku Kondankai, located in a building in Osaka, sent letters to junior high schools in the Kinki region, which centers on Osaka Prefecture, and Fukui Prefecture to gather participants.

“The workshop is held so that teachers have an accurate knowledge on the risks and fears of radiation,” said a staff member of the secretariat.

According to the website of the organization, its chairman is a professor emeritus at Kyoto University.

Asahi Shimbun reporters asked the secretariat staff member about the organization's member companies, program expenses, policies and relations with electric power companies.

"We cannot reveal them because our organization is a voluntary group," she said.

However, Asahi Shimbun reporters later learned that a vice president of Kansai Electric Power Co. had been the organization's chairman until January 2012, and that some staff members of the secretariat were employees of Kansai Electric.

The woman at the secretariat, who is also employed by the utility, said she did not know if the organization followed certain policies.

But a citizens' group found the policies through an information disclosure request to the government. The policies read, "The organization aims to contribute to the promotion of the development and utilization of nuclear power."

Kansai Electric is currently trying to restart reactors at its Oi nuclear power plant and the Takahama nuclear power plant, both located in Fukui Prefecture.

TEPCO's first profits since 3/11

April 30, 2014

Tepco moves into black for first time since Fukushima meltdowns

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/04/30/business/corporate-business/tepco-moves-black-first-time-since-fukushima-meltdowns/#.U2IYnlfi91s>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. said Wednesday it moved into the black in fiscal 2013 amid drastic cost-cutting efforts since its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear complex was wrecked by the natural disasters of March 2011, bleeding the utility dry.

Tepco, which is undergoing restructuring under effective state control, reported a group net profit of ¥438.65 billion in fiscal 2013, which ended March 31, compared with a loss of ¥685.29 billion the previous year.

It also posted a group pretax profit of ¥101.42 billion against a loss of ¥326.96 billion in fiscal 2012.

But Tepco's struggle to get its business back on track is likely to continue, with prospects unclear on when the company will be able to restart the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture — a key element in its turnaround plan.

Tepco has been reluctant to resort to another electricity rate hike even if the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant fails to resume operations from July, as assumed in the firm's revamped turnaround plan that was approved by the government in January.

Meanwhile, group sales in fiscal 2013 increased 11 percent from the previous year to ¥6.63 trillion, supported by electricity rate hikes in 2012 to cope with surging fuel costs for thermal power generation while all Tepco's nuclear reactors remained offline.

Tepco did not release an earnings outlook for the current fiscal year due to the continuing uncertainty over resuming operations at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa.

All of the nation's 16 commercial nuclear power stations are currently offline, as reactors have to clear new safety requirements introduced after the Fukushima nuclear meltdowns. Tepco filed for a state safety assessment of reactors 6 and 7 at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa last September, but it is not clear when the process will end.

Reactions to Oishinbo manga

April 30, 2014

Manga about work at Fukushima No. 1 stirs locals' ire

by Tomohiro Osaki

Staff Writer

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/04/30/national/manga-about-work-at-fukushima-no-1-stirs-locals-ire/#.U2Np_Ffi91s

Cartoon characters who suffered nosebleeds after a visit to the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant are turning into a headache for manga publisher Shogakukan.

Locals are apparently angry about the “misleading” depictions in an episode of the popular manga series “Oishinbo” published Monday in the weekly Big Comic Spirits magazine.

Visiting the stricken plant two years after the 2011 nuclear catastrophe, a group of characters, all newspaper journalists, are momentarily exposed to hourly radiation levels of 1,680 microsieverts. After their tour, which takes them near the plant’s six reactors, lead character Shiro Yamaoka begins to complain of “extreme exhaustion” as well as sudden nosebleeds that span days. His colleagues confess to suffering similar symptoms.

Later, when they meet a character named Katsutaka Idogawa — based on a real-life former mayor of the town of Futaba in Fukushima Prefecture — they learn that he too has suffered repeated nosebleed attacks and felt “unbearably sick” since the accident.

“Many Fukushima residents have been afflicted by the same symptoms. It’s just they don’t say it openly,” Idogawa tells them.

In another scene of the episode, the team of reporters complain that they were allowed to publish only a handful of photos taken at the site, an apparent dig at plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co’s rigorous censorship of the media.

In response, a Twitter user with the handle @jyunichidesita who claimed to be a resident of the city of Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, expressed anger at the depictions. The user claimed he or she had “never suffered such symptoms over the past three years.”

By noon Wednesday, the protest had been re-tweeted more than 13,000 times.

When contacted by The Japan Times, the editorial department of Shogakukan was unapologetic. Speaking on condition of anonymity, the weekly’s managing editor said the publisher had been inundated with phone calls and emails from readers saying the descriptions risk arousing public prejudice against the prefecture.

The editor said the episode drew on “meticulous reportage” conducted by manga author Tetsu Kariya and his team in Fukushima. Nothing the Idogawa character said deviated from the opinion of the real-life mayor, the editor insisted. Kariya himself once told the media that he had suffered several bouts of nosebleeds and been plagued by unusual fatigue following his visits to the plant.

However, the managing editor stressed that the publisher was not pointing the finger at radiation exposure as the cause of the characters' illnesses. He noted that Yamaoka, the main character, is at one point assured by a doctor that no medical studies indicate radiation in Fukushima could have resulted in his nosebleeds.

The editor, however, also added doctor and radiation expert Eisuke Matsui, another real-life character who appeared in the episode, told the editorial staff that "the connection between sickness and radiation is not exactly zero" and that his opinion would be reflected in future episodes.

In an apparent attempt to dodge further criticism, the editorial department said in a statement dated Monday: "We would like to stress that past 'Oishinbo' episodes clearly stated that it would be a huge loss for consumers if they balked at eating (Fukushima) foods proved safe just due to their lack of understanding."

An unacceptable franco-japanese agreement

Source : Réseau Sortir du Nucléaire

Press Release - May 2nd 2014

Shinzo Abe's visit to France: the Network "Sortir du Nucléaire" denounces a draft agreement that has scandalous repercussions for the French and for the Japanese.

France is putting pressure on Japan to restart a disastrous fast breeder reactor in order to test fuel for the Astrid reactor!

According to Yomiori Shimbun, France has asked Japan to revive the disastrous Monju fast breeder reactor in order to be able to test the fuel for Astrid, the prototype reactor developed by the CEA! This project will be formally recognised at a summit meeting on May 5, when Prime Minister Abe is visiting France. The Network "Sortir du Nucléaire" denounces this draft agreement as outrageous both for the French and for the Japanese and calls on parliamentarians to oppose its signature.

The Japanese press reveals an imminent French-Japanese nuclear agreement

According to the daily newspaper *Yomiuri Shimbun*, the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to France will lead the way to the signing on Monday May 5 of research agreements into so-called "fourth generation" nuclear production. As part of this research, France would call upon Japan to use the Monju fast breeder reactor, which has been shut down for nearly 4 years, in order to test the plutonium fuel for the prototype reactor Astrid (Advanced Sodium Technological Reactor for Industrial Demonstration).

According to the newspaper, in response to repeated requests from France, the Japanese government intends to accelerate the programme of reforms at the Japanese Atomic Energy Agency to ensure that the Monju reactor passes the required safety tests for starting up again.

A scandalous agreement for both the French and the Japanese

If this agreement is actually signed, it will allow the Commissariat à l'Energie Atomique (Atomic Energy Commission) to move several steps further towards the realisation of the Astrid project, presenting the French once again with a "fait accompli". [1] Without any consultation and without even any discussion during debates about energy transition, the nuclear industry will have introduced through the back door the development of a dangerous, disastrous and exorbitantly expensive technology.

This agreement would be equally disastrous for the Japanese, victims of one nuclear accident, who will have imposed on them, in spite of their opposition, the starting up of a reactor known for its many accidents and long term breakdowns. To add insult to injury, the agreement is due to be signed just weeks after suspicions were raised that the Japanese Atomic Energy Agency falsified inspection reports on Monju [2]. **For both the French and Japanese leaders, satisfying the desires of the nuclear industry appears to be more important than protecting the population [3]!**

Fast breeders - a technology that should be abandoned urgently!

The fast breeder reactor, using plutonium and sodium, is an inherently dangerous technology. France and Japan are among the last countries in the world to continue down this cul-de-sac, even though the technology has proved to be catastrophic.

The Monju fast breeder reactor came online in 1995 and was shut down in the same year following a sodium leak that triggered a major fire. It was started up again in May 2010 only to be shut down in August of the same year after a new problem was discovered. It produced electricity for one hour. It is situated on an active seismic fault [4], and was also hit by a typhoon in September 2013 that put its data transfer system out of action [5]. In May 2013, the Japanese nuclear safety authority had even prohibited it from ever being started up again.

As for Astrid, the so-called "fourth generation" reactor is simply a new version of the disastrous Superphénix reactor. Over a period of twelve years, this reactor operated for less than 200 days at full power and in the end will have cost 12 billion euros. At a time when the French government is imposing austerity measures, it is unacceptable that such costly, useless and absurd projects continue to receive a blank cheque.

What sense can there be in the legislation on energy transition if large scale projects are carried out in parallel without even being submitted to the vote by Deputies in Parliament? The Network "Sortir du Nucléaire" calls on French parliamentarians, who should be the first to be concerned with the choice of direction of French energy policy to oppose the signing of this unjust agreement and to prevent the pursuit of fast breeder technology, whether in France or in Japan.

To learn more about the Astrid reactor: www.sortirdunucleaire.org/ / Le- reactor -Astrid -tech

References

- [1] Already in 2010, the “Grand Emprunt” (French government loan) had provided € 650 million for the Astrid project. In 2012, new partnerships were signed with Bouygues.
- [2] <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/04/11/national/falsified-inspections-suspected-at-monju-fast-breeder-reactor/#.U2DKscelAXw>
- [3] This case is reminiscent of the shipment of MOX fuel to Japan, two years after the accident, even though the plants for which it was intended were still shut down because of public opposition to their being restarted: <http://www.sortirdunucleaire.org/areva-mox-japon>
- [4] <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/18/world/asia/18japan.html?pagewanted=1>
- [5] <http://enenews.com/landslide-at-mox-fueled-japan-nuclear-plant-ap-emergency-data-transmission-from-monju-stops-as-typhoon-hits-kyodo-cant-access-site-due-to-mudslides-reactor-temperatures-unknown>

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This press release can be found on our website: <http://www.sortirdunucleaire.org/accord-franco-japonais>

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TEPCO to repay (small) part of debt to 3 banks

May 3, 2014

TEPCO to repay 150 billion yen in post-Fukushima loans

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140503p2g00m0dm020000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. will repay 150 billion yen in debt -- part of the emergency loans it received in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis -- to three major Japanese banks in December, bank officials said Friday.

The three are the Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ, Mizuho Bank and Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp. The utility known as TEPCO received roughly 2 trillion yen in loans from the three and other banks, mostly without collateral, to deal with the nuclear crisis.

Following the repayment, TEPCO will be screened to receive future loans from the banks.

In April, TEPCO repaid 4 billion yen in emergency loans to the government-backed Development Bank of Japan, with a further 4 billion yen payment planned in October.

But the utility still faces difficulties in procuring funds on its own. It aims to restart issuing corporate bonds in fiscal 2016, but it is still uncertain if it can do so as its business operations will remain unstable, given the suspension of its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant.

Experts offer advice to TEPCO (NHK video)

May 2, 2014

Nuclear Watch: Experts Offer Advice to TEPCO

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/newsline/201405022011.html>

US and UK experts (TEPCO panel members Dale Kein and Barbara Judge) explain that TEPCO still needs to:

- · Improve communication (speed, transparency, clarity of handouts to public)
- · Organise an international support network to help decontaminate the plant.

According to Mrs. Judge, bringing international expertise is a way to gain public trust.

Oishinbo's impact

May 15, 2014

Editorial: Don't suppress debate on nuclear power, effects of radiation on health

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140515p2a00m0na010000c.html>

A manga work that depicts Fukushima Prefecture residents having nosebleeds following the outbreak of the nuclear crisis has stirred controversy. The content of the work is highly questionable and it is understandable that many Fukushima residents are furious about it. Moreover, concerns have been raised that the work could arouse further harmful rumors against the prefecture.

However, it is feared that there may be moves to take advantage of the controversy to suppress discussion on the pros and cons of nuclear power and the effects of radiation on human health. The public should hold calm discussions on how to dispel Fukushima residents' concerns about their health as well as to restore disaster-hit areas.

The manga series in question is "Oishinbo," published in Shogakukan Inc's "Shukan (Weekly) Big Comic Spirits." In an installment published earlier in May, "Oishinbo" depicts the protagonist suffering from a nosebleed after visiting the tsunami-ravaged Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

In the latest installment carried in the issue of the magazine released on May 12, a former Futaba mayor says, "There are many people in Fukushima who have nosebleeds and suffer from severe exhaustion because they have been exposed to radiation."

Also in the latest installment, an associate professor at Fukushima University says, "Fukushima is no longer inhabitable. You can't safely live there," based on his experiences of decontaminating areas tainted by radioactive substances. The manga also shows some residents of Osaka, which has accepted and disposed of rubble from quake- and tsunami-hit Iwate Prefecture, complaining about health hazards.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government, the Iwate Prefectural Government, the Osaka prefectural and municipal governments and the Environment Ministry among other entities strongly protested against the manga work. They argue the piece could fuel harmful rumors, that decontamination work has proven effective and that radiation levels in rubble from disaster-hit areas are well below the permissible levels set by the government.

A study conducted by the U.N. Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation denies that the number of patients with cancer and genetic illnesses will increase. It is difficult to imagine people suffering from nosebleeds just because they have visited the crippled nuclear plant. Still, little is known about the impact of exposure to low levels of radiation over a long period on human health.

Some experts point to the possibility that the psychological stress residents of areas affected by the nuclear disaster suffer from could adversely affect their immune systems, eventually causing them nosebleeds or a sense of fatigue.

Fears have been raised that the latest controversy could discourage people to freely discuss the safety of atomic power stations and the impact of radiation on human health. The nuclear crisis is attributable primarily to the government's promotion of its nuclear power policy based on the groundless myth of nuclear plants' infallible safety. As "Oishinbo" points out, the way the government has disclosed information on the leak of radioactive substances from the crippled power plant deserves severe criticism. The government's official position that radioactively contaminated water is under control has also certainly evoked a sense of distrust among members of the public. A long-term follow-up study should be conducted on the impact of exposure to low levels of radiation over a long period on human health.

There are many other points of contention that need to be addressed. However, members of the general public, politicians and experts cannot hold constructive debate on these matters if they become emotional. All members of the public should consider these matters calmly with Fukushima residents.

Oishinbo's impact (2)

May 15, 2014

Yoroku: Ambiguities around nuclear disaster spawn host of harmful rumors

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140515p2a00m0na003000c.html>

In April 1813, a rumor spread like wildfire around Edo -- present day Tokyo -- that eating soba noodles would kill you. The numbers of people sitting down to a bowl of soba dropped drastically, and many soba restaurants closed for a time. Concerned neighborhood officials finally began moving to quell the rumor that June.

This is one of the anecdotes included in the volume "Edo no fuhyo higai" (Damaging rumors of Edo) by Kozo Suzuki. What started that particular rumor? Did a diner actually die of food poisoning? Or perhaps someone had an allergic reaction. Whatever the case, blaming it on soba was believable enough, and the rumor grew to gargantuan proportions.

It is sometimes said that the more serious and vaguer a problem is, the more rumors that problem will spawn. The deadly noodle rumor that swept through Edo two centuries ago is a reflection of the anxieties of the people who lived there. We have an equivalent problem today, where uncertainty about risk and severity has bred repeated waves of harmful rumors: radioactive contamination from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

And one recent factor being criticized for encouraging this uncertainty and thereby the nasty rumors is the manga "Oishinbo," which sparked controversy with its depiction of a character who gets nosebleeds after visiting the crippled Fukushima plant. Another character also expresses doubts about the effectiveness of decontamination operations and says, "No one should live in Fukushima."

It's common scientific knowledge that the radiation dose absorbed by the main character in the manga will not cause nosebleeds. It's also true, however, that the effects of low radiation doses remain largely unknown. The Ministry of the Environment protested that it has confirmed the effectiveness of its decontamination operation, but the more the government says such things, the more doubtful the public tends to become. Meanwhile, it is the people of Fukushima who are suffering most because of the ambiguity that continues to cling to this issue despite its importance.

It is necessary to overcome this ambiguity that could spawn harmful rumors and deepen common perceptions of risk. In this time of atomic emergency, we call on Japanese society to do its utmost to support the people who have suffered and lost the most to this calamity. ("Yoroku," a front-page column in the Mainichi Shimbun)

Tempting people with compensation?

May 18, 2014

Government sweetening the pot for storage of Fukushima radioactive waste

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201405180020>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The central government is compiling a generous compensation plan to overcome the reluctance of two towns to host intermediate storage facilities for radioactive waste from the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Measures being considered for the municipalities of Okuma and Futaba include buying or renting properties at inflated real estate values and covering the costs to relocate the grave sites of relatives.

Okuma and Futaba are hosts to Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The two towns and the Fukushima prefectural government have not given their consent for the intermediate storage facilities, with many residents fearing the facilities will become permanent fixtures in their backyards.

The waste, expected to fill the equivalent of 23 Tokyo Domes, is currently being kept temporarily in various locations in Fukushima Prefecture where decontamination work has been conducted.

The government under then Prime Minister Naoto Kan announced in August 2011 that intermediate storage facilities would be needed to take in the waste from those locations.

However, little progress has been made on constructing intermediate storage facilities, and the government says the delay has affected further decontamination efforts and overall reconstruction in Fukushima.

Large parts of Okuma and Futaba continue to have high levels of radiation, and prospects are dim that residents who fled the areas can return to their homes in the near future. The radiation levels have also pushed down real estate values in the two municipalities.

Under the central government's compensation plan, **the real estate values will be calculated on the assumption that the land and buildings will one day be available for use after radiation levels have fallen far enough for the evacuation orders to be lifted.**

Government compensation will be separate from the compensation that local residents can receive from TEPCO.

Residents have also raised concerns that they would be unable to visit graves in Okuma and Futaba if the intermediate storage facilities are constructed there.

The central government's plan would not only cover the costs of moving the gravestones and remains away from the storage facilities, but it would also pay for memorial services that would be needed in line with the transfer.

In addition, the government would provide support if the local communities decide to construct a new cemetery in a location where radiation levels are comparatively low.

For families that do not want to move the graves, the central government will consider allowing the graves to remain at their current sites. The intermediate storage facilities could be designed to avoid such grave sites, and family members would be allowed to visit the graves even after the facilities are completed

Abe adamant that nobody has been "directly affected" by radiation

May 18, 2014

Abe seeks to dispel radiation concerns stirred by Japanese manga

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140518p2g00m0fp005000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Saturday sought to dispel concerns stirred by a famous Japanese comic which linked radiation exposure from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex to nosebleeds, saying there is not a single case of someone's health known to have been damaged through exposure.

In a recent edition of the long-running comic "Oishinbo," the main character is shown having a nosebleed after visiting the plant, where three nuclear reactors melted down and buildings exploded days after a huge earthquake and tsunami hit northeastern Japan in 2011.

"There is no confirmation that someone's health has been directly affected by radioactive substances," Abe told reporters after visiting Fukushima Medical University to be briefed about radiation effects in the wake of the disaster at the Fukushima plant.

"There is a need for the state to make all-out efforts to deal with baseless rumors," Abe said and vowed to provide accurate information to eliminate such concerns.

The premier also said his government will study whether the way it has been providing information to the public was sufficient.

During his one-day trip to Fukushima, Abe watched a simulated thyroid examination at the medical university. Radioactive iodine released in nuclear accidents can accumulate in thyroid glands due to breathing or ingestion, and increase the risk of thyroid cancer.

Oishinbo's impact (3)

Comic publisher accepts criticism over Fukushima controversy

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140519p2g00m0dm042000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The publisher of a weekly comic magazine said Monday it accepts a wave of criticism over depictions of the situation at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex in a long-running comic called "Oishinbo."

In Monday's installment of the series — now suspended indefinitely — Hiroshi Murayama, who is also managing editor of the weekly Big Comic Spirits magazine the series runs in, includes an afterword in which he writes of feeling a strong pang of responsibility for the outrage caused by recent issues of the manga.

In an episode last month, the manga's characters fall ill and get nosebleeds after visiting the meltdown-hit Fukushima No. 1 power plant. The illustrations quickly sparked outrage online, and many complained to publisher Shogakukan Inc. that the story might fuel prejudice toward people from Fukushima.

"We take criticism to heart and will once again re-examine the whole concept of expression," Shogakukan Inc. said in the latest issue of the Big Comic Spirits, responding to criticism from not only people in disaster-hit Fukushima Prefecture but also the central government.

The comic "Oishinbo," about the adventures of a food writer, came under fire when a recent episode showed its main character having a nosebleed during his visit to the nuclear power plant devastated by a massive earthquake and subsequent tsunami in March 2011.

People in Fukushima said the scene runs counter to the truth and viewed it as harmful rumor as the scene may give readers the impression that local people have been suffering nosebleeds due to radiation from the crippled plant.

In the latest issue, the comic magazine carried a 10-page section to include opinions from medical experts and academics.

Shogakukan also explained that Oishinbo's author, Tetsu Kariya, had run the episode to raise awareness about the effects of residual radioactive substances and low dose exposure.

Earlier, Kariya insisted he spent two years looking into what was going in Fukushima and said he did not understand why he had to face criticism.

Their voices, he said, are rarely heard because they are reluctant to complain of sickness for fear of being branded as "overly squeamish."

Manga author Tetsu Kariya, who has made repeated visits to the plant since the triple meltdowns, decided that “it’s wrong to ignore the voices of those people just because these are considered in the minority and likely to unsettle others,” Murayama said in the endnote.

“As editor in chief, I decided Kariya’s viewpoint was worth presenting to readers for their opinions,” he said.

The main characters in the long-running “Oishinbo” (“The Gourmet”) series are culinary writers working for a fictional newspaper company.

On Monday, in the last episode before the manga’s suspension, they conclude that, as journalists, they must face the pain of “telling the truth” about Fukushima. Remaining silent, they decide, is equal to “lying to the Fukushima residents.”

When it comes to the livability of Fukushima, there is a tendency to “sugarcoat your language in order to spare the feelings of the residents,” one reporter says, “but I think doing so is hypocritical.”

He adds: “As a human being, I would like to encourage people in Fukushima to have the courage to flee their dangerous homeland.”

The characters are apparent stand-ins for author Kariya, who wrote in a blog post that he “can only spread the truth.”

“Trumpeting the safety of Fukushima may have pleased some. But deception is what I abhor most,” he said.

Monday’s issue devotes 10 pages to laying out the opinions of 13 experts and municipalities.

One of them, Hiroaki Koide, an assistant professor at the Kyoto University Research Reactor Institute, says that from a medical point of view the connection between nosebleeds and radiation exposure can’t be entirely ruled out.

Backing Kariya, he adds: “The government is not only indifferent to taking responsibility for the accident, but determined to erase it from people’s memory.” Such irresponsibility, he insists, is “almost criminal.”

Meanwhile, municipalities including Osaka and Fukushima prefectures and the town of Futaba have lodged complaints with the publisher.

Latest edition of manga magazine drawing attention

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140519_22.html



The latest edition of a manga series with a storyline that's come under fire for depicting health problems relating to radiation exposure in Fukushima Prefecture hit the shelves on Monday.

The long-running Oishinbo series in the Big Comic Spirits weekly magazine is put out every Monday by major Japanese publisher, Shogakukan.

Last month, the series had the main character, a newspaper reporter, experiencing nosebleeds after returning from a visit to the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

A former mayor of Futaba Town, which co-hosts the plant, then appears in the comic to explain that many residents of the prefecture are suffering the same symptoms.

The episode has drawn heavy criticism for linking nosebleeds to radiation exposure in Fukushima Prefecture. The government and critics of the story say it is promoting baseless rumors that the prefecture is dangerous.

This week's edition of the magazine carries a special feature that presents opinions from 13 experts about the claims made in the Oishinbo episode, as well as the view of the chief editor.

The editor says the episode was intended to raise questions about radioactive substances and low-dosage radiation. He expressed hope that the controversy will promote public discussion that will help determine the future of the Japanese people.

The appearance of the latest edition has received a mixed reaction from people in Fukushima.

One Fukushima city resident says he's never heard of people around him suffering nosebleeds.

A local woman stressed that the residents of Fukushima were hurt by the manga story. She says they felt like they were being hit by a new nuclear scare, even though radiation levels have now dropped and food products are being found safe.

Another woman says that even though the comic supposedly carried the views of people having some relation to Fukushima Prefecture, she feels the people who really live there have been ignored.

A 59-year-old man says it would be worrisome if radioactivity is really to blame for nosebleeds. But he says the issue is a sensitive one and should have been presented with more care, as it is unknown whether the case is true.

A woman says it is important to raise such issues, as the nuclear accident is being forgotten already. She says she hopes people in other prefectures will know that Fukushima residents are getting back on their feet.

Shogakukan says the Oishinbo series will not appear in the magazine for a while in line with the plan adopted earlier.

May 19, 2014 - Updated 09:03 UTC

Oishinbo's impact (4)

May 19, 2014

Depictions of characters' radiation-induced illnesses 'give voice' to silent Fukushima residents

'Oishinbo' editor defends manga

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/05/19/national/oishinbo-editor-defends-manga/#.U3omCyji-1s>

by Tomohiro Osaki
Staff Writer

The editor of "Oishinbo" defended on Monday the decision to depict characters in the cooking comic book as potentially hurt by radiation in Fukushima, calling it a "meaningful" attempt to sound the alarm about the grim, and largely overlooked, reality of life in the prefecture.

In Monday's installment of the series — now suspended indefinitely — Hiroshi Murayama, who is also

managing editor of the weekly Big Comic Spirits magazine the series runs in, includes an afterword in which he writes of feeling a strong pang of responsibility for the outrage caused by recent issues of the manga.

In an episode last month, the manga's characters fall ill and get nosebleeds after visiting the meltdown-hit Fukushima No. 1 power plant. The illustrations quickly sparked outrage online, and many complained to publisher Shogakukan Inc. that the story might fuel prejudice toward people from Fukushima.

While acknowledging the raft of angry letters received by the publisher, Murayama stopped short of offering an apology. He did, however, note that Shogakukan is taking the outcry seriously and would conduct a policy review.

Murayama said the story line was meant to spotlight the truth that "parts of Fukushima are indeed dangerous and uninhabitable" and "some local people are worried about health problems linked to radioactive fallout."

Their voices, he said, are rarely heard because they are reluctant to complain of sickness for fear of being branded as "overly squeamish."

Manga author Tetsu Kariya, who has made repeated visits to the plant since the triple meltdowns, decided that "it's wrong to ignore the voices of those people just because these are considered in the minority and likely to unsettle others," Murayama said in the endnote.

"As editor in chief, I decided Kariya's viewpoint was worth presenting to readers for their opinions," he said.

The main characters in the long-running "Oishinbo" ("The Gourmet") series are culinary writers working for a fictional newspaper company.

On Monday, in the last episode before the manga's suspension, they conclude that, as journalists, they must face the pain of "telling the truth" about Fukushima. Remaining silent, they decide, is equal to "lying to the Fukushima residents."

When it comes to the livability of Fukushima, there is a tendency to "sugarcoat your language in order to spare the feelings of the residents," one reporter says, "but I think doing so is hypocritical."

He adds: "As a human being, I would like to encourage people in Fukushima to have the courage to flee their dangerous homeland."

The characters are apparent stand-ins for author Kariya, who wrote in a blog post that he "can only spread the truth."

"Trumpeting the safety of Fukushima may have pleased some. But deception is what I abhor most," he said.

Monday's issue devotes 10 pages to laying out the opinions of 13 experts and municipalities. One of them, Hiroaki Koide, an assistant professor at the Kyoto University Research Reactor Institute, says that from a medical point of view the connection between nosebleeds and radiation exposure can't be entirely ruled out.

Backing Kariya, he adds: "The government is not only indifferent to taking responsibility for the accident, but determined to erase it from people's memory." Such irresponsibility, he insists, is "almost criminal."

Meanwhile, municipalities including Osaka and Fukushima prefectures and the town of Futaba have lodged complaints with the Publisher.

Manga controversy (NHK video)

Nuclear Watch

Manga Controversy

Aired on May 19

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/newsline/201405200015.html>

And residents never got the information

May 21, 2014

TEPCO ready to release radiation, not information, during Fukushima crisis

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201405210045>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

In the chaotic early stages of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, Tokyo Electric Power Co. was preparing a last-ditch countermeasure that would have released a large amount of radiation on an unknowing public.

Masao Yoshida, the manager of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, told a government committee that dry venting was planned on March 14, 2011, to prevent rising pressure from causing the containment vessel of the No. 3 reactor to break apart, according to documents.

Venting is an emergency measure to prevent a containment vessel from rupturing and spewing huge amounts of radioactive materials into the atmosphere. But venting also results in the release of such substances, including radioactive iodine that can cause thyroid gland cancer, albeit at a lower level.

However, residents around the nuclear plant were never warned about the venting plan. At the time, the government had called on TEPCO and the Fukushima prefectural government not to make any announcements about the precarious situation at the No. 3 reactor to avoid panic among the public.

Under TEPCO's manual to deal with nuclear accidents, the company is required to share as much information as possible with the central government and local municipalities about venting plans for possible evacuation and other emergency measures.

Dry venting was never carried out at the Fukushima plant, partly because an explosion at the No. 3 reactor building reduced pressure within the containment vessel. That explosion led to the release of radioactive materials, but the containment vessel remained largely intact.

Yoshida acknowledged the dry venting plan in testimony given to the government's Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations. The Asahi Shimbun recently obtained a copy of Yoshida's testimony.

In his exchanges with investigators, Yoshida described the crisis at the plant early on March 14, 2011, three days after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Water pumped in to cool nuclear fuel at the No. 3 reactor had dried up, and pressure was rising within the containment vessel.

TEPCO first attempted wet venting, in which steam containing gases that include radioactive materials is passed through water kept in the suppression chamber of the reactor. The measure can reduce the level of radioactive materials in the steam, but that effort failed at the Fukushima plant, according to the document.

At 6:23 a.m., TEPCO considered dry venting, a process that does not involve steam passing through water, at the No. 3 reactor, according to the document. Dry venting leads to the release of radioactive materials at concentrations between 100 and 1,000 times greater than through wet venting.

Shortly before 7 a.m., TEPCO conducted a simulation exercise related to dry venting, and later forecast radioactive iodine would be carried in a north-northwest direction by wind blowing from the south-southeast, the document showed.

Within three hours of dry venting, radiation levels near the district of Soma in northern Fukushima Prefecture were forecast to reach 250 millisieverts, more than double the 100-millisievert level used as a guideline for the ingesting of iodine tablets to prevent thyroid gland cancer, according to the document.

At 7:49 a.m., central government officials told TEPCO not to release information about the situation to the public. TEPCO officials later conducted another simulation about the spread of radioactive materials in the event of dry venting.

While TEPCO was still attempting wet venting, a hydrogen explosion at the No. 3 reactor building at 11:01 a.m. reduced the pressure in the containment vessel, eliminating the need for dry venting, according to Yoshida.

He told investigators he never knew about the media blackout concerning the No. 3 reactor. Yoshida told the investigators, "Public relations officials can do whatever they want to, such as issuing press releases, but we at the plant had our hands full trying to deal with the accident."

A TEPCO official told The Asahi Shimbun that the company had considered dry venting, but it did not make that information available to local residents.

The official simply said that when the company was studying the possibility of dry venting, it eventually became unnecessary to carry out the procedure.

Yoshida's testimony underscores the confusion over who should inform residents about the possibility of dry venting. Such information would be vital for those concerned about possible radiation exposure who may be planning to flee the area.

As Yoshida's testimony showed, informing the public may not be high on the list of priorities of workers trying to bring a nuclear accident under control.

Yoshida died of cancer last year.

Although more than three years have passed since the Fukushima nuclear accident started, no clear rules have been set on how to integrate measures dealing with a nuclear accident with the evacuation of local residents.

“Residents should be informed the minute consideration has begun on such an important decision as dry venting,” said Hideaki Kubori, a lawyer knowledgeable about corporate governance. “Companies have an obligation to protect the safety of residents during a serious incident.

“With the central government and TEPCO having failed to clarify responsibility even after three years, discussions should not begin on resuming operations at nuclear plants,” he said.

(This article was compiled from reports by Hideaki Kimura, Kyoko Horiuchi and Shinichi Sekine.)

Yoshida's interviews kept secret

May 23, 2014

Yoshida wanted his comments on crisis kept secret

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/05/23/national/yoshida-wanted-his-comments-on-crisis-kept-secret/#.U3-srCji_IU

by Reiji Yoshida

The government on Friday released a written request from Masao Yoshida, the late chief of the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, that a Diet investigation panel not publicly disclose any of the 28 hours of interviews on how he handled the March 2011 meltdowns.

The Diet panel received all of the records of the interviews that a separate governmental panel conducted with him from July 22 to Nov. 6 in 2011. Yoshida submitted the request to ensure that the records “will not be leaked” to a third party.

In the note, dated May 29, 2012, Yoshida said that he was worried his accounts might include factual errors because he was speaking from memory, several months after the nuclear crisis began, and that some of his comments about the other people involved might lead to “misunderstandings” if they were taken out of context.

“I request that (the Diet investigation panel) strictly manage (the records) so that they will not be leaked to a third party,” Yoshida said in the note, a copy of which was posted on the Cabinet Secretariat’s website.

Based on the request, the government has refused to release the records of the interviews. The Asahi Shimbun said it obtained a copy and has started publishing excerpts.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a press briefing that the government released the entire text of the request to make Yoshida's intention clear.

May 22, 2014

Yoshida interviews to stay sealed: Suga

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/05/22/national/yoshida-interviews-to-stay-sealed-suga/#.U3-s9iji_IU

by Reiji Yoshida
Staff Writer

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga on Thursday again refused to release a confidential record of interviews with the deceased chief of the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, although he said the government might consider doing so at the family's request.

Suga's comment came in response to an earlier remark by Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto, co-leader of Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party).

Hashimoto bashed the government for not releasing the record of the government's interviews with Masao Yoshida, who was head of the plant during the triple core meltdown in March 2011.

The record was produced by a government panel that was investigating the crisis, and handed over to another investigative team set up by the Diet.

Before the hand over took place, Yoshida submitted a written request for the Diet panel not to publicize any of its cont

TEPCO to woo Tokyo area

May 23, 2014

TEPCO to supply electricity outside Tokyo area

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/business/AJ201405230028>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tokyo Electric Power Co. said May 22 that it plans to sell electricity outside the Tokyo metro area beginning this fall.

TEPCO Customer Service Corp., a subsidiary of the operator of the embattled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, told the industry ministry that TEPCO will provide electricity on a country-wide basis starting as early as October.

The utility plans to raise sales outside the Tokyo area to 34 billion yen (\$334 million) by fiscal 2016, and to 170 billion yen by fiscal 2023.

By selling power in areas it has not serviced before, as well as collaborating with other utilities, TEPCO plans to cover losses related to the Fukushima nuclear crisis and the shutdown of reactors.

TEPCO will try to woo Tokyo-based companies to make bulk purchases of electricity to be used at their branches, plants and shops across the nation by offering them lower prices than other major power producers.

The utility will organize a sales promotion base in the western Kansai region or the Chubu region next year.

To supply power to regions outside the area it now serves, **TEPCO will procure electricity from outside sources that include factories with in-house generators.**

TEPCO's decision came as Chubu Electric Power Co. and Kansai Electric Power Co. began selling electricity in the Tokyo metropolitan area.

The power company is **also making efforts to cut costs for thermal power generation by forming tie-ups with other utilities.**

With all of the nation's nuclear reactors currently offline, increasing fuel costs have been weighing on the finances of power companies.

"First, we will reduce expenses in the thermal power division," Fumio Sudo, who became the chairman of TEPCO in April, has said.

TEPCO currently estimates that it can cut costs to the tune of 650 billion yen a year if it collaborates with other power or gas suppliers in various fields ranging from fuel procurement to installation and operations of power plants.

TEPCO is currently in talks with Chubu Electric Power, Tokyo Gas Co. and Osaka Gas Co. in **efforts to establish a joint venture**. TEPCO is expected to discuss the details of possible collaborations with those firms as early as the end of the month, and will decide which company to work with to set up the joint venture by the end of this fiscal year.

(This article was written by Mari Fujisaki and Ryo Inoue.)

SOS from frontline worker ignored on 3/11- Yoshida's regrets

May 23, 2014

Fukushima plant chief admitted mishandling of reactor cooling system

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201405230034>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A wrong instruction issued by the manager of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant after an emergency cooling system failed possibly led to an early meltdown at the No. 1 reactor, documents show.

Before his death from cancer last year, Masao Yoshida told a government committee that he felt "regret" for making a "wrong presumption" in handling the critical situation in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

According to a copy of Yoshida's testimony, recently obtained by The Asahi Shimbun, a worker at the plant's central control room noticed that the cooling system, an isolation condenser (IC) attached to the No. 1 reactor, was losing its functions on the evening of March 11, 2011.

Suspecting that the condenser was losing cooling water, the worker requested that Yoshida, who was in the emergency response center, take steps to refill the condenser with water using a light oil-powered pump.

The No. 1 reactor lost electric power at 3:37 p.m., about an hour after the magnitude-9.0 quake jolted the plant compound.

The isolation condenser serves as a last-ditch measure to cool the reactor when ordinary pumps cannot operate due to a lack of outside power supplies and emergency generators.

Placed above the reactor vessel, it cools steam from the pressure vessel, condenses it into water and returns water into the reactor.

Steam is cooled as it passes through piping in a water-filled tank, which needs to be refilled after water evaporates in the process.

But Yoshida was unaware of how the mechanism worked, because it was the first time that an isolation condenser was operated at the plant in 20 years.

Not realizing that the worker's request meant the isolation condenser was losing functions, Yoshida only instructed workers to continue preparations to pour water into the reactor vessel--an order that should have been given when the emergency cooling system was functioning.

In its report, the Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations of Tokyo Electric Power Co. concluded that **"at the time there was nobody present in the plant who had years of experience in IC operations, not even training or experience in IC inspections."**

In his testimony, Yoshida said he "knew almost nothing about how to control IC," adding that the condenser is "a unique system." The lack of knowledge about the condenser made it difficult for him to grasp meaning of the request from the central control room, he added.

The testimony also showed that while Yoshida was widely hailed by the media as the "man who saved Japan," he had a number of regrets in his response to the nuclear crisis. As for his response to the isolation condenser on the No. 1 reactor, he admitted he had an "overwhelming sense of regret" for not realizing what was an "SOS" from frontline workers.

He also testified that there was no “suggestion” of any kind from the headquarters of TEPCO, the operator of the plant, as to how the plant workers should manage the isolation condenser.

If Yoshida had been aware of the condenser’s mechanism and realized it had become dysfunctional, he could have taken steps to prevent the early meltdown at the No. 1 reactor, such as venting to handle the rising pressure in the reactor vessel and restoring the functions of the isolation condenser.

Yoshida only realized that the isolation condenser was possibly not functioning after reports showed a rise in radiation levels inside the No. 1 reactor building at around 10 p.m. on March 11, 2011.

The government’s analysis estimates that the core of the No. 1 reactor became damaged at around 6 p.m., and the reactor went into meltdown two hours later.

(This article was compiled from reports by Hideaki Kimura and Kyoko Horiuchi.)

Gov't will not release interviews (follow-up)

May 24, 2014

Government shows no intention of disclosing Fukushima disaster interviews

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201405240045>

By SHINICHI SEKINE/ Staff Writer

Successive Cabinets have refused to release details of firsthand accounts of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, despite an understanding by a government investigation committee that the information from 772 interviewees could be made public.

The media and other third parties have been denied access to the testimonies about Japan’s worst-ever nuclear accident. The government is still showing reluctance even after The Asahi Shimbun started reporting excerpts from interviews involving Masao Yoshida, who was the manager of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant when it was hit by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

When pressed on the issue, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said May 23 the government could only release the records if it receives permission from the interviewees.

“There will be no problem if (they) make requests (to disclose their testimonies),” the government’s top spokesman said at a news conference.

But The Asahi Shimbun learned that the government’s Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations had agreed on July 8, 2011, before it started the investigation, that those interviewed could disclose the content of their interviews, such videotaped testimonies to the media.

The panel agreed that the interviews would be closed sessions.

It also said it would disclose testimonies “to the extent necessary” and withhold contents that might reveal identities and information that the interviewees do not want released.

Questions remain over the exact cause of the triple meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear plant, and conflicting reports have been released on what occurred in the early stages of the disaster.

A copy of Yoshida’s testimony to the committee obtained by The Asahi Shimbun revealed that 90 percent of the approximately 720 workers defied Yoshida’s orders and fled the plant at a critical juncture.

The records of the investigation have been transferred to the Cabinet Secretariat’s office for the preparation of nuclear safety regulatory organization reform.

The office says the records should not be made public in principle, and it has not confirmed the interviewees’ intentions on whether to disclose their hearings.

One interviewee related to the Democratic Party of Japan said he told the government committee that he did not care if the records were made public. He added that the committee has never approached him to confirm his intention on the matter.

On May 23, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party’s project team on nuclear regulation and its panel on environmental issues agreed to continue applying pressure on the government to release Yoshida’s testimonies.

“Such records must be made public to the maximum possible extent in order to prevent such a tragic accident from occurring again,” said Yasuhisa Shiozaki, depute chair of the LDP’s Policy Research Council.

The government on May 23 released a written request by Yoshida that stated he did not want his interviews to be publicly disclosed.

“I do not intend for any of my interviews to be made public. There may be contents in which I misunderstood the facts based on memory distortions and other factors,” Yoshida, who died last year of cancer, said in the note.

His request was submitted when the government committee handed his testimonies to a Diet investigation panel.

But the copy of Yoshida’s testimony obtained by The Asahi Shimbun shows that he immediately agreed when told by interviewers that the records could be made public in the future.

Courts' mission to "protect residents' personal rights"

March 22, 2014

Court recognizes 'invasion of personal rights' in ruling against reactor restarts

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140522p2a00m0na012000c.html>

The Fukui District Court's ruling that ordered against reactor restarts at the Oi nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture has acknowledged a possible "invasion of personal rights" of residents living within a 250-kilometer radius of the plant if a nuclear accident occurs.

The court's May 21 decision, which ordered plant operator Kansai Electric Power Co. (KEPCO) not to restart the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at the Oi nuclear plant in Oi, Fukui Prefecture, is certain to affect KEPCO's plans for reactor restarts while safety screenings are under way by the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA). The screenings are based on new standards drawn up in the wake of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster.

Unlike any past rulings in similar lawsuits, the court recognized that the plant "poses a realistic, imminent danger in this quake-prone country" -- taking the enormous effect of the Fukushima nuclear disaster into consideration. The lawsuit is one of the numerous cases filed with courts across the country contesting the safety of nuclear power plants in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

In a provisional injunction petition filed with the Osaka District Court by a group of some 260 residents in the Kansai region in March 2012 demanding the suspension of the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at the Oi nuclear plant, whether the nuclear reactors could be safely halted in the event of a major earthquake became a point of contention. The Osaka District Court rejected the petition in April last year, ruling that the nuclear reactors -- then still online -- met the safety standards and that there was no tangible danger to be recognized.

The residents filed an immediate appeal, arguing that KEPCO underestimated possible quake damage, but the Osaka High Court also rejected their demand on May 9 this year on the grounds that NRA's safety screenings are underway. "It is not appropriate to decide whether reactor restarts should be banned before the screenings are concluded," the ruling said.

Lawyer Katsuhiko Kabuki, who represented the plaintiffs in the petition, hailed the Fukui District Court's decision that ruled against reactor restarts. "It is a refined ruling that declared that the mission to protect residents' personal rights lies with the courts, while drawing a line from KEPCO's economic and commercial interests."

Regarding the difference in court decisions over the same issue, Kabuki said, "In the case of a provisional injunction, the factor of urgency is taken into consideration, whereas the latest decision faced the issue squarely. Because this is a ruling of a formal trial, it bears graver significance."

Takayoshi Igarashi, former professor at Hosei University, said, "Judges hand down rulings according to their conscience. It is natural for decisions over nuclear plant safety to turn out different depending on how they perceive the Fukushima nuclear disaster. It is likely that courts will continue to make conflicting decisions, but I believe the Supreme Court will ultimately come up with a uniform decision."

There are numerous similar lawsuits filed in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, in which residents living near nuclear plants are demanding a ban on nuclear plant restarts at courts in Sapporo, Shizuoka, Matsue, Kagoshima and elsewhere. There are also other lawsuits over the Oi nuclear plant pending in courts in Kyoto and Otsu.

In the past, there were only two rulings in which residents won lawsuits over nuclear plant issues -- the 2003 decision by the Kanazawa branch of the Nagoya High Court, which nullified the construction permission for the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor in Fukui Prefecture, and the 2006 decision by the Kanazawa District Court, which ordered the suspension of the Shika nuclear plant's No. 2 reactor in Ishikawa Prefecture. However, those decisions were subsequently overturned at higher courts, fixing the residents' defeats.

NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka distanced himself from the Fukui District Court's ruling, saying, "I have nothing to say about a judicial ruling. We will continue our safety screenings on the Oi nuclear plant as ever based on our own ideas."

Because the court decision requires far severer regulatory criteria for the Oi reactors than the NRA's safety standards, which Tanaka describes as "the world's strictest," the appeal trial of the case will likely focus on that issue as a major point of contention.

While the NRA's guidelines urge residents living within a radius of 30 kilometers from a nuclear plant be evacuated in the event of a nuclear disaster, the Fukui District Court recognized far greater repercussions, ruling that a nuclear disaster could pose a danger to residents within a 250-kilometer radius from the plant.

The NRA has heretofore defined its role as a mere examiner of whether nuclear reactors meet regulatory standards and stated that it "will not decide whether a nuclear plant should be restarted or not." An official with the NRA secretariat said, "Unless the Fukui District Court's decision is overturned in appeal trials, the plant operator wouldn't be able to decide to reactivate the reactors" -- suggesting a possible impact of the court ruling on KEPCO's decision to bring the reactors online.

Fukui court ruling:What does it mean?

May 23, 2014

Reflect on Fukui nuclear ruling

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/05/23/commentary/reflect-on-fukui-nuclear-ruling/#.U3-tWSji_IV

The Fukui District Court's ruling this week that it will not allow the restart of two nuclear power reactors run by Kansai Electric Power Co. challenges the Abe administration's energy policy of keeping nuclear power as a key source of the nation's electricity supply despite the safety risks that materialized in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster in March 2011.

The court's Wednesday ruling was on a lawsuit filed by a group of 189 people from Tokyo, Fukui and other prefectures against the 2012 restart of two of the reactors at Kepco's Oi Nuclear Power Plant in Oi, Fukui Prefecture.

The two Oi reactors — the first to have been reactivated after all of the nation’s nuclear reactors were shut down following the triple meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.’s Fukushima No. 1 plant — were taken offline last year for regular maintenance, leaving the nation again without nuclear power.

The content of the court’s ruling, in effect, questions the plans by power firms and the government to restart more than a dozen nuclear reactors around the country just three years after the disaster in Fukushima, where roughly 130,000 local residents remain displaced from their homes due to the effects of radiation fallout and Tepco continues to struggle to cope with the aftermath of the reactor core meltdowns caused by the massive earthquake and tsunami.

The district court said the Nos. 3 and 4 reactors at the Oi plant have “structural deficiencies” in their safety measures against severe earthquakes, and determined that restarting their operation would violate the fundamental rights to life of plaintiffs who live within 250 km of the plant — the maximum range where the effects of a worst-case nuclear power plant disaster are estimated to spread in simulations based on the Fukushima case.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in reversing the previous Democratic Party of Japan-led administration’s nuclear phaseout policy, has emphasized the economic viability and supply stability of nuclear energy. He has repeatedly dismissed the no-nuclear option in Japan’s energy mix as unrealistic, noting that the nation is losing trillions of yen each year due to the increased cost of fuel imports to run thermal power generators to make up for the shutdown of nuclear power plants.

The ruling dismissed a similar argument by Kepco in court, noting that it is legally irrelevant to discuss people’s fundamental rights to life on the same level as the question of rising costs of generating electricity.

It went on to say that even if Japan suffers large trade deficits because of the nuclear power plant shutdowns, the real loss of national wealth is when people become unable to live stable lives on their land — an apparent reference to the shattered lives of those residents around the Fukushima plant who were forced to flee their homes. The court also called the radiation fallout from the Fukushima disaster “the worst environmental contamination” in Japan’s history and brushed aside as completely missing the point the argument that the nation needs to have nuclear power as a clean energy that reduces emissions of global warming gases.

One of the key points of the ruling is that operation of the Oi reactors needs to be stopped if there is “even a slightest chance” that the reactors’ ability to keep cooling their cores and contain radioactivity could be lost — as happened in the case of the Fukushima No. 1 plant — if the plant is crippled by severe earthquakes.

The crucial point of the ruling is its contention that it is inherently impossible to determine on scientific grounds that an earthquake more powerful than assumed in the operator's worst-case scenario would not happen. It noted that since 2005, four nuclear power reactors around the country have experienced quake shocks more powerful than the maximum level anticipated on their sites. It is "groundless optimism" in this quake-prone country that such a temblor would never hit the Oi plant, the ruling stated.

In the wake of the Fukushima disaster, the government last year introduced what it calls the world's toughest safety standards on nuclear power plants, which obliges utilities to put in place specific countermeasures against severe accidents such as earthquakes and tsunamis. So far, nine power companies have applied to the Nuclear Regulation Authority for safety screening of their plans to restart 18 reactors at 11 nuclear power plants around the country.

The power companies have invested heavily in additional safety features at their nuclear power plants to meet the updated standards. The cost of imported fuel due to the nuclear shutdowns has weighed heavily on their earnings, with six of the nation's 10 power firms reporting pretax losses for the year that ended in March. The costs have been passed on to electricity rates, and the utilities warn that they will have to raise the rates even higher if they remain unable much longer to restart the nuclear reactors.

Kepeco has applied for NRA screening of its plans to restart the Nos. 3 and 4 Oi reactors. The company has appealed Wednesday's ruling to a higher court, and until the ruling is finalized, the utility will be legally able to reactivate the Oi reactors once it gets the go-ahead from the NRA and relevant government authorities.

Officials say the district court ruling will not affect what they are doing. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga says the government has no plans to change its policy of seeking the restart of reactors that have cleared the NRA's screenings, with the consent of host municipalities.

NRA chief Shunichi Tanaka has also said the regulation authority will "continue our own examination of the Oi plant" based on the new safety standards.

The Abe administration and the power companies need to stop and reflect on the Fukui court ruling in the context of what the events of the Fukushima disaster. The core meltdowns at Tepco's Fukushima plant took place after the operator deliberately underestimated tsunami risks and failed to take necessary precautions. When it hit, Tepco sought to excuse its lack of preparedness by characterizing the tsunami as simply beyond the scope of "conventional assumptions."

What the ruling called the “groundless optimism” about safety of the Oi plant can be a malady common to all nuclear power plants in this country. The “safety myth” in nuclear power was shattered in the Fukushima disaster. Such a myth should not be resurrected.

Who's done it?

May 27, 2014

Fukushima puzzle: Who ordered halt to pumping of seawater at stricken plant?

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201405270056>

By HIDEAKI KIMURA/ Staff Writer

The identity of the individual in the prime minister's office who exacerbated the nuclear disaster seems destined to forever remain a mystery.

All that is known is that a call was made from the office in Tokyo to Masao Yoshida, the late manager of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, calling for reconsideration of his plan to pump seawater into the No. 3 reactor.

Giving up the plan to switch to seawater early on the morning of March 13, 2011, later led to a brief period when water was not being pumped into the No. 3 reactor. That led to overheating of the reactor, which dangerously added to the unfolding crisis triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami two days previously.

Plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. released video of teleconferences related to the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2012, but the footage left it unclear who had made the phone call to Yoshida asking that fresh water be used instead of seawater.

TEPCO officials cited concern that pumping in seawater would lead to irreparable damage. Yoshida gave hours of testimony to the government's Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations between July and November 2011. The Asahi Shimbun recently obtained a copy. Yoshida died last July of esophageal cancer.

He was asked about the pumping in of water to the No. 3 reactor. Seawater had been pumped into the reactors of the Fukushima No. 1 plant in an attempt to cool the nuclear fuel.

Yoshida instructed his subordinates to continue pumping in seawater to the No. 1 reactor even after he received a phone call on the evening of March 12, 2011, from Ichiro Takekuro, the senior TEPCO expert who was based at the prime minister's office at the time of the accident. Takekuro gave the instruction to stop pumping seawater.

A similar debate about whether seawater or fresh water should be pumped in also took place for the No. 3 reactor early on March 13, 2011.

According to Yoshida's testimony to the government panel, nuclear fuel in the No. 3 reactor had become exposed because of a lack of water. At 5:42 a.m., Yoshida received a report that tanks holding fresh water were all empty. He decided to switch to seawater.

However, at 6:43 a.m. Yoshida received a phone call from a TEPCO employee based at the prime minister's office, saying there was an emergency.

Video of teleconferences have shown that at that time Yoshida was being asked to avoid using seawater as much as possible because of the damage it could do to the reactors.

When Yoshida received the 6:43 a.m. call, he immediately complied with the request to switch to fresh water.

In his testimony, Yoshida said that someone in the prime minister's office had picked up the phone used by the TEPCO employee.

Yoshida said, "I always felt that we would have to use seawater so I believe that I said from the very beginning that we had to go with seawater. However, I later received a phone call from the prime minister's office and told to do something, so I responded that we would try our best to find other sources (of fresh water)."

However, Yoshida became more fuzzy when the question turned to who made the call from the prime minister's office.

"I am sorry, but my memory of that moment is missing so I have no recollection of who it was that I spoke to," Yoshida told investigators. "I can only talk in terms of what may have been possible."

Yoshida gave as possibilities high-ranking TEPCO officials who were at the prime minister's office at the time as well as officials of the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, the now-defunct body then responsible for regulating and supervising the nuclear power industry. However, he gave no definitive answer.

According to video of the teleconferences, at 9:13 a.m., Sakae Muto, the TEPCO executive vice president in charge of nuclear energy who was at the off-site center in Fukushima Prefecture, raised doubts about pumping in fresh water. He is heard saying, "We have to begin thinking about using seawater. Have you discussed this with the prime minister's office?"

Yoshida continued to scramble to find fresh water, but at 12:18 p.m. he gave the instructions to switch to seawater because all the fresh water had been used.

Yoshida felt it would take about 10 minutes to make the switch. However, it was not until 1:11 p.m. that the pumping of seawater began. That meant about a hour had passed with no water entering the No. 3 reactor.

Shimazaki out of the picture: This can't be good news

May 28, 2014

Pro-nuclear expert replacing NRA commissioner who raised flag on quake risk

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201405280023

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Replacements for two outgoing commissioners of the Nuclear Regulation Authority suggest the Abe administration will find it easier to gain approval for restarts of the nation's nuclear reactors.

Few people in government circles and the nuclear industry will be sorry to see Kunihiro Shimazaki go. His successor is expected to more quickly give the green light to reactivate nuclear power plants.

Shimazaki, who is 68 and a professor of seismology, proved to be a thorn in the side of electric power companies with his calls for a reassessment of the force with which seismic waves and tsunami could pummel nuclear plants being considered for restarts.

Kenzo Oshima, 71, a former undersecretary-general at the United Nations, is also stepping down. Both men are leaving because their terms expire in September.

The two newly named NRA commissioners are Satoru Tanaka, 64, a professor of nuclear engineering at the University of Tokyo, and Akira Ishiwatari, 61, a professor of geology at Tohoku University. Their terms are for five years.

With Shimazaki out of the picture, the NRA will have to get by without a seismology expert to offer advice.

Tanaka once served as president of the Atomic Energy Society of Japan, and clearly is a proponent of nuclear energy. He has been a professor since 1994 at the University of Tokyo, a respected base of nuclear engineering research in Japan. He has also served on committees related to nuclear energy set up by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, a staunch backer of the nuclear industry.

The business sector, notably electric power companies, griped that Shimazaki was hindering efforts to resume operations at nuclear plants idled since the 2011 nuclear disaster in Fukushima Prefecture. An executive with Kyushu Electric Power Co. summed up those sentiments by saying, "Shimazaki made us suffer."

Kyushu Electric had applied for a speedy inspection of its relatively problem-free Sendai nuclear plant in Kagoshima Prefecture in its request to bring the facility back online.

Shimazaki was in no mood to acquiesce without making Kyushu Electric put in some hard work. He told the utility to reconsider the maximum force of a quake that could strike the plant. It meant the utility had to take additional safety steps, effectively thwarting the company's hopes of resuming operations in time for this summer when electricity demand peaks.

With memories of the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant still fresh, Shimazaki lashed out at electric power companies over their failure to take adequate measures to deal with towering tsunami that could devastate the coast of the Tohoku region.

It is feared that in his remaining months as commissioner, Shimazaki will continue calling for higher estimates of expected quakes--which would delay NRA approval of reactor restarts.

On May 14, executives of the Kansai Economic Federation and Kyushu Economic Federation met with Katsuhiko Ikeda, the NRA secretary-general, to request that approval be given to resumed operations at nuclear plants as soon as possible.

In government circles, officials had clearly grown weary of the way Shimazaki conducts business. "While tougher inspection standards were called for, Shimazaki kept raising the hurdle for inspections and he never reached a conclusion," said one high-ranking administration official.

At a May 9 meeting of a policy committee within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, Yasuhisa Shiozaki, the deputy policy chief, openly criticized Shimazaki when he said, "While it is acceptable to have seismologists on the NRA, the same cannot be said for someone who knows absolutely nothing about nuclear energy."

With Tanaka as a commissioner, expectations are high that NRA approval of reactor restarts will become a formality.

As a member of an advisory panel on energy policy when the Democratic Party of Japan held power, Tanaka came out in favor of maintaining the ratio of electricity generated through nuclear energy at about 20 percent.

It was also recently learned that three years ago, Tanaka received about 1.6 million yen (\$16,000) in research funds and remuneration from a nuclear plant manufacturer and a foundation linked to Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the stricken Fukushima plant.

Tanaka told The Asahi Shimbun in a 2012 interview that no amount of self-reflection over the Fukushima nuclear accident would be adequate considering the scale of the disaster. At the same time, he said, "Nuclear energy is still a technology that is needed in terms of energy security as well as for its contributions to the industrial sector."

Hideyuki Ban, a co-director of the anti-nuclear Citizens' Nuclear Information Center, said, "I have doubts about whether someone who has long been a proponent of nuclear energy can become thoroughly involved in regulation."

He said Tanaka's appointment could damage trust in the NRA.

The other new commissioner, Ishiwatari, has only tepid links to the nuclear industry. Those who have worked with him in the NRA describe him as an able coordinator with a keen sense of the task in hand.

Applications have been filed with the NRA to reactivate 18 reactors at 11 nuclear power plants.

What is the real impact of court rulings?

May 28, 2014

Utility could fire up reactors despite legal block

Kepeco could defy courts and restart Oi reactors despite legal block

by Eric Johnston

Staff Writer

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/05/28/national/kepeco-defy-courts-restart-oi-reactors-despite-legal-block/#.U4ZH6Cji91s>

Last week's ruling by the Fukui District Court blocking the restart of two reactors at the Oi power plant in Fukui Prefecture continues to create controversy, with operator Kansai Electric Power Co. saying it may defy the decision and fire up the reactors if three conditions are met even as safety concerns mount.

"We've appealed the verdict, which means the ruling is not yet confirmed. Our thinking hasn't changed about restarting the reactors as soon as their safety has been confirmed," Kepeco President Makoto Yagi said Tuesday.

Kepeco has appealed to the Kanazawa branch of the Nagoya High Court. A decision could take two or three years. After that, depending on the verdict, it could be appealed to the Supreme Court, adding more years before a final decision is reached.

In addition to getting the green light from the Nuclear Regulation Authority on safety issues, Yagi said that central and local permission would also be conditions for restarting the reactors. The pro-nuclear administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is expected to grant approval quickly.

But getting local consent could now be much trickier. Traditionally, that was something of a formality, involving little more than a statement by municipalities in Fukui Prefecture that host nuclear plants and the governor, all of whom are pro-nuclear.

Since the Fukushima nuclear crisis of 2011, however, political leaders in towns and villages, particularly in adjacent Kyoto and Shiga prefectures, have become more vocal in demanding a say in whether Fukui's atomic plants are safe to restart.

In the event of an accident at one of them, the port city of Maizuru, Kyoto Prefecture, which is located just a few kilometers from the Fukui border and is home to a Maritime Self-Defense Forces base, might become the front line evacuation and rescue center for those fleeing Fukui.

In a worst-case scenario, Maizuru itself would need to be evacuated, as much of the city's population of nearly 89,000 lives within 30 km of the Oi nuclear facility.

But cooperation between Fukui, the central government and Kansai-area leaders on developing a regional response to a nuclear accident in Fukui has long been difficult. That has increased concerns among local politicians that pressure by Abe, Kepco and pro-nuclear Fukui politicians on the NRA to approve restarts will ignore Maizuru's concerns, drawing a response from the city's mayor.

"We need a safety check involving experts selected by Maizuru and Kyoto Prefecture," Maizuru Mayor Ryozo Tatami told reporters on Tuesday.

If upheld by the higher courts, the Fukui decision will be a landmark case that greatly expands the number of localities nuclear power advocates will have to consider when formulating local safety procedures. **The ruling said residents living within 250 km of the Oi facility are entitled to seek an injunction against restarting the reactors.**

The NRA is considering restarting them under the new rules, but Kepco has already warned that the Kansai region will face the summer without electricity from the No. 3 and 4 reactors at Oi.

The Abe administration, which is pushing hard to restart some idled reactors as soon possible, is backing the appointment of new experts to the NRA that it feels will be more cooperative than some current commissioners.

One of the strictest commissioners has been Kunihiko Shimazaki, 68, whose criticism of earthquake safety measures has earned him the wrath of pro-nuclear politicians, utilities and business lobbies.

Shimazaki's term ends in September. Abe hopes to replace him with Tokyo University professor Satoru Tanaka 64, who is on record as favoring nuclear power past 2030, when only five of Japan's 50 remaining reactors would be less than 30 years old.

Don't turn NRA into "toothless" watchdog

May 29, 2014

EDITORIAL: Nuclear watchdog must not be made toothless

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201405290026>

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has a habit of trying to promote policy changes through political appointments. His administration seems to have employed this political ploy to achieve its goals in the area of nuclear safety inspections.

This is the only possible way to put proposed replacements for two outgoing commissioners of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) into perspective.

Of the four commissioners working under NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka, Kunihiko Shimazaki and Kenzo Oshima will retire in September when their terms expire.

The administration has decided to replace them with Satoru Tanaka, a professor of nuclear engineering at the University of Tokyo, and Akira Ishiwatari, a professor of geology at Tohoku University. Tanaka is former president of the Atomic Energy Society of Japan, while Ishiwatari is former president of the Geological Society of Japan.

The nominations are expected to be approved by the Diet.

What concerns us most is Shimazaki's retirement from his post and the selection of Satoru Tanaka as a new commissioner.

Shimazaki, a seismologist, has been strongly criticized by electric utilities and the business community for applying rigorous standards in assessing whether seismic faults near nuclear facilities are active.

But such criticism is unfair because most seismologists agree with his risk assessments. We hope that Ishiwatari, a geologist, will conduct safety inspections from a purely scientific viewpoint.

Satoru Tanaka, who will effectively replace Oshima, a former diplomat, is an engineer who has been promoting nuclear power generation while serving as a member of government advisory panels related to atomic energy, including the Advisory Committee for Natural Resources and Energy of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI).

The Abe administration apparently intends to eventually promote him to the post of NRA chief to succeed Shunichi Tanaka.

Based on the lessons gleaned from the Fukushima nuclear disaster, the NRA was established as a powerful new nuclear safety watchdog that operates independently of METI, a staunch backer of the nuclear power industry. During its first one year and eight months of operation, the body has reasonably performed its role of enforcing strict regulations.

The question is how Satoru Tanaka will contribute to the NRA's job performance as the nuclear regulator. There are still many challenges that need to be tackled in continuing moves to reform the nuclear power industry, one of which is the empowerment of the Secretariat of the Nuclear Regulation Authority. The NRA is also tasked with helping local governments struggling to develop workable plans for the evacuation of their communities during nuclear emergencies and changing the mind-set of electric utilities.

The new nuclear safety standards, which were established last year, need to be reviewed constantly to reflect the latest scientific knowledge. The NRA commissioners have very important roles to play in all these efforts.

Even after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, Satoru Tanaka has consistently argued that nuclear power generation is necessary technology.

In its final report, the accident investigative committee of the Atomic Energy Society of Japan, led by Tanaka, cited the "lack of sufficient understanding among the experts concerning the roles that they have to perform" and the "lack of sufficient attention to safety among the regulatory authorities." The report was compiled only through internal discussions within the society, which has been often criticized for its closed nature.

Can Satoru Tanaka serve as a fair and unbiased nuclear regulator? Can he do his job purely from the viewpoint of safety, based on soul searching as a specialist of nuclear technology in the face of the Fukushima nuclear disaster? Can he carry out his job as a regulator independently of his personal belief

that nuclear power generation and the program to establish a nuclear fuel recycling system should be promoted?

If he can't, he is not qualified to sit on the NRA.

The terms of the remaining two commissioners will expire next year and the tenure of the chairman will come to an end in 2017.

The government should not be allowed to make the nuclear watchdog toothless by nominating experts who are convenient to it and the industry.

--The Asahi Shimbun, May 29

Yoshida not in agreement with TEPCO's head office

June 1, 2014

Despite talk of pullout, Hosono says he backed Yoshida's resolve not to abandon Fukushima plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201406010019>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The liaison between Prime Minister Naoto Kan and Masao Yoshida, manager of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant at the onset of the March 2011 accident, urged Kan to support Yoshida's belief that workers should not be withdrawn as the crisis worsened.

Goshi Hosono, who was serving as a special adviser to the prime minister at that time, told The Asahi Shimbun that he advised Kan to back Yoshida, though some executives in the head office of the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., had suggested that all workers should withdraw from there.

Months after the onset of the accident, the government's Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations of Tokyo Electric Power Co. questioned Yoshida and compiled a report. By showing him its sections related to Hosono, The Asahi Shimbun interviewed him for nearly three hours.

Hosono, a Democrat Party of Japan lawmaker, said he felt the biggest disagreement between Yoshida and the TEPCO head office occurred on the night of March 14, 2011, three days after the nuclear accident broke out. It was soon after it became impossible to inject cooling water into the No. 2 reactor.

On that night, Hosono twice received telephone calls from Yoshida. In the first of the two calls, Yoshida said water could not be pumped into the reactor.

Hosono recalled, "I understood that Yoshida suggested the possibility that people at the Fukushima No. 1 plant will become unable to work there. The suggestion meant that all of the workers at the plant will have to withdraw from there."

In the second call, Yoshida told Hosono that water had begun to enter the reactor. When Hosono asked Yoshida, "You can hold on to your tasks, can't you?" Yoshida replied, "All right. We can still make efforts here. Our morale has not weakened."

Hosono said he thought, "Yoshida has regained his former self." Unlike in the first call, Hosono felt Yoshida's strong determination to never give up in resolving the nuclear crisis.

Around the same time, TEPCO President Masataka Shimizu repeatedly tried to contact industry minister Banri Kaieda. Hosono had heard from Kaieda and Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano that TEPCO wanted to withdraw all the workers from the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

"The idea of withdrawing the workers (from the plant) was expressed by officials at the company (headquarters), including President Shimizu. I felt that their stance differed from that of Yoshida," Hosono recalled.

"(My impression was) Yoshida had decided in his mind to stay in the plant. The prime minister's office also decided to support him completely. The problem was whether TEPCO (headquarters) had the resolve to support him and other workers in the plant," Hosono said.

"TEPCO employees stationed in the prime minister's office appeared to be operating in a mind-set that there were no more ways remaining to deal with the accident," Hosono recalled.

By those remarks, Hosono revealed a big difference that existed in the stance between Yoshida and employees at TEPCO's head office on whether the workers at the plant should be withdrawn.

After receiving the second call from Yoshida, Hosono advised Kan, "The situation at the Fukushima No. 1 plant is one in which workers can make progress there. We should respect Yoshida's judgment."

Before dawn on the next day, March 15, Kan summoned Shimizu to the prime minister's office and told him, "A pullout cannot be allowed."

Soon after 6 a.m. on the same day, some abnormalities occurred in the No. 2 reactor but the radiation level did not rise. At 6:42 a.m., Yoshida ordered workers at the Fukushima plant to wait in the compound so that they could return to their posts immediately if problems occurred.

However, 90 percent of the workers withdrew to the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear power plant, located about 10 kilometers from the No. 1 plant, ignoring Yoshida's instructions, according to Yoshida's testimony to the government's investigation committee.

Since the nuclear accident broke out, Hosono has seldom accepted interviews on how the government dealt with the accident.

As three years had passed, he thought, "My memory is approaching its limits. The time has about come for me to talk about the details."

He recently saw Asahi Shimbun reports based on transcripts from the government's investigation committee's questioning of Yoshida. Hosono consented to an interview with The Asahi Shimbun. (This article was written by Hideaki Kimura and Kyoko Horiuchi.)

"An overpowering sense of helplessness"

June 2, 2014

Hopelessness reigned after TEPCO said Fukushima crisis 'out of control'

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201406020049>

By HIDEAKI KIMURA/ Staff Writer

One of the darkest hours in the Fukushima nuclear disaster came very early on when plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. said the situation was out of control.

After hearing this, nuclear experts and government officials gathered at the prime minister's office in Tokyo got ready to throw in the towel, even though the plant manager was on-site and standing firm.

In interview with The Asahi Shimbun, Goshi Hosono, a special adviser to Naoto Kan, the prime minister at that time, conveyed the utter panic and hopelessness that gripped people in the room.

TEPCO executives said the nuclear reactors "are now out of control" as signs emerged of major damage to the No. 2 reactor's containment vessel. From that point, it seemed the only recourse would be to evacuate all plant workers as quickly as possible as a meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 plant became inevitable.

Hosono's account offers the most complete picture to date of the helplessness that raged as the enormity of the disaster became apparent early on March 15, 2011, four days after the earthquake and tsunami that triggered the crisis.

TEPCO officials became hugely alarmed around 2 a.m. or 3 a.m., when the pressure inside the reactor containment vessel started shooting up, prompting them to state that things are "out of control."

But then the courageous words of plant manager Masao Yoshida, who had spoken to Hosono just the day before, sprang to mind. Yoshida, who was in charge of dealing with the on-site situation, had boldly told Hosono, "I will do my best and stand firm."

Several senior executives from TEPCO headquarters arrived at the prime minister's office. They included Ichiro Takekuro, who was serving in a liaison capacity, and Susumu Kawamata, general manager of TEPCO's Nuclear Quality & Safety Management Department.

Hosono said the remark about the situation being out of control "was not made by a specific individual, but rather as a team of TEPCO members."

"It was shocking to hear the words 'out of control' from TEPCO. With nuclear experts saying the situation was out of control, there was no way I could tell them to keep it under control."

But Hosono was not in a quitting mood and tried to shake them out of their pessimism.

"I told TEPCO, 'Experts should be able to say something even in a situation like this. It's not the time to be low spirited. We have to do something, so just try to come up with a plan,' I told them strongly."

No one seemed to have anything meaningful to offer. Other nuclear experts who were present at the office, like Haruki Madarame, chairman of the Nuclear Safety Commission, shared the same mind-set with TEPCO that all options had run out in containing the disaster.

"With nothing we could do, we felt an overpowering sense of helplessness," Hosono recalled. A full-withdrawal of all workers from the plant would mean that TEPCO had given up any hope of averting a full-scale disaster.

"Overall, we all thought the withdrawal had to be stopped no matter what, but we didn't have anything to back up our belief. How do we do this ... ? With TEPCO saying there was nothing they could do, we were consumed by hopelessness," said Hosono.

The members gathered at the prime minister's office were unable to reach an agreement on the level of withdrawal from the facility. But Hosono advised Kan to trust Yoshida, rather than TEPCO, when reaching his final decision.

In the end, Kan told TEPCO President Masataka Shimizu the same day that he would not allow the company to pull out all its workers.

* * *

The following is what Fukushima plant manager Masao Yoshida told a government inquiry panel about the situation at the stricken facility on March 14-15, 2011:

"It's because the water, it isn't going in. If water can't go in, the fuel, it's just going to melt away."

"It could be plutonium, it could be something else, but all substances amounting from the fuel are going to be released. It's going to be a much more serious matter than the current cesium situation because all the radioactive substances are going to be released and dispersed outside. We're imagining the collapse of eastern Japan."

"The situation is going to be more than a Chernobyl-class disaster, maybe not exactly like the film 'The China Syndrome,' but more like that. Then, we'll have to stop pumping water into the No. 1 and No. 3 reactors as well."

NISA officials first to flee after disaster

June 3, 2014

Nuclear safety inspectors first to flee stricken Fukushima plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201406030026>

By SHINICHI SEKINE/ Staff Writer

Safety inspectors with the government's nuclear watchdog body were the first to flee when disaster struck the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

The exodus of Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) officials compromised communications between the government and plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. at a critical juncture.

This unexpected turn of events shows that the government itself was not sure what role it should play in the nuclear crisis.

The plant manager, Masao Yoshida, who died last year of esophageal cancer, was questioned by the government's Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations several months after the accident. The Asahi Shimbun obtained a copy of his testimony.

According to his testimony, on March 15, 2011, four days after the Fukushima plant was hit by the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, 90 percent of the workers in the plant withdrew to the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear power plant some 10 kilometers away, ignoring Yoshida's order to remain in and around the compound of the No. 1 facility.

Before that, however, NISA inspectors fled the site immediately after the accident even though they should have stayed to assess what steps were needed to deal with the accident. They went to makeshift government headquarters set up about five kilometers from the No. 1 plant.

On March 15, the makeshift facility was transferred to Fukushima city, some 50 kilometers away.

With all government safety inspectors absent from the No. 1 nuclear power plant, the government had no direct means to grasp what was happening there. As a result, it was forced to depend entirely on TEPCO for information.

But channels of communication between the government and TEPCO did not go smoothly. This chaotic situation prompted the prime minister, Naoto Kan, to go to TEPCO's head office in Tokyo. That was the catalyst for the government and TEPCO to jointly set up headquarters in Tokyo, 230 kilometers away, to deal with the nuclear accident.

The government's investigation committee's reports based on Yoshida's recall of the events highlight the withdrawal of the No. 1 plant's workers to the No. 2 plant even though the government's safety inspectors were the first to flee.

After the accident, the government reviewed its manual to deal with nuclear disasters. In a future nuclear emergency, it was decided that safety inspectors of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA), the successor to NISA, must stay in an "emergency office" set up in the command center of a nuclear power plant and gather information.

However, the standards are not clear about how long safety inspectors or other government officials should remain in the event of a major accident like the one at the Fukushima No. 1 plant or what roles they should play. Also left unsaid is precisely the kinds of information they would be expected to gather.

The National Personnel Authority stipulates that the amount of radiation a public servant is exposed to at the time of a nuclear accident must not exceed 100 millisieverts. After the Fukushima accident, the limit was temporarily raised to 250 millisieverts. However, it was abolished in December 2011. No new limit has been decided.

When a nuclear accident occurs, the prime minister is expected to order the Self-Defense Forces or other government organizations to leap into action.

"In effect, it only means that the government supports the operator of a plant where the accident took place," said Hideka Morimoto, deputy secretary-general of the NRA Secretariat.

The government's stance that the operator of the plant is the main player to deal with an accident remains unchanged even after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima facility.

"We are not assuming that an accident the operator cannot control will take place," said NRA chairman Shunichi Tanaka.

Fukushima is still a disaster

sent by <http://pectineactualites.wordpress.com/>

June 3, 2014

News Flash: Fukushima Is Still a Disaster

http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/newsflash_fukushima_is_still_a_disaster_20140603#

By Harvey Wasserman



U.S. Ambassador to Japan Caroline Kennedy wearing a yellow helmet and a mask inspects the central control room for the Unit 1 and Unit 2 reactors of the tsunami-crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant last month. AP /Toru Yamanaka

The corporate media silence on Fukushima has been deafening even though the melted-down nuclear power plant's seaborne radiation is now washing up on American beaches.

Ever more radioactive water continues to pour into the Pacific.

At least three extremely volatile fuel assemblies are stuck high in the air at Unit 4. Three years after the March 11, 2011, disaster, nobody knows exactly where the melted cores from Units 1, 2 and 3 might be.

Amid a dicey cleanup infiltrated by organized crime, still more massive radiation releases are a real possibility at any time.

Radioactive groundwater washing through the complex is enough of a problem that Fukushima Daiichi owner Tepco has just won approval for a highly controversial ice wall to be constructed around the crippled reactor site. No wall of this scale and type has ever been built, and this one might not be ready for two years. Widespread skepticism has erupted surrounding its potential impact on the stability of the site and on the huge amounts of energy necessary to sustain it. Critics also doubt it would effectively guard the site from flooding and worry it could cause even more damage should power fail.

Meanwhile, children nearby are dying. The rate of thyroid cancers among some 250,000 area young people is more than 40 times normal. According to health expert Joe Mangano, more than 46 percent have precancerous nodules and cysts on their thyroids. This is "just the beginning" of a tragic epidemic, he warns.

There is, however, some good news—exactly the kind the nuclear power industry does not want broadcast.

When the earthquake and consequent tsunami struck Fukushima, there were 54 commercial reactors licensed to operate in Japan, more than 12 percent of the global total.

As of today, not one has reopened. The six at Fukushima Daiichi will never operate again. Some 30 older reactors around Japan can't meet current safety standards (a reality that could apply to 60 or more reactors that continue to operate here in the U.S.).

As part of his desperate push to reopen these reactors, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has shuffled the country's regulatory agencies, and removed at least one major industry critic, replacing him with a key industry supporter.

But last month a Japanese court denied a corporate demand to restart two newer reactors at the Ooi power plant in Fukui prefecture. The judges decided that uncertainty about when, where and how hard the inevitable next earthquake will hit makes it impossible to guarantee the safety of any reactor in Japan.

In other words, no reactor can reopen in Japan without endangering the nation, which the court could not condone.

Such legal defeats are extremely rare for Japan's nuclear industry, and this one is likely to be overturned. But it dealt a stunning blow to Abe's pro-nuke agenda.

In Fukushima's wake, the Japanese public has become far more anti-nuclear. Deep-seated anger has spread over shoddy treatment and small compensation packages given downwind victims. In particular, concern has spread about small children being forced to move back into heavily contaminated areas around the plant.

Under Japanese law, local governments must approve any restart. Anti-nuclear candidates have been dividing the vote in recent elections, but the movement may be unifying and could eventually overwhelm the Abe administration.

A new comic book satirizing the Fukushima cleanup has become a nationwide best-seller. The country has also been rocked by revelations that some 700 workers fled the Fukushima Daiichi site at the peak of the accident. Just a handful of personnel were left to deal with the crisis, including the plant manager, who soon thereafter died of cancer.

In the meantime, Abe's infamous, intensely repressive state secrets act has seriously constrained the flow of technical information. At least one nuclear opponent is being prosecuted for sending a critical tweet to an industry supporter. A professor jailed for criticizing the government's handling of nuclear waste has come to the U.S. to speak.

The American corporate media have been dead silent or, alternatively, dismissive about the radiation now washing up on our shores, and about the extremely dangerous job of bringing intensely radioactive fuel rods down from their damaged pools.

Fukushima's General Electric reactors feature spent fuel pools perched roughly 100 feet in the air. When the tsunami hit, thousands of rods were suspended over Units 1, 2, 3 and 4.

According to nuclear engineer Arnie Gundersen, the bring-down of the assemblies in Unit 4 may have hit a serious snag. Gundersen says that beginning in November 2013, Tokyo Electric Power removed about half of the suspended rods there. But at least three assemblies may be stuck. The more difficult half of the pile remains. And the pools at three other units remain problematic. An accident at any one of them could result in significant radiation releases, which have already far exceeded those from Chernobyl and from the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

At least 300 tons of heavily contaminated Fukushima water still pour daily into the Pacific. Hundreds more tons are backed up on site, with Tepco apologists advocating they be dumped directly into the ocean without decontamination.

Despite billions of dollars in public aid, Tepco is still the principal owner of Fukushima. The "cleanup" has become a major profit center. Tepco boasted a strong return in 2013. Its fellow utilities are desperate to reopen other reactors that netted them huge annual cash flow.

Little of this has made its way into the American corporate media.

New studies from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission have underscored significant seismic threats to American commercial nuclear sites. Among those of particular concern are two reactors at Indian Point just north of New York City, which sit near the highly volatile Ramapo Fault, and two at Diablo Canyon, between Los Angeles and San Francisco, directly upwind of California's Central Valley.

The U.S. industry has also suffered a huge blow at New Mexico's Waste Isolation Pilot Project. Primarily a military dump, this showcase radioactive waste facility was meant to prove that the industry could handle its trash. No expense was spared in setting it up in the salt caverns of the desert southwest, officially deemed the perfect spot to dump the 70,000 tons of high-level fuel rods now backed up at American reactor sites.

But an explosion and highly significant radiation release at the pilot project last month has contaminated local residents and cast a deep cloud over any future plans to dispose of American reactor waste. The constant industry complaint that the barriers are "political" is absurd.

While the American reactor industry continues to suck billions of dollars from the public treasury, its allies in the corporate media seem increasingly hesitant to cover the news of post-Fukushima Japan.

In reality, those gutted reactors are still extremely dangerous. An angry public, whose children are suffering, has thus far managed to keep all other nukes shut in Japan. If they keep them down permanently, it will be a huge blow to the global nuke industry—one you almost certainly won't see reported in the American corporate media.

Cloud over NRA's credibility

June 4, 2014

The NRA doesn't need a 'yes man'

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/06/04/editorials/nra-doesnt-need-yes-man/#.U48Bjyji91s>

The Abe administration's May 27 nomination of two new commissioners of the Nuclear Regulation Authority could cast a cloud over the nuclear watchdog's credibility since one of them, Satoru Tanaka, is a nuclear energy proponent with close ties with the community of industries, bureaucracy and academia that has promoted nuclear power generation in this country. Lawmakers must scrutinize his nomination when it reaches the Diet floor to determine if he is capable of objectively carrying out his duties.

To replace two NRA commissioners whose terms end in September — Kunihiro Shimazaki, a seismologist who served as head of the Seismological Society of Japan, and Kenzo Oshima, a former ambassador to the United Nations — the administration nominated Tanaka, a professor of the University of Tokyo who specializes in the nuclear fuel cycle and treatment of nuclear waste, and Akira Ishiwatari, a professor of geology at Tohoku University who served as head of the Geological Society of Japan.

It's not difficult to discern the intentions of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, government bureaucrats and Liberal Democratic Party lawmakers who want to restart idled nuclear power plants behind the decision to not renew the tenure of Shimazaki and instead seek to appoint Tanaka.

Shimazaki is known for his strict approach to the safety of nuclear power plants. Through the study of geological faults at plant sites and examination of the steps taken at plants to cope with major quakes and tsunami, he has confronted power companies that seek to reopen their plants. He determined that a fault below the No. 2 reactor of Japan Atomic Power Co.'s Tsuruga nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture is an active fault. In screening of the Nos. 3 and 4 reactors of Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi nuclear power plant in the same prefecture, he demanded that the company strictly review the depth of a fault that can become the focus of an earthquake. His demand has ruled out the possibility of an early restart of the two reactors. Some pro-nuclear LDP lawmakers have reportedly been unhappy with Shimazaki.

In contrast, Tanaka has close ties with the nuclear power establishment. He served as an official of the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum from 2010 to 2012, received more than ¥500,000 in rewards from Tepco (Tokyo Electric Power Co.) Memorial Foundation in fiscal 2011 and received a donation of ¥600,000 from Hitachi-GE Nuclear Energy, Ltd. in fiscal 2011. His affiliation with the JAIF and the monetary gifts will likely fall within the scope of conditions that disqualify candidates for NRA commissioners, which were set by the then Democratic Party of Japan-led administration in July 2012. Under the conditions, an NRA commissioner should not have been a member of a nuclear power company and related entities and should not have received a reward from these entities in the past three years.

Shinji Inoue, senior vice minister of the Environment Ministry, said the Abe administration followed what the law says but not the conditions set by the DPJ government in nominating Tanaka to the NRA position. But Inoue contradicted his own earlier statement in the Diet that the government should follow the conditions.

Tanaka became a member of the Advisory Committee for Natural Resources and Energy under the trade and industry ministry in June 2011. He is known to have stressed in the committee the need for Japan to maintain a certain level of nuclear power generation and to keep a fast-breeder reactor as an option for the nation's energy policy. Given his career record and stance, one wonders just how objectively he will screen power companies' applications for restart of nuclear power plants.

Public trust in the NRA could be lost if its neutrality is in doubt. Japan's system of nuclear regulatory oversight was reformed after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster because the now-defunct Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency was under the umbrella of the trade and industry ministry — which promotes nuclear energy. Established in September 2012 to replace NISA, the NRA's oversight of the nuclear power industry must be strict and transparent.

Will investigation interviews be made public ?

June 5, 2014

Suga: Fukushima interviews could be made public

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140605_27.html

Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga says the country's government will publicize interviews with Tokyo Electric Power Company and government officials about the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant if they give consent.

A government-appointed accident investigation committee interviewed 772 people after the 2011 accident for a report. They include the plant's former head Masao Yoshida, who died last year.

Suga said on Thursday that the government sees no problem with publicizing the interviews, except for parts that concern national security or the rights and interests of a third party.

He said the government would release them based on the freedom of information law.

The government has not publicized any of the interviews on grounds that they were conducted with the understanding that it would not do so.

Jun. 5, 2014 - Updated 07:36 UTC

TEPCO shareholders to demand disclosure of nuke accident interviews

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201406050055>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A group of Tokyo Electric Power Co. shareholders looks set to file a lawsuit to force the government to release records of interviews it had with 772 people to determine the cause of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011.

The group first plans to ask the Cabinet Secretariat, which keeps the records, to disclose them. If it refuses, as is expected, the group will immediately file an administrative lawsuit with the Tokyo District Court.

It is also waging a separate legal action against TEPCO to determine the responsibility of company executives for the nuclear accident.

The government established the Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations in May 2011, two months after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The committee conducted the interviews on the condition that what the individuals said would not be publicly disclosed. The identities of those interviewed have not been revealed, although it is known that Masao Yoshida, who was the manager of the Fukushima plant at the time and died of esophageal cancer last year, was one.

The committee has said it would disclose the records of the interviews within necessary limits, but has yet to do so.

"If the government obtains agreements for disclosure (from those interviewed), it will disclose the records within necessary limits based on the stipulations of the information disclosure law," Yoshihide Suga, chief Cabinet secretary, said June 5.

Yuichi Kaido, a lawyer who is representing the group, said media reports based on what Yoshida told the investigation committee suggest that TEPCO's chain-of-command structure had collapsed after the March 2011 triple meltdown.

"Records of interviews not only with Yoshida, but also other people concerned, are indispensable to clarify the cause of the accident and (TEPCO's) responsibility," Kaido said. "The government should decide on rules for disclosure and, in principle, disclose the records."

Kaido criticized the Abe administration and previous ones headed by Naoto Kan and Yoshihiko Noda for concealing the information that has a direct bearing on the cause of the nuclear disaster.

Under the information disclosure law, government agencies and ministries must decide within 30 days whether to reveal information once a request is made.

If the government organization decides not to disclose the information, the individual or group that made the request for disclosure can file a complaint with the organization. However, Kaido's group plans to file an administrative lawsuit immediately if the Cabinet Secretariat decides not to disclose the records of the 772 interviews. The action is intended to clarify in a trial whether the government's nondisclosure stance is appropriate.

The government said that when its investigation committee submitted the records of the interviews in response to a request from the Diet's Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission, Yoshida petitioned that the records of his interviews not be disclosed.

Based on Yoshida's request, the government is refusing to disclose his records.

The Asahi Shimbun was the first media organization to obtain a copy of the interviews with Yoshida. In the documents, Yoshida grants the government the right to disclose them.

A member of the government's investigation committee tells Yoshida: "I will be taking records of what you say here. There is a possibility that the records will be made public (in the future). Are you OK with that?"

"I'm OK," Yoshida said in response.

(This article was written by Hideaki Kimura and Kyoko Horiuchi.)

Making interviews public (2)

TEPCO shareholders ask for interview release

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140605_30.html

Shareholders of Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, plan to take legal action to get the government to release interviews about the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

A group of shareholders and others filed a request with the government for disclosure of interviews with the plant's former head Masao Yoshida and 771 TEPCO and government officials. A government-appointed investigative panel interviewed them for a report following the 2011 accident. The government has not released any of the interviews.

The group says the interviews are important for examining responsibility for the accident, and that Japanese want to know the truth.

The group says that if the government turns down the request, it will take its case to the Tokyo District Court.

The shareholders have sued TEPCO's management, demanding that it compensate the company for damage caused by the accident.

Jun. 5, 2014 - Updated 10:06 UTC

772 Fukushima No. 1 interviews slated for release

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/06/05/national/772-fukushima-no-1-interviews-slated-for-release/#.U5FuQiji91s>

by Reiji Yoshida
Staff Writer

The government will release the transcripts of interviews with 772 people about the 2011 Fukushima meltdown crisis, provided the subjects agree to the disclosure of their testimony, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said Thursday.

Even with the permission of the interviewees, parts of the transcripts will be redacted if it is deemed they would violate the rights or interests of third parties or could harm “the safety of the nation,” Suga said.

“I’ve ordered (staff) to quickly carry out procedures to confirm the intention of (the interview subjects),” he said. “We will disclose the records if they agree, based on the Information Disclosure Law.”

Until now, the government has refused to publicize records of interviews conducted by its investigation panel on the grounds that the subjects — mainly government officials and Tokyo Electric Power Co. employees — spoke on condition that their testimony would not be publicized. The panel granted them this confidentiality to encourage candid answers.

The 772 people were interviewed for a total of 1,479 hours, according to the panel’s final report published in July 2012.

The government has faced pressure in recent weeks to disclose the records after the Asahi Shimbun started publishing what it said were excerpts of the panel’s interviews with Masao Yoshida, who was in charge at Fukushima No. 1 when three reactors suffered meltdowns. Yoshida has been considered a hero for preventing the crisis from escalating into an even worse disaster.

On Thursday, the Asahi reported that a group of Tepco shareholders plans to file a lawsuit seeking disclosure of the interviews with all 772 people.

Release the documents

June 6, 2014

For Kan and former Cabinet members, disclosure of Fukushima testimony a non-issue

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201406060042>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Ten politicians interviewed by a government investigative panel on the cause of the Fukushima nuclear disaster are in favor of their accounts being released to the public, The Asahi Shimbun has found.

The finding will likely add to growing public pressure on the Abe administration to disclose the records.

Among those who gave consent is Naoto Kan, the prime minister who spearheaded the Democratic Party of Japan-led government's response to the March 2011 disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"I left the decision to disclose the content of the hearings to Yotaro Hatamura and other officials," said Kan, referring to the chairman of the government's Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations.

"They should be released to the greatest extent possible unless the current administration decides to handle disclosure in an arbitrary manner."

Of 72 politicians interviewed by The Asahi Shimbun, 11 acknowledged they were questioned by the investigative panel. Of these, 10 concurred on the release in full or with conditions.

Former Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano was comfortable with disclosure.

"I will not oppose it as long as the records are not made available arbitrarily as a result of political intervention with regard to whose testimonies are subject to disclosure and which portions will be released," Edano said in a statement.

Earlier, the newspaper acquired a copy of the testimony given by the late Masao Yoshida, who was the manager of the plant. It provided a detailed first-hand account of the circumstances as to the scope of the disaster triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami unfolded.

Tetsuro Fukuyama, a former deputy chief Cabinet secretary and one of the 11 interviewees, calls for rules to be drawn up with regard to the release of such materials. He called for consideration to be given to privacy issues and taking steps to prevent arbitrary disclosure.

Yoshihide Suga, the current chief Cabinet secretary and the government's most senior spokesman, told a news conference June 5 that the government "intends to release (the records) to the extent necessary" if those who testified give consent.

Suga has instructed the Cabinet Secretariat's office, where the records are kept, to begin ascertaining the intention of the interviewees about the disclosure

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The government's committee held hearings with 772 people.

Goshi Hosono and Manabu Terata, special advisers to Kan, were also in favor of the disclosure.

"I strongly hope that the records will be released," Terata said. "I believe that my recollection (of the disaster) is public property."

Motohisa Ikeda, former senior vice minister of the ministry of economy, trade and industry who headed the off-site emergency response center, declined to give an answer.

Toshimi Kitazawa, former defense minister, and Yoshito Sengoku, former deputy chief Cabinet secretary, said they were not interviewed by the committee.

Members of the government's panel agreed before embarking on the interviews in July 2011 that, in principle, hearings will be conducted behind closed doors and with a small number of people.

They also agreed that the panel will disclose the contents of the hearings in an appropriate manner if the interviewees agreed to it.

But successive governments have denied public access to the records and did not name the individuals who were questioned by the panel.

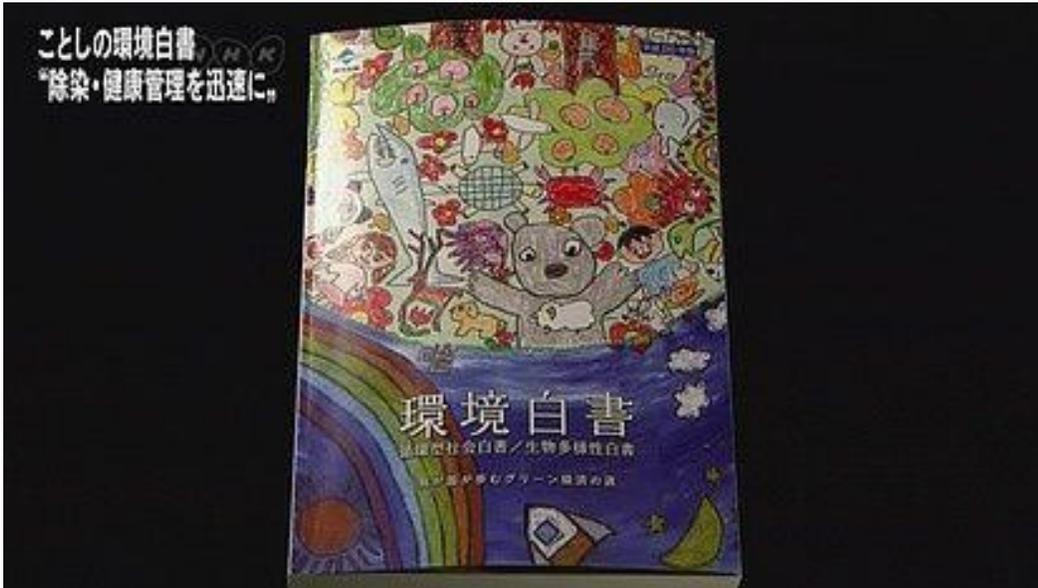
(This article was written by Asako Myoraku and Kazuo Ikejiri.)

Fukushima radiation still biggest environmental problem for Japan

June 6, 2014

Report: Nuclear accident top environmental problem

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140606_18.html



A government report says the release of radioactive materials following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident remains Japan's biggest environmental problem.

The Cabinet approved this year's white paper on the environment on Friday.

The report says building intermediate storage facilities for contaminated soil and other waste is essential to speed up the decontamination work and promote reconstruction.

The government plans to build such facilities near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The report also says determining amounts of radiation exposure is important for managing the health of residents.

The report points to the need to provide better information to alleviate their concerns. It notes Fukushima Prefecture's efforts to train personnel for health consultations.

The white paper also calls for rapidly moving ahead with environmentally friendly programs to reconstruct the affected areas.

It cites the prefecture's solar power generation program, which solicits funding and other forms of participation by residents.

A village in the prefecture plans to construct renewable energy facilities as a pillar of its community rebuilding efforts.

Jun. 6, 2014 - Updated 03:36 UTC

120 million yen for Tanaka's course at the University of Tokyo

June 7, 2014

Tepco gifted ¥120 million to university course run by NRA nominee

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/06/07/national/tepco-gifted-120-million-to-university-course-run-by-nra-nominee/#.U5NtQSji91s>

JJI

Tokyo Electric Power Co. donated ¥120 million in the four years through fiscal 2011 to a nuclear fuel cycle course taught at the University of Tokyo by a professor who the government has now nominated as a Nuclear Regulation Authority commissioner, it was learned Saturday.

Satoru Tanaka's nomination was submitted to the Diet by the government late last month.

The University of Tokyo's department of nuclear engineering and management launched the course in fiscal 2008 to promote studies on the nuclear fuel cycle and train personnel able to work for programs to recycle spent fuel at nuclear plants.

According to records the university provided to Jiji Press and other sources following a disclosure request, Tepco initially offered to donate a total of ¥150 million to the course over five years through fiscal 2012. The university decided to accept ¥30 million per year, and Tanaka and other faculty members discussed how to use the funds.

The course, however, was terminated in September 2011 after Tepco proposed ending the donations in the aftermath of the triple meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Of the ¥120 million that had been donated by the utility up to that point, the university that November returned ¥20.36 million it had not used.

A Tepco official explained that the company made the donations in order to support the development of talented people. Tanaka, who has also served as president of the Atomic Energy Society of Japan and as chairman of the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum, did not reply to a request for an interview.

NRA's independence

June 10, 2014

Source : Reuters

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/10/japan-nuclear-regulator-idUSL4N00R16X20140610>

Independence of Japan's nuclear regulator questioned after shakeup

Tue Jun 10, 2014 3:38am EDT

- * Post-Fukushima agency's reputation tested as reactor restarts loom
- * New commissioner Tanaka has received nearly \$100,000 in funding from industry
- * Industry funding for academic research in Japan not uncommon
- * Stern critic of nuclear safety practices Shimazaki to exit panel

By Mari Saito and Kentaro Hamada

TOKYO, June 10 (Reuters) - Japanese legislators approved a reshuffle at the nuclear safety regulator including appointing a commissioner who has received nearly \$100,000 from nuclear-related entities over the past decade to fund his academic research.

Among the two commissioners stepping down from the five-member panel at the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA), one is a fierce critic of safety practices in the industry.

Opponents said the changes, which were approved on Tuesday, undermined Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's commitment to an independent watchdog at a time when utilities are pushing to restart their idled reactors.

The NRA's independence is under scrutiny as it reviews applications to restart reactors, all 48 of which were shut in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima disaster.

The commission was set up as an independent agency after Fukushima to replace a regulator seen as too close to the industry and to an energy ministry that promoted atomic power. Since then, utilities have pledged more than \$15 billion to upgrade equipment and facilities.

Japan's lower house of parliament, where Abe has a majority, approved his government's nomination of Satoru Tanaka, a nuclear engineering professor at the University of Tokyo and a proponent of nuclear power.

It also approved geologist Akira Ishiwatari, whose candidacy generated little controversy. The upper house is expected to also give them the greenlight.

Industry analysts said any nuclear energy expert in Japan would have received funding from the industry given the decades of close ties between utilities and Japanese academia.

"But it is a matter of the degree of money you receive," said Hideyuki Ban of Citizens' Nuclear Information Center, a non-profit anti-nuclear group.

Tanaka did not respond to e-mailed requests for comment on the donations, which were detailed in financial disclosures and Japanese media. Tokyo University would not provide contact information for him, citing privacy concerns.

"Bringing someone like (Tanaka) on as a regulator changes the fundamental role of the NRA," said Tomoko Abe, an independent anti-nuclear lawmaker not related to the prime minister.

"This nomination could undermine the very role of the regulator."

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said last month that the nominees were the "best people for the job, who can fulfil their roles from an independent, scientifically unbiased and fair standpoint".

Akihiro Sawa, a research director at the 21st Century Public Policy Institute, a think tank affiliated with Japan's biggest business lobby Keidanren, defended Tanaka.

"Academic institutions now encourage professors to get research funds and it's very competitive, so his background should not be judged purely on the outside funds he has received," said Sawa.

YEARS OF FUNDING

Tanaka, who was not at parliament on Tuesday, had sought to dispel concerns about his candidacy. He recently told public broadcaster NHK: "If I am approved, I will take into account mistakes from the Fukushima accident and I will do my utmost by utilising all my experience."

Eight months after Fukushima, he was one of the first experts to say it may be safe to consider atomic energy again, according to remarks he made to a government panel on energy.

Between the 2004 and 2010 fiscal years, Tanaka received 6 million yen (\$58,500 at current exchange rates) for research from three firms according to disclosures made by Tokyo University in response to a public information request from Reuters: Electric Power Development Co Ltd, known as J-Power, which is building a nuclear plant in northern Japan; reactor maker Hitachi Ltd's nuclear division; and Hitachi GE Nuclear Energy Ltd.

Japan's Jiji news service said Tanaka also received around 3 million yen over five years to March 31, 2012 from the Tepco Memorial Foundation, an organisation set up by the predecessor company to Fukushima operator Tokyo Electric Power, or Tepco. A foundation spokesman said Tanaka had been paid for judging research grants but declined to give an amount.

Tokyo University said it had no information on any possible payment from the Tepco foundation, as this would be Tanaka's private income.

In disclosures to the NRA in April, Tanaka said he received at least 500,000 yen in the year to March 2012 from the foundation. NRA nominees are only required to disclose funding received in the past three years.

For the year to March 2012, Tanaka told the NRA he also received a total of 1.1 million yen from Hitachi GE Nuclear Energy and Taiheiyo Consultant, an engineering firm.

None of the original NRA commissioners received funds from a utility or nuclear plant operator for their research in the three years leading up to their appointment, according to disclosures made when the NRA was set up.

Commissioner Toyoshi Fuketa received about 1.5 million yen in fiscal 2009-10 from Nuclear Fuel Industries for research he did with Japan's sole producer of nuclear fuel, an NRA filing showed.

CRITICAL VOICE

The NRA's most critical voice, seismologist Kazuhiko Shimazaki, will retire in September after two years as its deputy, a period in which he angered the industry with safety demands that in one case effectively scuttled a reactor restart.

Activists and some NRA officials had hoped Shimazaki would remain, sources with direct knowledge of the matter said. But the government said he and a former Japanese ambassador to the United Nations, Kenzo Oshima, wanted to leave at the end of their two-year terms.

Shimazaki has not spoken publicly about his retirement and the NRA declined to make him available for comment. It's not clear who will be the NRA's new deputy.

"The main objective of this shuffle is to remove commissioner Shimazaki," said Tetsunari Iida, executive director of Japan's Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies, an anti-nuclear group. "The industry would never be satisfied if he wasn't replaced."

An official at a utility who asked not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the topic called Shimazaki's retirement a "small victory" and said utilities hoped restarts would now move ahead quickly.

The first restart, at the Sendai reactor on Japan's island of Kyushu, is expected to be approved in the coming months after the utility resubmitted its application following demands from Shimazaki to upgrade its assumptions over earthquake risk.

The NRA chairman acknowledged the regulator was under pressure "from all different directions". "We have worked together to create the functions and the independence of the regulator," Shunichi Tanaka, who is no relation to the new commissioner, told a recent news conference.

"This is a groundbreaking thing, and we will all work toward protecting it."

(\$1 = 102.52 yen) (Editing by William Mallard and Dean Yates)

Yoshida Testimony (Asahi Shimbun)

The Asahi Shimbun has published a series of articles based on M. Yoshida's testimony after the Fukushima disaster.

Most of these articles have been posted on this blog but here are a few which had escaped my attention.

<http://ajw.asahi.com/tag/Yoshida%20testimony>

EDITORIAL: Fukushima interviews public assets that need to be disclosed

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201406060027>

June 06, 2014

Since the government is supposed to be working for the good of the people, important information it has gathered is a valuable asset that belongs to each and every one of us.

After the nuclear catastrophe at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in 2011, a government investigative committee interviewed 772 people to try and identify what happened and why. They included Masao Yoshida, who was the manager of the stricken Fukushima plant. Yoshida died of esophageal cancer in 2013.

Since the Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations ended its short-lived probe into the disaster, the government has kept the valuable records of those interviews secret. It has not even disclosed the names of those interviewed.

Let us make this argument again: The government should immediately disclose, as much as possible, the records of testimonies about the accident.

On June 5, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said, "If the government obtains agreements for disclosure (from those interviewed), it will disclose the records within necessary limits based on the stipulations of the information disclosure law." He then set about learning about the intentions of the interviewees.

But the administration remains unwilling to disclose the testimonies by Yoshida on the grounds that he asked for nondisclosure of the records in a written statement submitted to the committee. This is by no means a convincing argument.

Yoshida was in charge of front-line operations at the crippled plant. He should have given his detailed accounts of the accident in an appropriate public forum, such as in testimony before the Diet. But he was struck down by cancer and died before he could do so.

Now, the document of his testimonies is one of the most valuable public assets. According to the document, at the outset of the interviews, a member of the government's investigation panel informed Yoshida of the possibility that records of his statements could be made public. Yoshida answered, "I'm OK (with that)."

In a written statement he later submitted to the committee, Yoshida voiced concerns about possible lapses in memory. But facts can be clarified by checking his remarks against those of others. Yoshida also spoke candidly about his assessments of other people involved. But this would not cause any problems if proper rules for disclosing the records are established. These concerns do not provide a good justification for keeping all the records enveloped in secrecy.

The document of Yoshida's interviews, a copy of which has been obtained by The Asahi Shimbun, shows that the inquiry panel's analysis of the accident was not satisfactory. The panel's final report referred to Yoshida's comments from the viewpoint of whether Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the Fukushima plant, was considering the evacuation of all its employees from the plant. But the report ignored Yoshida's claim that even TEPCO employees responsible for supervising workers on the front-line temporarily took refuge in the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear power plant, located more than 10 kilometers from the No. 1 plant, in defiance of his instructions and orders.

What actually happened during the nuclear crisis? What kind of judgments did people involved make and how did they act or fail to act?

The investigation committee admitted that its probe had not even come close to revealing the whole picture of the accident and emphatically called for a continued inquiry. The government's decision to effectively call off the investigation prematurely upset public expectations.

Many of the lawmakers in the Democratic Party of Japan who responded to the disaster as members of the Cabinet and other government offices have voiced their willingness to consent to the disclosure of the records of their own interviews.

The government should urge the interviewed witnesses to consent to the disclosure of their statements by stressing the importance of making them public. In particular, the remarks made by people who were deeply involved in responses to the nuclear crisis must be made public.

Making such remarks available to all of us would contribute greatly to the efforts for making in-depth analyses of the harrowing disaster from various viewpoints.

--The Asahi Shimbun, June 6

EDITORIAL: Startling Fukushima testimony raises grave questions

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201405210015>

May 21, 2014

When faced with a life-threatening crisis, humans do not necessarily behave according to set rules. Some will do anything to save their skins. Without factoring in this possibility, is it ever possible to design something that is guaranteed to be safe?

We raise the issue because of a document that recently came to light. It is a record of statements made by Masao Yoshida, who was the manager of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant at the time of the March 2011 disaster. Yoshida died last July of esophageal cancer.

This valuable document covers exchanges Yoshida made when he was questioned by the government's Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations of Tokyo Electric Power Co.

The document begs a fundamental question: Is it right to entrust operations of nuclear power plants to electric power companies that are private enterprises?

According to the document, Yoshida said that on March 15, four days after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami crippled the Fukushima No. 1 plant, fears were being voiced that the plant's No. 2 reactor containment vessel was damaged or destroyed. At that most critical juncture, according to the document, about 90 percent of plant workers defied Yoshida's orders and fled to the Fukushima No. 2 plant, about 10 kilometers away, to seek temporary refuge.

Doubts have always existed about the efficacy of disaster response measures at nuclear power plants. Would any utility really order its workers to risk their lives and keep performing their duties? How many

workers would the utility be able to continue to secure during an accident? At Fukushima, these questions were no longer just theoretical.

The safety of commercial nuclear power plants today can be maintained only if plant operators deal appropriately with any mishap. The more serious the situation, the more people are needed to contain the crisis. But unlike Self-Defense Forces personnel, police officers and firefighters, who are all special-status government workers, nuclear power plant operators are private-sector workers.

The 50 or so workers who stayed at the Fukushima No. 1 plant while the crisis unfolded came to be called the "Fukushima 50" and were lauded around the world for their heroic dedication. But there is no guarantee such heroism will come into play when the next nuclear crisis occurs. The document raises grave questions.

Yet, Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, was reportedly not even aware of the document's existence. We find it extremely hard to understand that the head of this organization, created to prevent a recurrence of nuclear crisis, was not familiar with all the details from the outset of the Fukushima disaster.

The possibility of plant workers deserting en masse during a crisis was not even raised during discussions last year on establishing new regulatory standards for nuclear power plants.

Yotaro Hatamura, an expert in the science of failures and former chairman of the government's investigation committee on the Fukushima accident, stated in the overview of the investigation report: "Whatever may happen will happen. Whatever is thought to never happen will also happen." Has nobody heeded Hatamura's warning?

The government's investigation committee interviewed 772 individuals in connection with the Fukushima disaster. There must be many valuable opinions that have yet to be made public.

TEPCO must reveal every aspect of the mass desertion, and waste no time in doing so. The utility cannot be entrusted with nuclear power plant operations so long as it refuses to face the issue head-on.

For its part, the government should disclose all investigation committee materials to the public and make every effort to ensure that people learn lessons from the Fukushima accident. In the absence of any such effort, we firmly oppose the restart of reactors that are currently off-line.

--The Asahi Shimbun, May 21

VOX POPULI: The other side of the Fukushima story is not so heroic

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/vox/AJ201405210013>

May 21, 2014

Vox Populi, Vox Dei is a daily column that runs on Page 1 of the vernacular Asahi Shimbun.

A few days into the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011, foreign media began referring to the plant workers who stayed on to contain the unfolding crisis as the "Fukushima 50," even lauding their actions as a "last bastion" of heroism.

But another side of the story has recently come to light. According to a document obtained by The Asahi Shimbun, about 650 plant workers--roughly 90 percent of the total workforce--defied the plant manager's orders and fled to the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear power plant about 10 kilometers away. This mass "desertion" may have stymied efforts to properly handle the crisis at the crippled plant.

The plant manager, Masao Yoshida who died last year, ordered everyone to temporarily evacuate from high-radiation zones but remain on the plant's premises so that they would be able to return to their posts quickly if needed. Given the harrowing situation Yoshida himself and his assistants were forced to struggle through, perhaps those who disobeyed his orders and fled may deserve to be accused of dereliction of duty.

However, I cannot really blame those workers. It is easy to talk of putting one's life on the line, but actually doing so is an entirely different matter. This reminds me once again that nuclear power generation is a technology that forces us to imagine the worst-case scenario and make the ultimate choice between asking some people to risk their lives or letting vast expanses of the nation become an uninhabitable wasteland.

This mass desertion in defiance of Yoshida's orders remained unknown until The Asahi Shimbun reported it on May 20. If the facts are hidden and treated as if they never happened, the Fukushima crisis will never be understood in its entirety, and no real lessons can be learned from the disaster.

"The danger past and God forgotten," goes an old saying. Three years after the crisis, could it be that society is now beginning to embrace a new "myth" that propagates the idea of safe nuclear power generation by simply assuming there will never be another nuclear disaster? In ancient China, advancing

troops were said to have marched to the beating of drums, while retreating troops marched to the clanging of gongs. In our country today, we hear the drums of the government, the bureaucrats and the business leaders that are set on restarting currently idle nuclear reactors. But let us not forget that the gongs of retreat from nuclear power generation are also sounding loud and clear.

--The Asahi Shimbun, May 21

* * *

"A de facto revival of the nuclear Safety Commission"

June 11, 2014

Abe picks for NRA 'undermine' nuclear watchdog's independence

Reuters

The Lower House has approved a reshuffle of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, including appointing a commissioner who has received more than ¥10 million from nuclear-related entities over the past decade to fund his academic research.

Among the two commissioners stepping down from the five-member panel at the NRA, one is a fierce critic of safety practices within the industry.

Opponents said the changes, which were approved Tuesday, undermine Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's stated commitment to an independent watchdog at a time when utilities are pushing to restart their idled reactors.

The NRA's independence is under scrutiny as it reviews applications to restart reactors, all 48 of which were shuttered in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The commission was set up as an independent agency after the disaster to replace a regulator seen as too close to the industry and to an energy ministry that promoted atomic power.

The Lower House, where Abe has a majority, approved his administration's nomination of Satoru Tanaka, a nuclear engineering professor at the University of Tokyo and a proponent of nuclear power.

It also approved geologist Akira Ishiwatari, whose candidacy generated little controversy. The Upper House is expected to also give them the green light.

Industry analysts said any nuclear energy expert in Japan would have received funding from the industry, given the decades of close ties between utilities and academia.

“But it is a matter of the degree of money you receive,” said Hideyuki Ban of Citizens’ Nuclear Information Center, a nonprofit foe of nuclear power.

Tanaka did not respond to emailed requests for comment on the donations, which were detailed in financial disclosures and the media.

“Bringing someone like (Tanaka) on as a regulator changes the fundamental role of the NRA,” said Tomoko Abe, an independent anti-nuclear lawmaker who is not related to the prime minister. “This nomination could undermine the very role of the regulator.”

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said last month that the nominees were the “best people for the job, who can fulfill their roles from an independent, scientifically unbiased and fair standpoint.”

Akihiro Sawa, a research director at the 21st Century Public Policy Institute, a think tank affiliated with the Keidanren business lobby, defended Tanaka.

“Academic institutions now encourage professors to get research funds and it’s very competitive, so his background should not be judged purely on the outside funds he has received,” Sawa said.

Tanaka, who was not at the Diet on Tuesday, has sought to dispel concerns about his candidacy.

“If I am approved, I will take into account mistakes from the Fukushima accident and I will do my utmost by utilizing all my experience,” he told NHK recently.

Eight months after the three meltdowns at Fukushima No. 1, he was one of the first experts to say it may be safe to consider atomic energy again, according to remarks he made to a government panel on energy.

Between the 2004 and 2010 fiscal years, Tanaka received ¥6 million for research from three firms, Electric Power Development Co Ltd, known as J-Power, which is building a nuclear plant in northern Japan; reactor maker Hitachi Ltd's nuclear division; and Hitachi GE Nuclear Energy Ltd.

Jiji Press said Tanaka also received around ¥3 million over five years to March 31, 2012, from the Tepco Memorial Foundation. A foundation spokesman said Tanaka had been paid for judging research grants, but gave no amount.

Tokyo University said it had no information on any possible payment from the Tepco foundation, as it would be Tanaka's private income.

In disclosures to the NRA in April, Tanaka said he received at least ¥500,000 in the year to March 2012 from the foundation. NRA nominees are only required to disclose funding received in the past three years.

For the year to March 2012, Tanaka told the NRA he also received a total of ¥1.1 million from Hitachi GE Nuclear Energy and Taiheiyo Consultant, an engineering firm.

None of the original NRA commissioners received funds from a utility or nuclear plant operator for their research in the three years leading up to their appointment, according to disclosures made when the NRA was set up.

The figures exclude a total of ¥120 million Tepco donated during the four years through fiscal 2011 to a nuclear fuel cycle course taught by Tanaka, according to Jiji.

Commissioner Toyoshi Fuketa received about ¥1.5 million in fiscal 2009-2010 from Nuclear Fuel Industries for research that he conducted with Japan's sole producer of nuclear fuel, an NRA filing revealed.

The NRA's most critical voice, seismologist Kazuhiko Shimazaki, will retire in September after two years as its deputy, a period during which he angered the industry with safety demands that in one case effectively scuttled the restart of a reactor.

Activists and some NRA officials had hoped Shimazaki would remain, sources with direct knowledge of the matter said. But the government said he and former Ambassador to the U.N. Kenzo Oshima wanted to leave at the end of their two-year terms.

Shimazaki has not spoken publicly about his retirement and the NRA declined to make him available for comment. It's not clear who will be the NRA's new deputy.

"The main objective of this shuffle is to remove commissioner Shimazaki," said Tetsunari Iida, executive director of Japan's Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies, an anti-nuclear group. "The industry would never be satisfied if he wasn't replaced."

An official at a utility who asked not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the topic called Shimazaki's retirement a "small victory" and said utilities hope restarts will now move ahead quickly.

The first restart, at the Sendai nuclear plant in Kagoshima Prefecture, is expected to be approved in the coming months. The utility resubmitted its application, following demands from Shimazaki to upgrade its assumptions regarding earthquake risks.

NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka acknowledged the regulator is under pressure "from all different directions."

"We have worked together to create the functions and the independence of the regulator," Tanaka, who is no relation to the new commissioner, told a recent news conference. "This is a groundbreaking thing, and we will all work toward protecting it."

June 11, 2014

Tohoku Electric seeks reactor restart; praise, anger expressed over NRA changes

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201406110056>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tohoku Electric Power Co. on June 10 applied to the Nuclear Regulation Authority for safety screenings to restart a reactor that might lie directly above an active fault.

The application for the Higashidori nuclear power plant in Aomori Prefecture was submitted after the government announced plans to replace a NRA commissioner criticized as overly cautious with a pro-nuclear expert. The personnel change has drawn praise from residents around the Higashidori plant and outrage from victims of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

NRA inspectors have visited the Higashidori plant four times but have yet to reach a conclusion on whether an active fault runs under important equipment at the plant. Under Japanese law, nuclear reactors cannot operate if they lie directly above an active fault.

“All those involved have been irritated with (the NRA’s) slow-moving inspections,” said Yasuo Echizen, the mayor of Higashidori village, adding that he hopes the nuclear plant will be restarted at the earliest possible date.

The NRA was set up in the aftermath of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant accident to replace two nuclear safety bodies that were criticized for their cozy ties to the nuclear industry. The new nuclear watchdog introduced stricter safety rules for nuclear power plant operations.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe wants to restart nuclear power plants, but all reactors remain offline in Japan, with some utilities waiting for NRA approval.

Nuclear power plant operators and government officials have largely blamed NRA Commissioner Kunihiko Shimazaki for the delay in giving the green light for the resumption of reactor operations.

The Diet on June 11 approved the Abe administration’s proposed personnel changes that would replace Shimazaki, a seismology expert, with Satoru Tanaka, a nuclear engineering professor at the University of Tokyo and a leading proponent of nuclear energy.

Another NRA commissioner, Kenzo Oshima, will also leave the nuclear watchdog. He will be replaced by Akira Ishiwatari, a professor of geology at Tohoku University, who has only tepid links to the nuclear industry. Some experts expect Ishiwatari to be impartial in judging the safety of nuclear reactors.

Yoichi Suenaga, a former president of Aomori University who is currently chairman of a group of local companies and individuals who discuss nuclear energy and regional development, said he welcomes the changes in the NRA.

“We have had doubts (about the credibility of the NRA) because the body has just been sticking to the problem of a possible active fault,” Suenaga said.

The reaction to the NRA changes was quite different in Fukushima Prefecture, where evacuees from the nuclear accident triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011 said they fear that nuclear safety is again taking a back seat to industry interests.

“The personnel replacement is advantageous to those who want to restart reactors, and will render the current nuclear regulations ineffective,” said Hiroaki Kanno, 66, a doctor in Fukushima, who evacuated from Namie, Fukushima Prefecture.

A resident of Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, said the Abe administration’s latest decision violates personnel shift rules introduced by the previous administration led by the Democratic Party of Japan.

“It is lunacy that the Abe administration is attempting to appoint Tanaka, an obviously ineligible figure, as commissioner,” said Ruiko Muto, a 60-year-old former teacher who is seeking to hold senior officials of Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Fukushima No. 1 plant, criminally responsible for the disaster.

Yayoi Hitomi, 53, a magazine editor in Koriyama in the prefecture, said the government’s move reminded her of the failures of the NRA’s predecessor to properly evaluate the dangers at the Fukushima plant.

“(The commissioner replacement) represents a de facto revival of the Nuclear Safety Commission,” she said.

Shimomura's notes describe Fukushima crisis

June 12, 2014

Insider's notes as Fukushima crisis unfolded describe disinterested TEPCO officials

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201406120061>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Like many government officials dealing with the initial stages of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, Kenichi Shimomura was shocked by the paucity of information available.

As it turns out, updates were pouring in, but Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the stricken plant, was reluctant to turn them over.

Shimomura, the Cabinet Secretariat councilor in charge of public relations, was with Prime Minister Naoto Kan at TEPCO's head office in Tokyo as the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unraveling.

"Until then, I had the impression that we were dealing with someone who was overseas somewhere," Shimomura recalled. "I thought there was nothing we could do if TEPCO headquarters also did not have any information. So it was a major shock for me when I realized TEPCO headquarters had been receiving information but never bothered to pass it on to the prime minister's office which was located so close by."

Early on March 15, 2011, Shimomura entered a room at TEPCO headquarters that had a teleconferencing system connecting the utility's headquarters with six outside locations, including the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear plant and the Fukushima offsite center.

Shimomura kept a notebook handy and sketched the six video monitors of the teleconferencing system at TEPCO headquarters.

He agreed to let Asahi Shimbun reporters see his jottings about the Fukushima nuclear accident triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami four days earlier.

Prior to becoming councilor, he worked as a reporter with Tokyo Broadcasting System Television Inc.

In an entry for March 15, 2011, Shimomura wrote that he went to TEPCO headquarters at 6:07 a.m.

TEPCO would eventually release video of the teleconferences held that day, but the sound was erased, ostensibly for privacy reasons.

As a result, the events of that day when radiation levels at the Fukushima No. 1 plant site reached alarming levels can only be pieced together through the recollections of those who were at the scene.

Prior to going to TEPCO headquarters, Shimomura was napping at the prime minister's office. He was suddenly awoken by a phone call and told: "TEPCO is saying it wants to pull its workers (from the Fukushima No. 1 plant). The prime minister is going to TEPCO headquarters."

Shimomura put on his disaster management uniform and was driven to TEPCO headquarters. He ran up to the second floor where a task force had been set up to deal with the nuclear accident. Someone in the prime minister's office whispered to Shimomura that Kan had just given TEPCO executives a tongue-lashing.

In his notes, Shimomura wrote: "Leaving the plant site will never be allowed. We cannot have the eastern half of Japan covered in nuclear waste!"

He went on to write: "Responsibility will be held from the company president on down. Those 60 and older should be prepared to die here."

DISINTERESTED TEPCO EXECUTIVES

The times Shimomura jotted down in his notebook for the most part match those found in TEPCO internal documents. He also sketched diagrams of technical explanations given by TEPCO officials about the nuclear plant.

The entry for 6:14 a.m. shows that the situation at the plant had changed dramatically for the worse.

Shimomura wrote: "There was a loud noise and (pressure) fell to zero."

Beside the entry, he made a sketch of the reactor containment vessel on the basis of an explanation given by TEPCO officials.

That was when officials at TEPCO headquarters received a report that an explosion had occurred in the vicinity of the No. 2 reactor and the pressure in the suppression chamber had abruptly fallen to zero.

In his notes, Shimomura states that TEPCO officials suspected the bottom of the pressure vessel may have broken off, a catastrophic development.

Shimomura writes that Kan called Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano and told him, "Something very grave has occurred."

Shortly before 7 a.m., TEPCO officials handed out a document titled "On moving the main office function."

Although there was no indication of where TEPCO wanted to move it to, Shimomura reckoned it meant relocating from the quake-proof control center building where Masao Yoshida, the Fukushima No. 1 plant manager, was working.

In the end, Yoshida did not leave the building, but there were still concerns about the reactor reaching a critical state if there was any let-up in work to pump water into the reactor to cool it.

Shimomura was so concerned about the situation, he admonished TEPCO officials, telling them that rather than simply say "work" they should always be clear they were referring to "water-pumping work."

Recalling that moment, Shimomura said, "I didn't want the water-pumping work to be gradually ignored as the situation unfolded."

Shimomura also felt that the TEPCO executives at the utility's headquarters seemed overly detached. He said it seemed as if they were not directly involved since they were far from the scene of the nuclear accident.

Other government officials who were at TEPCO headquarters also sensed the same thing.

Shimomura records Tetsuya Nishikawa, who was then assistant chief Cabinet secretary, yelling at TEPCO executives, "Don't you ever think that you are all right just because you are here (at TEPCO headquarters)."

Shimomura also jotted down an exchange between Kan and then TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata at around 8 a.m.

Kan: "Don't just work on one thing, but create at least two lines of work and proceed simultaneously."

Katsumata: "Yes, thank you."

Kan: "Don't thank me. Are you saying you cannot do it?"

Shimomura recalled feeling fearful when he learned that fire had been confirmed at the No. 4 reactor at 9:38 a.m. Seventeen minutes later, Shimomura wrote that TEPCO reported: "The fire is out of control."

It was only at about 11 a.m. that the blaze had burned out by itself.

NO RECOLLECTION OF WORKERS LEAVING NO. 1 PLANT

The events at the No. 2 reactor described in Shimomura's notebook match the statements given by Yoshida to the government's Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations. The Asahi Shimbun obtained a copy of Yoshida's testimony.

Around 7 a.m. on March 15, while Shimomura was at TEPCO headquarters, about 90 percent of the workers at the Fukushima No. 1 plant temporarily fled to the Fukushima No. 2 plant about 10 kilometers away in direct violation of an order given by Yoshida.

In his testimony, Yoshida said, "In fact, I never told the workers to go (to the No. 2 plant)."

TEPCO internal documents record that Yoshida ordered workers to wait within the No. 1 plant site.

However, the utility maintained that the workers did not ignore Yoshida's instructions. They explained that evacuating temporarily to the No. 2 plant was always an option because Yoshida's order left open the possibility of leaving for the No. 2 plant if "there were no locations at the No. 1 plant where radiation levels were low."

In Shimomura's notes, there is no mention of TEPCO saying workers would temporarily evacuate to the No. 2 plant. At that time, Shimomura was with Kan as he was conferring with TEPCO executives while watching the teleconference.

Shimomura said he never heard talk from TEPCO that it wanted its workers to move to the No. 2 plant or that an order had been given to allow for such a move. He added that he would have noted such an exchange.

Shimomura said he had a different interpretation of the talk about evacuating workers. His sense was that it referred to moving workers at the central control room of the No. 2 reactor to the quake-proof control center building at the No. 1 plant where Yoshida was stationed.

Shimomura did jot down that at around 6:50 a.m. TEPCO staff informed officials in the prime minister's office that workers would return to their tasks about an hour after checking that radiation levels on the plant site had not risen.

Shimomura said, "The image I had was that the workers were at a location that would allow them to return to work immediately after an hour had passed. It never occurred to me that the workers had gone to the No. 2 plant."

Because the earthquake had damaged roads, coupled with the necessity of removing and putting on protective clothing and face masks when entering and leaving the No. 2 plant, workers who had fled there could not possibly return to the No. 1 plant in one hour.

In fact, the earliest that workers returned to the No. 1 plant was about noon.

With regard to the significance of the Yoshida testimony, Shimomura said, "I feel there is a need to read from it the lessons about whether people can pass on information properly when regular communications channels have been destroyed."

Asked why he decided to divulge his own notes on the nuclear accident, Shimomura said: "I kept quiet because I thought that no one would want to listen to someone who was in government at the time. However, I felt the time had come to speak up because the Yoshida testimony was revealed."

Shimomura said he was never questioned by the government investigative panel or asked to submit his notebooks.

(This article was written by Hideaki Kimura, Kyoko Horiuchi, Tomomi Miyazaki and Shinichi Sekine.)

Tanaka's defense

June 13, 2014

New NRA member rejects criticism

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140613_30.html

A new member of Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority has rejected criticism that his ties with the nuclear industry may compromise the watchdog's independence.

University of Tokyo Professor Satoru Tanaka met reporters on Friday. The Diet had approved his nomination two days before.

Tanaka said he has been involved in nuclear energy-related education and research and wants to make the most of his experience when he becomes an NRA commissioner. He also said he fully recognizes that the authority should be independent.

Tanaka said the Fukushima nuclear accident greatly affected people and the environment and should not have happened.

He expressed hope that the authority will draw up regulations by incorporating findings of an investigation into what caused the accident.

Tanaka said he will make judgments while keeping in mind that human knowledge has limits and nuclear energy will always have risks.

Tanaka and another university professor, Akira Ishiwatari, are to replace two of the NRA's five commissioners in September. Ishiwatari is a professor at Tohoku University and a geologist.

Lawmakers said Tanaka should be disqualified because he was a member of an industry lobby, the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum, for two years until June 2012.

Guidelines created by the previous Democrat-led government say people who belonged to industry groups in the past three years cannot become commissioners.

Officials of the government say it did not apply the guidelines when nominating Tanaka.

Jun. 13, 2014 - Updated 08:09 UTC

Fukushima Gov. irked by money remark

June 17, 2014

Japan minister apologises for Fukushima money gaffe

<https://au.news.yahoo.com/world/a/24256691/japan-minister-apologises-for-fukushima-money-gaffe/>

June 17, 2014, 2:22 pm

AFP Japan minister apologises for Fukushima money gaffe

Tokyo (AFP) - A Japanese cabinet minister apologised on Tuesday after appearing to suggest people in nuclear disaster-hit Fukushima could be persuaded to put up with contaminated waste if the government threw cash at them.

Environment minister Nobuteru Ishihara came under fire after saying money would be a decisive factor for local governments and residents being asked to accept plans to build storage facilities for radioactive waste.

The remarks were seen as insensitive to the tens of thousands of people who remain unable to return to homes around the crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant because of persistently high levels of radiation.

Fukushima Governor Yuhei Sato immediately hit back, saying: "It was extremely regrettable. The remarks rode roughshod over the feelings of residents who are longing for their hometowns."

Goshi Hosono, former environment minister and a senior lawmaker of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan, called for Ishihara's resignation, telling reporters: "The remarks -- it's about money -- should never have been made."

Ishihara on Tuesday told reporters "I sincerely apologise to those who were annoyed by my remarks."

He said, however, that as the minister in charge of reconstruction, he would continue exploring proposals for waste-storage facilities, including details of compensation.

Central and local governments have been negotiating for months over the construction of "temporary" storage facilities for soil and other waste contaminated by fallout from the meltdowns at Fukushima following the 2011 tsunami.

Ishihara's gaffe was unusual for a man who has shown himself to be a relatively sure-footed politician, but was redolent of his father, current lawmaker and former Tokyo governor Shintaro Ishihara, who is no stranger to controversy.

Just three days after Japan's northeast was swamped by the huge tsunami, Ishihara senior caused outrage by saying the disaster -- which killed more than 18,000 people -- had been divine punishment for a nation obsessed by materialism.

Ishihara: Money comment was misunderstood

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140617_14.html

Japan's environment minister has apologized for controversial remarks on storing radioactive waste in Fukushima towns.

Nobuteru Ishihara said on Monday that money would ultimately decide what happens to the waste. He made the remarks after briefing the chief cabinet secretary about his meetings with residents of 2 host towns for intermediate storage facilities.

Ishihara tried to clarify the comments on Tuesday. He said in the end, compensation for land and to help rebuild lives and local economies will be the issue.

He said he is sincerely sorry for causing any misunderstanding.

The minister said there was no change to his approach of standing alongside the local people and carefully explaining the situation to them.

The government hopes to build the storage facilities with the approval of Fukushima Prefecture and the host towns. It plans to begin sending contaminated soil and debris to the towns next January.

Jun. 17, 2014 - Updated 02:08 UTC

June 16, 2014

Ishihara: Money ultimate decider for storage plan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140617_01.html

Japan's Environment Minister has been trying to clarify comments he made about building intermediate storage facilities for radioactive soil and waste in Fukushima towns.

Nobuteru Ishihara appeared to say that money can solve any problems.

Ishihara held meetings with residents of the towns of Futaba and Okuma. They expressed concern about government plans to situate the facilities there, and asked for clarification about how much the government plans to compensate them for their land and buildings.

Ishihara and Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga discussed the meeting at the Prime Minister's office in Tokyo.

Nobuteru Ishihara later told reporters that money will ultimately decide what happens.

But he later said he hadn't meant to imply that it could solve everything. He said the government cannot propose an exact figure until residents accept the plan, but they will discuss the value.

The government hopes to begin sending contaminated soil and debris to the facilities from next January. But the plan needs approval from the host towns and Fukushima Prefecture.

Jun. 16, 2014 - Updated 19:25 UTC

Minister slammed for comments on contaminated soil storage in Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140617p2g00m0dm052000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Environment Minister Nobuteru Ishihara drew criticism from Fukushima officials on Monday for suggesting that money would ultimately decide whether local authorities accept the state's proposal for building facilities in the prefecture to store contaminated soil after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster.

Ishihara told reporters in Tokyo earlier in the day that the protracted negotiations between the state and local governments in the northeastern prefecture would ultimately be settled by the "monetary value" of accepting the interim storage facilities, such as grants to local authorities hosting them.

Ishihara immediately sought to contain fallout from his remarks, telling a hastily called news conference that he had meant to say details of any compensation for hosting such facilities cannot be explained to local residents until local governments accept the proposal.

Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato criticized Ishihara's remarks, calling them regrettable. "The remarks trample on residents' longing for their hometowns. I want to find out what his true intention was," he added.

Futaba Mayor Shiro Izawa, whose town is being considered for hosting storage facilities for top soil and other waste generated through decontamination efforts in the disaster-hit prefecture, said the remarks would lead to "misunderstanding" that local residents are after compensation and damages from the state.

Ishihara's remarks came a day after the state ended its briefing sessions for the residents of Futaba and Okuma, the other town being considered for hosting the facilities. The crippled nuclear power complex straddles both towns.

The sessions drew criticism that the state's explanation about compensation remained vague, prompting the prefectural government and the two municipal authorities to call for a more concrete explanation from the state.

Since last December, the state and the local authorities have been negotiating over the construction of temporary storage facilities for contaminated soil and other waste.

There is a large gap between the state and the local governments over the size of grants to be created as the price of accepting the storage facilities, keeping the negotiations deadlocked, according to a source familiar with the matter.

The state plans to build the interim storage facilities by nationalizing about 16 square kilometers of land around the Tokyo Electric Power Co. plant, seeking to start operating the facilities next January. While the state says the contaminated waste will be moved to a permanent storage site to be built outside of the prefecture, there is little prospect of finding such a permanent site at the moment.
June 17, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Fukushima governor irked over remark

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140617_19.html

Fukushima Governor Yuhei Sato has expressed displeasure over the environment minister's remarks.

Sato told reporters on Tuesday that the comments were made at a time when local people still haven't agreed to host the facilities.

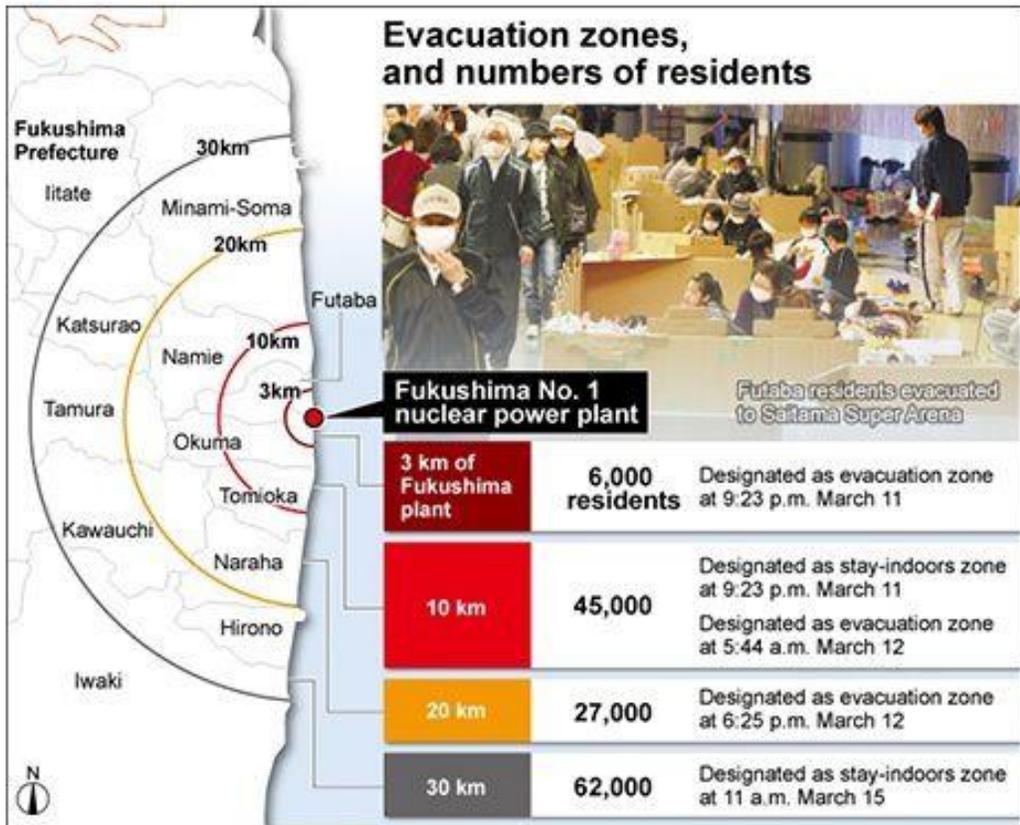
The governor said he wonders whether the minister truly understands how much the people have suffered, having to leave their homes for 3 years and 4 months.

He added he wants to look into the minister's intentions.
Jun. 17, 2014 - Updated 02:52 UTC

Very little information to make crucial decisions

June 17, 2014

Lack of information hampered government's evacuation efforts in Fukushima crisis
<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201406170061>



THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

As the crisis unfurled at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011, the prime minister’s office issued **a series of evacuation orders in reaction to worsening developments without sufficient information and expert knowledge**, according to testimony by a former top government official.

In testimony to the government’s Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations, then Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Tetsuro Fukuyama, who was in charge of evacuating residents, detailed how government officials were forced to issue evacuation orders in a flurry. The Asahi Shimbun recently obtained a copy of his testimony.

“We only had limited information (on the developing nuclear crisis), but made decisions (to issue evacuation orders) with clear objectives for each of the decisions,” Fukuyama said in a recent interview with The Asahi Shimbun.

“Whether we made the right decisions or not at the time will only be judged by history,” the Democratic Party of Japan Upper House member added.

After the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami crippled cooling systems of nuclear reactors at the plant on March 11, 2011, the prime minister's office ordered residents living within a radius of 3 kilometers from the facility to evacuate at 9:23 p.m. that evening.

However, after the failure of a venting system to reduce the pressure in the No. 1 reactor vessel, the government issued an evacuation order for residents living within a 10-km radius at 5:44 a.m. on March 12.

A hydrogen explosion in the No. 1 reactor prompted officials to further expand the evacuation order to cover a 20-km radius from the plant at 6:25 p.m. that day.

Then amid the worsening condition of the No. 2 reactor, the government was forced to order residents living between a 20-km to 30-km radius from the plant to remain indoors at 11 a.m. on March 15.

Asked why the government officials only expanded the evacuation zones in increments, Fukuyama told committee members that it was feared that major traffic jams could ensue if an evacuation order was issued first for residents living away from the plant.

This would have made it difficult for residents living near the plant to promptly evacuate, the lawmaker said.

At the same time, Fukuyama criticized Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant operator, for failing to provide updates from the worsening crisis, saying it was "frustrating." He also acknowledged his lack of knowledge about the nuclear accident.

Asked why the officials did not issue an evacuation order for people living in a radius of 20 km to 30 km from the plant, Fukuyama suggested they instead were ordered to remain indoors as an emergency response, because it was estimated that it could take four to five days to evacuate all the 140,000 residents living within a 30-km radius of the plant.

On March 25, the government finally issued a voluntary evacuation order for residents living in a 20-km to 30-km radius of the plant. Fukuyama's testimony shows that he apologized for the government's decision for forcing residents in the area to wait inside buildings for as long as 10 days.

According to a survey of evacuees conducted by The Asahi Shimbun and a Fukushima University research team led by professor Akira Imai, more than 80 percent of respondents said they believe the government's evacuation orders were inappropriate.

Even though the government expanded evacuation zones in stages, extensive traffic congestion actually blocked evacuation efforts in many areas. The shortage of sufficient accommodation facilities also surfaced as a major problem during the evacuations.

"I cannot confidently say to what extent our evacuation orders properly reached the residents," Fukuyama said.

(This article was compiled from reports by Tomomi Miyazaki and Kyoko Horiuchi.)

A question of money (A blunder?)

June 18, 2014

Environment minister suggests Fukushima residents can be bought

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201406180009

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Environment Minister Nobuteru Ishihara apologized on June 17 for suggesting that payments to residents in Fukushima Prefecture would resolve the problem of selecting a site to temporarily store radiation-contaminated soil.

"I would like to express my heartfelt apology to those who experienced unpleasant emotions due to a comment lacking character that I made," Ishihara said.

That comment came the previous day, after Ishihara reported to Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga on the status of the project to construct the interim storage facility in Okuma and Futaba, both near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"With the conclusion of the explanatory meetings, I talked (with Suga) about the future schedule," Ishihara told reporters June 16. "In the end, it will come down to money. (Suga) did not say anything in particular about the monetary figure (for compensation to local residents) that was presented at the explanatory meetings."

In exchange for hosting the interim storage facility, the central government plans to provide a tax grant to the host municipality and compensation to individuals whose land will be used in the project. The size of the grant and compensation is expected to be a key factor in gaining the consent of the local community.

Under the government's plan, tons of soil removed during decontamination work and currently stored in various locations in Fukushima Prefecture would be transferred to the interim storage facility. That would speed up reconstruction work in locations where the contaminated soil has been removed.

Residents of the candidate sites have been reluctant to host the interim facility, fearing it will end up becoming a permanent fixture in their neighborhood.

Fukushima Governor Yuhei Sato was extremely critical of Ishihara's initial comment.

"The comment had absolutely no thought about the feelings of Fukushima residents toward their hometowns," Sato told reporters on June 17. "As a human, he should never have used the word 'money.' "

Although he apologized for his comment, Ishihara did not retract it on the grounds it was made at an informal gathering with reporters. He also said he could not totally recall what he said.

At the June 17 news conference, Ishihara explained what he was trying to say on the previous day.

"I meant to say that in the end what would be important was presenting the monetary figure to compensate for use of the land, to help rebuild the lives of residents and for the reconstruction of the local community," Ishihara said. "I never said the issue could be resolved through money."

When asked if he planned to apologize to the residents of Fukushima Prefecture, Ishihara only said, "Naturally, I will have many opportunities to visit Fukushima."

See several articles on the same subject at :

<http://fukushima-is-still-news.over-blog.com/article-fukushima-gov-irked-by-money-remark-123925148.html>

What Gov't really thinks of Fukushima

June 18, 2014

Editorial: Ishihara's Fukushima gaffe reflects real feelings of gov't

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140618p2a00m0na023000c.html>

拡大写真

Environment Minister Nobuteru Ishihara's gaffe over a plan to build interim facilities to store soil and other waste contaminated with radioactive substances from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant has rubbed local residents the wrong way. His remarks have called into question whether he is qualified as a politician.

Ishihara came under fire for suggesting on June 16 that "monetary value" would ultimately decide whether local authorities accept the central government's proposal to build interim storage facilities. He made the remarks after he reported the plan on the facility to Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga at the prime minister's office on June 16 -- the day following the latest briefing session for local residents on the plan.

Many local residents apparently took his remarks as reflecting the national government's true intentions to try to persuade local bodies in Fukushima to host such facilities by offering financial grants or compensation. It is only natural that Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato criticized Ishihara's remarks saying, "Does he understand the severity of the nuclear disaster?"

Ishihara later said he never meant that the matter can be settled with money and apologized for upsetting Fukushima residents. However, Ishihara has never attended any of the 16 briefing sessions for local residents on the plan that the national government has held since late May. He should visit Fukushima Prefecture as early as possible to apologize for and thoroughly explain his remarks.

The national government plans to acquire a land lot about 16 square kilometers in size that stands over the Fukushima Prefecture town of Futaba and Okuma to build an interim storage facility. The government aims to begin to shift contaminated soil and other waste, which is currently stored at temporary storage sites, to the new facility in January next year.

However, central government officials provided only a vague explanation in the briefing sessions on the road map toward the final disposal of contaminated soil outside Fukushima Prefecture and the amount of compensation the government will pay to local authorities when it nationalizes the facility. The

explanation hardly won the understanding of local residents. Such being the case, the government is considering establishing a system to provide grants that can be used to help residents restore their livelihoods and make up for losses caused by harmful rumors against local products.

Ishihara explains that he made the controversial remarks to the effect that it would be important to show the specific amounts of money to buy land for the facility as well as funds to cover local residents' efforts to restore their livelihoods and revitalize the local economy.

However, his explanation reminds the public of the traditional political method of providing massive amounts of grants to local governments hosting nuclear plants in efforts to promote atomic power. On the occasion of Okinawa's Nago mayoral race in January this year in which the pros and cons of a plan to relocate the U.S. military's Air Station Futenma to the city was the point of contention, the national government unveiled measures to revitalize the local economy in a bid to increase the chance of the candidate in favor of the relocation winning the election.

However, the national government's attempt ended in failure and the incumbent mayor who is opposed to hosting a substitute facility for Futenma base was re-elected. The idea of offering a massive amount of money in return for hosting burdensome facilities is outdated.

If Ishihara had truly sympathized with local residents who have been suffering from the nuclear crisis, he would not have said the issue could ultimately be settled by "monetary value." One cannot help but wonder if he ever learned any lessons from another gaffe he had made about the nuclear crisis when he was serving as secretary-general of the now ruling Liberal Democratic Party. At that time, Ishihara compared the crippled atomic power station to a facility of the AUM Shinrikyo cult that carried out deadly nerve gas attacks, using the word, "Satyam," and was later pressed to explain what he really meant by that.

Some people are reportedly searching for their children who went missing after being hit by the tsunami in 2011 near the proposed site for the interim storage facility. The construction of the facility could lead to the loss of land where local residents were born and raised.

Negotiations on the construction of the interim storage facility will never progress unless the national government sincerely listens to what local residents have to say and win their trust.
June 18, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Censure motion submitted against Ishihara

June 20, 2014

Opposition parties submit censure motion against minister Ishihara

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140619p2g00m0dm073000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Opposition parties submitted a censure motion against Environment Minister Nobuteru Ishihara for his controversial remarks on the issue of where to store nuclear-contaminated soil from crisis-hit Fukushima.

The parties including the biggest opposition Democratic Party of Japan submitted the motion to the House of Councillors, declaring the minister's apologies and retraction of the comments earlier in the day insufficient.

In a parliamentary session on the day, Ishihara retracted his remarks that suggested money would ultimately decide whether local authorities accept a proposal to build facilities to store soil contaminated with radiation after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster.

"I retract my comments and apologize for causing misunderstanding" as the remarks were not made in a dignified manner, Ishihara said.

But he made clear he had no intention of resigning, saying he wanted to fulfill his responsibilities as minister.

Ishihara said he will go to Fukushima to offer apologies there shortly after the current Diet session ends on Sunday.

He initially refused to retract them, as the remarks were made at an informal session with reporters, not at a formal news conference.

But he changed his stance under mounting pressure from opposition parties.

Following the joint action by the opposition parties in the upper house, they plan to submit a no-confidence motion against Ishihara to the House of Representatives on Friday.

Commenting on the censure motion on Thursday, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said at a press conference it will be rejected "without making a fuss."

Both motions are expected to be voted down as the two houses are controlled by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and its coalition partner the New Komeito party.

June 19, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Ishihara apologizes

June 23, 2014

Chastened Ishihara apologizes to Fukushima mayors, governor for 'money' remark

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201406230055>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Embattled Environment Minister Nobuteru Ishihara visited Fukushima Prefecture on June 23 to personally apologize for suggesting last week that buying off locals will pave the way for securing a site to temporarily store radiation-contaminated soil.

Ishihara apologized to prefectural Governor Yuhei Sato and the mayors of Okuma and Futaba, both candidate locations for an intermediate storage facility.

"I would like to deeply apologize for my remarks," Ishihara told Okuma Mayor Toshitsuna Watanabe. "I have caused you much trouble."

Ishihara bowed deeply, together with Shinji Inoue, a senior vice minister, and Parliamentary Vice Minister Tomoko Ukishima, who joined the trip. The meeting was held at Okuma's temporary town hall, set up in Aizu-Wakamatsu.

"It's a fact that our townspeople were not pleased by your remarks, but I will deeply accept your apology you have made in person, in which you have taken responsibility," Watanabe said.

On June 16, Ishihara told reporters after a meeting to update Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga on the progress of selecting a site for temporary storage facilities of the soil contaminated in the Fukushima nuclear crisis, "In the end, it will come down to money."

The government has run into difficulties in finding candidate sites, as many residents near the prospective locations have not been persuaded to have such facilities erected in their hometowns.

Ishihara withdrew his statement three days later, but the controversy lingered, as his words left the impression that he believed only throwing enough money at residents in Fukushima Prefecture would resolve the issue.

"Ishihara's words failed to take into consideration the feelings that Fukushima residents have toward their homeland," Sato said on June 17.

The environment minister's statement is sure to cast a shadow over the decision-making by Fukushima residents in accepting the construction of the facility.

When asked about the effect of Ishihara's remarks on the securing of storage sites, Watanabe replied, "It has already been three years (since the nuclear accident) and further delays in the reconstruction process cannot be allowed."

(This article was written by Teru Okumura and Yoshitaka Ito.)

Minister apologizes for remark on Fukushima nuclear soil storage

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140623p2g00m0dm027000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Environment Minister Nobuteru Ishihara apologized Monday for a remark suggesting the issue of where to store contaminated soil from the disaster-hit Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant was a matter of money.

Ishihara made the apology to Toshitsuna Watanabe, the mayor of the town of Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, one of the candidate sites for the construction of temporary storage facilities for the waste.

On June 16, Ishihara told reporters that protracted negotiations between the central and local governments would ultimately be settled by the "monetary value" of accepting interim storage facilities, such as grants to local authorities hosting them.

He suggested that money would ultimately decide whether local authorities accept the central government's proposal for building facilities in the prefecture to store contaminated soil after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster.

Watanabe told Ishihara in Monday's meeting that many residents of the town were hurt by his remark but that the town would accept his apology, noting that the minister came to Fukushima Prefecture to apologize.

The meeting between the minister and the mayor was held in the city of Aizuwakamatsu in the same prefecture, where the town government has established a temporary municipal government office as residents remain evacuated since the Fukushima Daiichi disaster.

Later on Monday, Ishihara is scheduled to meet with the mayor of Futaba, Shiro Izawa, in the city of Iwaki, also in Fukushima Prefecture, and Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato in the prefectural government office in the prefectural capital Fukushima City. Futaba is another candidate site for the temporary storage facilities.

After Ishihara made the remark, Gov. Sato criticized the minister, saying his comments damaged residents' feelings about their hometowns.

Following the criticism, Ishihara apologized during a news conference Tuesday last week and retracted his comment during a session Thursday of the House of Councillors Environment Committee.

June 23, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Minister apologizes for nuclear comment

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140623_32.html

Japan's Environment Minister has apologized to Fukushima officials for saying money will determine whether towns in the prefecture agree to store nuclear waste.

Nobuteru Ishihara retracted the comment at a Diet committee.

He was referring to the plan to build medium-term facilities for storing radioactive waste from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident.

The government is awaiting approval from the towns of Okuma and Futaba to locate the facilities there.

Ishihara separately met with the mayors of Okuma and Futaba as well as Prefectural Governor Yuhei Sato on Monday.

In his meeting with Sato, the minister offered what he called a heartfelt apology to the people of

Fukushima. Ishihara said he deeply regretted his remark.

Governor Sato asked Ishihara to show compassion to residents and quickly respond to their additional requests concerning the building of facilities.

The government wants to obtain approval from the 2 towns and Fukushima prefecture for the construction of the facilities as soon as possible. It hopes to begin sending radioactive waste to facilities there starting in January.

Jun. 23, 2014 - Updated 10:08 UTC

Minister apologizes for nuclear storage comment

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140623_17.html

Japan's environment minister has apologized to a Fukushima mayor for saying money will determine whether towns in the prefecture agree to store nuclear waste.

Nobuteru Ishihara retracted the comment at a Diet committee.

He was referring to the plan to build medium-term facilities for storing radioactive waste from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident.

The government is awaiting approval from the towns of Okuma and Futaba to locate the facilities there.

Ishihara met with Okuma Mayor Toshitsuna Watanabe on Monday. He said he had not meant to imply that money could resolve the issue.

The minister offered what he called a heartfelt apology to local residents. He said the facilities are essential to rebuilding the areas affected by the nuclear accident.

The mayor said the minister's remarks offended many people. But he accepted the apology, calling it a significant move to set things right, and he asked Ishihara to show compassion.

Jun. 23, 2014 - Updated 04:48 UTC

Ishihara to apologize for money comment

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140622_18.html

Japan's environment minister will visit Fukushima Prefecture to apologize for the controversial remarks he made about the planned construction of facilities to store contaminated soil.

Ishihara suggested last Monday that payments to local authorities would ultimately settle the issue of where to store the contaminated soil that accumulated after the nuclear accident in 2011.

He apologized and retracted the remarks during an Upper House committee session on Thursday.

Ishihara will visit Fukushima Prefecture on Monday to apologize to Governor Yuhei Sato and the mayors of Futaba and Okuma, the 2 towns where the government plans to build intermediate storage facilities.

Sato and other officials criticized Ishihara's comments, saying they ignored the feelings of the people of Fukushima.

The government is aiming to build the storage facilities with the agreement of the prefecture and the towns, and will start bringing in contaminated soil in January.

Jun. 23, 2014 - Updated 00:17 UTC

Can't afford to be against nukes

June 24, 2014

Pro-nuclear deputy mayor wins Rokkasho mayoral race

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140624p2a00m0na007000c.html>

ROKKASHO, Aomori -- The pro-nuclear deputy mayor won the mayoral election in this village on June 22, in a sweeping victory over opponents advocating against the nuclear fuel cycle program in the area.

The mayoral election was the first to be called in the village since the outbreak of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster in Fukushima Prefecture in March 2011.

Mamoru Toda, 67, won the mayoral race after garnering 95 percent of the vote -- or 5,144 votes -- with the backing of former Mayor Kenji Furukawa and all 18 members of the village assembly. Toda beat three other candidates who are opposed to the area's nuclear fuel cycle program, with the latter three gaining a mere 270 votes altogether. The voter turnout was 62.94 percent.

Behind the election results lies the fact that the nuclear fuel cycle program brings in massive amounts of subsidies and employment to the village. "If you are against the nuclear fuel cycle program, you won't make a living here," said one villager.

"The reason for my victory is that I advocated for coexistence, co-prosperity and promotion of the nuclear fuel cycle program, which won villagers' sympathy," Toda told reporters on the evening of June 22.

The Rokkasho Municipal Government and the Aomori Prefectural Government accepted to host the nuclear fuel cycle program in 1985. Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd. began trial operations at a spent nuclear fuel reprocessing plant in 2004, but there are no prospects for the plant to be fully operational anytime soon. Up until fiscal 2011, the village had received some 42.3 billion yen in grants under the three power source development laws, after such subsidies fully started in fiscal 1988.

In the 1990s, a mayor called for freezing the nuclear fuel cycle program but the project went ahead regardless. Ryoichi Kimura, professor emeritus at Aomori Chuo Gakuin University, who was involved in the compilation of the village history of Rokkasho, said, "All these twists and turns have left only a handful of opponents (to the nuclear fuel cycle program)." In fact, the number of votes cast for candidates against the nuclear fuel cycle program stood at somewhere between 77 and 374 in the past five elections.

In a survey by the Mainichi Shimbun on June 22, which covered 100 voters at polling stations, 94 of them had voted for Toda. However, only 41 of them said they think the nuclear fuel cycle program is "safe."

A farmer who worked for Toda's camp confessed, "I'm actually opposed (to the nuclear fuel cycle program). It brings nothing good for us. But if we remain against it, we won't be able to make ends meet."

Keiko Kikukawa, 65, who ran in the mayoral race calling for a village without a nuclear fuel cycle program, pointed out the realities faced by the village. "Young people here either leave this village or work in nuclear power-related businesses."

Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd. and its subsidiaries hire a total of some 5,600 employees in Aomori Prefecture. Many of them are believed to live in Rokkasho, exerting an overwhelming presence in the village that has less than 9,000 eligible voters.

June 24, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

TEPCO "returning to its former arrogant ways"

June 26, 2014

Source : Bloomberg

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-06-26/tepcu-faces-down-protest-to-press-ahead-with-atomic-restarts.html>

Tepco Faces Down Protest to Press Ahead With Atomic Restarts

By Jacob Adelman and Emi Urabe Jun 26, 2014 6:58 AM GMT+0200

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (9501) pledged to restart reactors at the world's largest atomic plant, rejecting a bid by anti-nuclear shareholders to scrap the units over safety concerns after the 2011 Fukushima disaster.

The company's annual general meeting voted down motions advanced by Greenpeace and other activist groups holding Tokyo Electric shares to decommission the reactors and to revise the company's recovery plan to exclude nuclear power.

The vote comes as Tokyo Electric, or Tepco, pursues a turnaround strategy that hinges on cutting fossil fuel costs by resuming two units at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in northwest Japan. Nuclear restarts anywhere in Japan are opposed by 59 percent of those who responded to a poll in March by the Asahi newspaper.

Tepco's board had recommended shareholders reject the measures, arguing the reactors provide an important source of baseload power without which the company can't meet customers' needs.

"We want shareholders to stand on our side, not the irresponsible company's side," Greenpeace campaigner Hisayo Takada said at a rally before the meeting, where activists held banners reading "No nuclear restarts!" and Tepco staff blocked entry to protesters in white-hooded protective coveralls and face masks.

Turnaround Plan

The proposals were among 10 motions advanced by the consortium of anti-nuclear groups calling itself the Nuclear Phaseout Tepco Shareholder's Movement. Others included the appointment of nuclear opponents to Tepco's board, a halt to the construction of two reactors at the Higashidori plant in northern Japan and the improvement of working conditions at nuclear stations. All were rejected.

Tepco won support from the government and its biggest lenders in January for its plan to recover financially from the Fukushima disaster, which assumes the restart of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa units in Niigata prefecture.

Banks, insurance companies and investment firms own more than 70 percent of Tepco's shares, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. Those majority shareholders would be expected to resist any effort to keep Tepco's nuclear plants shut, since many have also lent the company money under the expectation of a restart, Tom O'Sullivan, the founder of Tokyo-based energy consultant Mathyos, said before the vote.

Bank Support

“There’s no way those guys are going to be voting for that,” he said. “The bank support is predicated on them restarting Kashiwazaki.”

Japan spent 27.4 trillion yen (\$269 billion) on fossil fuels in 2013, up 50 percent from 18.1 trillion yen the year before the Fukushima disaster, according to Trade Ministry data.

About 160,000 people were forced to evacuate because of radiation fallout after the Fukushima accident, leaving Tepco with billions of dollars in compensation and cleanup costs that brought it to the brink of insolvency.

Tepco returned to operating profit last fiscal year, following two years of losses, after raising electricity rates and putting off maintenance at some of its plants

All of Japan’s 48 operable commercial reactors are idled for safety assessments after the accident at the Fukushima plant. Tepco applied for safety checks required for the two restarts at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in September.

Japan’s Nuclear Regulation Authority said its inspections at the two units would be delayed due to the lack of qualified personnel, the Sankei newspaper reported this month.

Safety Fears

The Kashiwazaki-Kariwa reactors are among seven units that will never be restarted due to local opposition and safety fears, Raymond James & Associates said in a June 19 research note. The governor of Niigata prefecture, who has a say in whether the units can resume, has criticized Tepco’s safety record.

The only reactors likely to start this year are the two units at Kyushu Electric Power Co.’s Sendai plant in southern Japan, according to Raymond James. The NRA said in March that it would prioritize those units for safety checks.

The consortium of anti-nuclear groups at today’s meeting possessed more than the 300 shares needed to propose motions, according to Tepco’s meeting announcement.

Greenpeace holds the minimum number of shares to vote on proposals, spokeswoman Ai Kashiwagi said. That minimum is 100, Tepco spokeswoman Mayumi Yoshida said. Tepco had an average of 1.6 billion shares of common stock outstanding during the year ended March 31, according to its annual report.

The only item approved was the appointment of Tepco's 11 directors. Tepco said 2,150 shareholders attended the meeting, which lasted for 3 hours and 23 minutes, at the Tokyo International Forum. Last year's meeting saw 2,090 attendees.

To contact the reporters on this story: Jacob Adelman in Tokyo at jadelman1@bloomberg.net; Emi Urabe in Tokyo at eurabe@bloomberg.net

Japan's utilities reject anti-nuclear demands from shareholders

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201406260062>

By KATSUHEI KAWAMURA/ Staff Writer

All nine electric power companies that operate nuclear plants rejected shareholders' proposals to close down the facilities, citing new safety measures and the need to quickly restart their reactors.

It was the first time anti-nuclear proposals were presented to all nine companies at their shareholders' meetings. Hokuriku Electric Power Co. had until now received no such request.

However, passing such changes requires support representing at least two-thirds of votes from shareholders who took part in the meetings. Large shareholders, such as banks, voted against the proposals.

The utilities all held their annual shareholders' meetings on June 26.

During Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s meeting in the Marunouchi district of the capital, Yui Kimura, 61, a leading member of the Nuclear Phase-out TEPCO Shareholders Movement, demanded the company appoint three well-known anti-nuclear experts as its directors.

"TEPCO is a company that is surviving with taxpayers' money," she said. "It is urgent for the firm to choose directors who can push through in-house reforms."

Kimura also noted that three years have passed since the accident at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"I suspect that TEPCO is returning to its former arrogant ways," she said.

The three names she submitted were: Shigeaki Koga, 58, a former industry ministry bureaucrat; Hiroyuki Kawai, 70, a lawyer representing plaintiffs seeking a nuclear-free Japan; and Tetsunari Iida, 55, director of the Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies.

“Those supporting the promotion of nuclear power generation have grown stronger by overcoming objections (to atomic energy) and by improving their systems (for nuclear power generation),” Koga said. “Anti-nuclear people will be unable to counter them unless they present new ideas, such as showing how economic conditions and livelihoods will improve through the promotion of renewable energies.”

TEPCO President Naomi Hirose said at the meeting that the utility is currently preparing to restart idled reactors at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture.

“We are promoting safety measures, such as construction of sea walls,” Hirose said.

Michiaki Uriu, president of Kyushu Electric Power Co., noted progress in the Nuclear Regulation Authority’s safety screening of two offline reactors at the Sendai nuclear power plant in Kagoshima Prefecture.

“We will make the utmost effort to pass the screening to restart the reactors as early as possible,” he said.

Hokkaido Electric Power Co. is facing financial difficulties due to the suspension of operations at its sole nuclear power plant.

“In the not-so-distant future, we will decide to apply for another hike in electricity bills,” said Katsuhiko Kawai, president of Hokkaido Electric.

TEPCO ignores some of its shareholders

June 26, 2014

Tepco shrugs off activist investors



Beleaguered utility swamped by anti-nuclear proposals at annual shareholders' meeting

by Kazuaki Nagata

Tokyo Electric Power Co. shot down a bevy of anti-nuclear policy proposals lobbed up by irate shareholders at its annual meeting Thursday in Tokyo and vowed instead to restart its idled reactors.

Some 2,150 shareholders attended the meeting in Chiyoda Ward.

Outside, anti-nuclear activists from Greenpeace held a rally, calling on Tepco to adequately compensate victims of the radiation leaked by its meltdown-hit Fukushima No. 1 plant and phase out nuclear energy. Decked out in radiation suits and masks, they held aloft signs that read, "Pay victims, no restart."

Some shareholders proposed that Tepco abandon nuclear power.

One urged Tepco to revise its 10-year business plan, approved in January, to eliminate reactor restarts.

He also questioned the value of restarting reactors 6 and 7 at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata Prefecture, which is a critical part of the utility's plans.

"Restarting the two reactors will only add just 2.71 million kw of power. . . . Our firm had more than 59 million kw of capacity at the peak of last summer and was able to easily provide power without nuclear power," the shareholder said.

He called on the utility to turn to energy-efficient, state-of-the-art thermal power plants, which release less carbon dioxide.

Citing the number of faults running under it, another shareholder urged Tepco to shutter the giant Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant.

Other proposals included halting construction of the Higashidori plant in Aomori Prefecture, to be jointly operated with Tohoku Electric, and ending investment in Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd., which runs a reprocessing plant in Aomori.

But these proposals were all rejected at the meeting.

Individual shareholders also spoke up for anti-nuclear policies during the question-and-answer session.

"Why doesn't Tepco management flat out say that nuclear power won't make a profit," said one shareholder. "I am really wondering about that. Everyone knows that Tepco has gone down because of nuclear power . . . so it won't do any good to the company if it keeps relying on nuclear power."

Tepco President Naomi Hirose said the utility's mission is to provide a stable power supply to customers as cheaply as possible. Without nuclear power, the utility has to rely on thermal power, which pushes up electricity prices due to the increasing costs of importing fuel to run the plants.

None of Japan's 48 commercial reactors has passed the review needed to restart operations in the wake of the Fukushima accident. All remain offline.

Power companies hold shareholders' meetings

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140626_35.html

Proposals to scrap nuclear reactors have been rejected at shareholders meetings of 9 major power companies in Japan.

The firms held the annual meetings on Thursday.

Shareholders of Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, said it's responsible for the Fukushima nuclear accident, and that restarting reactors that are now offline is outrageous. Shareholders also proposed scrapping nuclear reactors.

TEPCO executives responded that nuclear power is an important part of the nation's basic energy plan.

At the meeting of Kyushu Electric Power Company, shareholders proposed scrapping reactors at the Sendai plant in Kagoshima.

Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority has prioritized a safety screening process for the plant.

Kyushu Electric executives said the company will do its best to improve the plant's safety, and focus on passing the screening.

Shareholders of Kansai Electric Power Company submitted proposals to scrap all of its nuclear plants.

A local district court last month ordered Kansai Electric not to resume operations of two reactors, citing a lack of safety measures.

Jun. 26, 2014 - Updated 09:30 UTC

TEPCO shareholders reject anti-nuclear proposals

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140626_32.html

The operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has apologized to shareholders about problems involving radioactive wastewater there.

More than 2,100 shareholders of the Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, attended their annual meeting in Tokyo on Thursday.

Chairman Fumio Sudo said competition in the electric power industry will become fierce as reform of its structure proceeds. Sudo said the firm will work to fulfill its responsibility to pay damages caused by the nuclear accident at the plant, decommissioning reactors there, and rebuilding Fukushima Prefecture. He said to do this, the company aims to improve its corporate value by drastically changing its management style and business models.

President Naomi Hirose apologized to the people of Fukushima and large parts of society for causing trouble and anxiety over the contaminated water problems.

Some shareholders said it's outrageous that the company responsible for the accident aims to restart reactors that are offline. Others said the firm must not make the same mistake at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture.

TEPCO executives responded that nuclear power is an important part of the nation's basic energy plan.

The meeting rejected all 10 proposals by shareholders including those calling for abolishing the

Kashiwazaki-Kariwa and Fukushima Daini nuclear power plants. All proposals submitted by TEPCO's management were approved.

Jun. 26, 2014 - Updated 08:49 UTC

Nuclear renaissance ignores risks and public opposition

June 28, 2014

Abe's nuclear renaissance ignores stiff opposition

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/06/28/commentary/abes-nuclear-renaissance-ignores-stiff-opposition/#.U68FGbHi91s>

by Jeff Kingston
Special To The Japan Times

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's nuclear renaissance involves downplaying risks, restarting reactors, building new ones, and exporting reactor technology and equipment. A number of hurdles remain before he can rev up the reactors, but the summer of 2014 will probably be Japan's last nuclear-free one for decades to come.

On April 11, 2014, Abe's Cabinet approved a new national energy strategy that embraces nuclear power. This is not surprising given that Abe has vigorously promoted bringing idled reactors back online and is pitchman-in-chief for exports of nuclear technology and equipment. The new plan also opens the door to new reactor construction.

Abe's nuclear renaissance has become complicated, however, following the revelation in May 2014 that the government and the Tokyo Electric Power Co. had been hiding the fact that almost all workers and managers at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant bolted the scene and abandoned their posts on the morning of March 15, 2011, as the crisis seemed to be spiraling out of control. Instead of remaining on the plant site as ordered, most workers fled to the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear plant 10 km to the south. While such actions are understandable, the mass exodus raises the question of whether nuclear reactors can be operated safely if those responsible for conducting emergency operations cannot be relied on to carry out their duties.

Doubts about the Nuclear Regulatory Authority's safety reviews are also gathering as the shambolic decommissioning operations at Fukushima undermine its credibility. Why did the NRA allow Tepco to cut corners and compromise safety, leading to extensive radioactive contamination of groundwater now seeping into the ocean? Reports of problems with malfunctioning decontamination equipment, leaky

storage tanks for contaminated water and worker error are emblematic of the endless bungling. Why is Tepco, an exceptionally incompetent institution, being entrusted with such a crucial task?

The NRA's failure to adequately monitor the cleanup raises questions about whether it has the capacity to oversee strict enforcement of new safety guidelines and institutionalize a culture of safety.

"We are not assuming that an accident the operator cannot control will take place," NRA Chairman Tanaka explains, justifying reliance on the nuclear plant operator to manage a nuclear accident. In light of revelations, however, that is not a reassuring assumption.

The prospects for restarts got a shot in the arm when Abe nominated a pronuclear advocate with financial ties to the nuclear industry to become an NRA commissioner. This blatant political meddling damages the already threadbare credibility of the safety review process.

Evacuation zones have been expanded from a 10-km to a 30-km radius around nuclear plants, involving millions more residents and exponentially increasing logistical difficulties, but local authorities and utilities remain woefully unprepared. A March 2014 survey found that authorities in only six of the 16 nuclear plant evacuation zones have prepared the required evacuation plans. Are these existing evacuation plans plausible in a crisis or just paper exercises enabling hosting communities to check off the requisite box?

Chubu Electric simulated an evacuation of the 860,000 residents living within 30 km of the Hamaoka plant that revealed how difficult this would be in an actual emergency, taking so much time in traffic jams (from 32 to 46 hours) that those fleeing an accident would be subject to significant radiation exposure. Simulations conducted in Shimane and Kyushu reported similar snafus.

The evacuation preparedness problem won't go away and an improvised exodus means mayhem. **It is therefore alarming that none of the clusters of towns in any of the designated evacuation zones around the nation's nuclear plants has conducted a live evacuation drill.**

The NRA is reviewing applications to restart 19 nuclear reactors.

The safety screenings involve confirming that they meet new stricter safety standards, but Niigata Gov. Hirohiko Izumida warns that this doesn't mean they are safe to operate. He points out that local authorities are not able to cope with cascading simultaneous disasters as occurred in 2011, a risk the new guidelines do not address.

Perhaps this explains why **a recent Asahi poll finds continued high public opposition to nuclear energy: 77 percent of respondents favor phasing out nuclear energy, while only 14 percent oppose such a policy.**

Are the potential dangers of hosting a reactor an acceptable risk given the alternative of economic decline and depopulation? Many communities in remote coastal areas where Japan's fleet of reactors are sited are grappling with this calculus. Until now the Aomori Prefecture fishing port of Oma has been famous for its bluefin tuna catches, but that is changing due to the town's decision to host a nuclear power plant. Just across the Tsugaru Strait from Oma, the city of Hakodate, Hokkaido, filed a lawsuit earlier this year against the central government and the utility to block construction of the Oma mixed-oxide fuel (MOX) reactor. This is the first lawsuit in Japan of its kind in which a local government is the plaintiff seeking an injunction against building a nuclear plant. The two towns are separated by about 23 km of water, meaning that part of Hakodate, which has a population of 275,000, falls within the newly extended 30-km evacuation zone. The mayor of Hakodate complains that he is being asked to prepare an evacuation plan without adequate information and asserts that the lessons of Fukushima are being ignored as government support for nuclear energy does not include adequate assistance for disaster management, outsourcing it to local communities that lack sufficient capacity.

The possibility of legal entanglements casts a shadow over Abe's nuclear renaissance as local governments and citizens groups mount challenges that could delay restarts and new plant construction. Indeed, in May 2014, the Fukui district court ruled against Kansai Electric Power Co. (Kepco) in a lawsuit filed by citizens who oppose the restart of the utility's Oi reactors. The judge rejected Kepco's claims that the reactors could be operated safely and asserted that the intrinsic dangers of nuclear reactors combined with the unpredictability of earthquakes endanger the fundamental constitutional rights of citizens.

This establishes a precedent that could influence 16 similar cases in the judicial pipeline, but Kepco is appealing the ruling and Abe's spokesperson shrugged it off, insisting that it would have no influence on safety evaluations. His aplomb is understandable as Japan's higher courts are reliably submissive in nuclear energy lawsuits.

Maybe this is why the government rules out a national referendum on nuclear energy because citizens are not so predictably compliant and oppose the vested interests Abe represents

Jeff Kingston is the director of Asian Studies, Temple University Japan.

Collection of testimonies for future generations

June 29, 2014

Fukushima evacuee collects memories of those who can never return

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201406290007



Hidenori Konno, second from right, shows his collection of testimonies on April 9 in Motomiya, Fukushima Prefecture. They were provided by some of those who were forced to flee their homes due to the March 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The other four people are, from right, Yoshimi Saito, Kazuko Konno, Yoichi Konno and Taka Saito. (Mikio Kano)

By MIKIO KANO/ Staff Writer

MOTOMIYA, Fukushima Prefecture--A retired social welfare official who was forced to flee his home in the Tsushima district of the town of Namie after the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has found a new mission in life, to record the thoughts of those who once lived there and knew it in happier times.

Hidenori Konno, 66, who lived in the peaceful rural area northwest of the plant, can never return to his hometown because the area is designated a difficult-to-return zone by the government.

After the nuclear accident, triggered by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, Konno, a former official of the Fukushima Ward Council on Social Welfare, evacuated to Motomiya, also in Fukushima Prefecture, where he now lives. It was there that he came up with the idea.

“Though there is no prospect for returning, I wanted to preserve the memories of the people who lived there (for future generations).” So he began to visit elderly people in May 2013 to interview them.

He compiled his “collection of testimonies” by interviewing 16 former residents of the area, all of them aged 70 years or older. That collection eventually became a book titled, “3/11 Aru Hisaichi no Kiroku” (March 11, Records of one affected area).

The Tsushima district is located in a mountainous area about 20 to 30 kilometers from the plant. At the time of the nuclear accident, a total of 1,459 people lived there.

The people there made their living by cultivating fruit such as apples and pears, raising domestic livestock and growing rice. Even if they did not lay pipes for tap water, they were able to secure water through digging wells.

The residents also harvested wild vegetables in the mountains. During the rice-planting season, they practiced the time-honored tradition of “Tae-odori” (the rice-planting dance), passed on by their forefathers.

The people of Tsushima were close to nature, and the bond among those who lived in the area was strong. In compiling his collection, Konno visited not only evacuees living in Fukushima but also those who moved to other prefectures such as Saitama and Ibaraki.

Many of the farmers in the Tsushima district were returnees forced to flee Manchuria at the end of World War II. Japan ruled the area in northeastern China from the early 1930s to 1945. In Manchuria, many were engaged in agriculture despite the extremely cold weather. After the war, they settled in the Tsushima district and engaged in farming once again where they also suffered poor living conditions. Konno included that history in his collection, as well.

DAIRY FARMER FORCED TO KILL CATTLE

The book also describes the degree of suffering that interviewees were forced to endure as a result of the nuclear accident. For example, one dairy farmer was forced to kill his cows because there was no one who

would take care of them. Another man said that he moved from one evacuation center to another seven times with his wife who was wheelchair bound. She had lost her leg in an agricultural accident involving machinery.

However, all of the 16 evacuees had a strong desire to someday return to live in their homes in the district.

One was Yoichi Konno, 73, who has suffered from a kidney disease for more than 30 years. Because of his illness, he was unable to properly work. Therefore, he often spent his time at his hobby--gardening. He also built five fish ponds where he kept carp, goldfish and rainbow trout, which his neighbors enjoyed.

Since the nuclear accident, he has returned to his house several times when allowed to do so. His fish ponds now lie empty. The birds have since eaten all of his fish.

Before the nuclear accident, he also received dialysis treatment three times a week. Immediately after the disaster, however, due to crowded conditions at hospitals that provided the service, he could only get treatment twice a week. The time per treatment was also reduced by one hour. Due to the decrease in his treatments, his health took a turn for the worse. One time at his eldest daughter's house in Sukagawa, Fukushima Prefecture, where he lived at the time, he was so sick that an ambulance was called to take him to hospital.

At present, he is living with his wife, Kazuko, 69, in a temporary housing facility in Nihonmatsu, also in the prefecture. Sometime this summer, they will move to a new house that is being built next to their eldest daughter's house.

Still, Yoichi Konno says, "The scenery (of the Tsushima district) from the land I was born in remains fixed in my head. I want to live there again, even if the radiation levels remain high."

SUFFERING FROM CANCER

Meanwhile, farmer Yoshimi Saito and his wife, Taka, both 83, have been living in a temporary housing facility in Nihonmatsu since September 2011. The facility is the fifth one they have lived in since they evacuated.

Before the nuclear accident, Yoshimi was healthy and had never been hospitalized. However, it was while he was moving from evacuation center to evacuation center that doctors discovered he was suffering from prostate cancer.

Their children proposed they move in with one of them. However, Taka said with a sigh, “We have much baggage. In addition, my husband is suffering from a disease. It is hard to move again.”

Yoshimi also said, “I don’t know whether I can return (to the Tsushima district) while I am alive. But I hope that people from my grandchildren’s generation will be able to return someday.”

see also :

More evacuees getting new homes

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140626_05.html

An NHK survey suggests that more and more evacuees are settling down permanently away from their hometowns over 3 years after the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Residents of evacuation zones are entitled to tax reductions if they acquire a new house or land while they have to live elsewhere.

NHK has learned that the tax reduction was given to nearly 1,400 applicants during the fiscal year that ended in March.

That was more than twice the number of cases in the previous year.

About 17,500 households were registered in the high-radiation evacuation zones as of April.

Can mangas avoid politics?

June 29, 2014

Comic books champion debate on Fukushima disaster

Cartoonists broach sensitive topics ignored by media but avoid politics

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/06/29/national/social-issues/comic-books-champion-debate-fukushima-disaster/#.U7ENqrHi91s>

by Elaine Lies
Reuters

Farmers in Fukushima try to convince skeptical visitors that their crops are safe from radiation. Blood trickles from the nose of a reporter who visits the area.

These are two story lines found in manga — those ubiquitous comics for adults and teens — that have taken up Fukushima on an unprecedented scale even as Japanese film largely avoids the topic.

“Ichi Efu,” which centers on workers at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, has sold 170,000 copies in book form in nearly two months, a rare success for a debut manga. Another comic book set off a furor that sparked angry responses from the government, including Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

As the world’s worst nuclear accident in 25 years fades from the public spotlight in Japan, publishers say they hope manga will spark debate about uncomfortable topics such as the health impact of the accident, which released radiation over a wide swath of the northeast.

In contrast to the more than 30 manga published since the disaster, there has been only one mass-market film to date on Fukushima — “Homeland,” released in March. Its director was careful to emphasize the human story over any political statements during publicity tours.

The nuclear disaster, set off by a tsunami that tore through the poorly protected Fukushima No. 1 plant and touched off meltdowns, remains a sensitive subject in Japan, especially since roughly 150,000 people still remain in temporary housing and may never go home again.

“Movies take a lot of money and backers tend to flinch away from this topic. . . . Manga are a lot more independent and can go where even news programs might hesitate,” said Kenichiro Shinohara, an editor at popular “Morning,” the manga weekly in which “Ichi Efu” is also published.

There are several hundred manga published each year, ranging from cute to violent and pornographic, in magazine and book form. Most are pure entertainment, but others take up samurai-era history, business strategy or World War II — most notably “Barefoot Gen,” a popular manga about the atomic bombing of Hiroshima that stirred a censorship controversy last year.

The popular media form — more than 10 million copies of manga magazines are sold annually — is afforded unrivaled freedom. This month, a law was passed to ban the possession of child pornography, but

pornographic manga featuring children was excluded after publishers and opposition lawmakers said it could limit free speech.

Fukushima manga run the gamut from “Sobamon,” which promotes the safety of Fukushima produce, to the overtly anti-nuclear “Fighting the Nuclear Demon.” At least one is set in the future.

“Manga are easier to follow than serious journalism or reportage, and of course there is some entertainment value, which makes them easier to pick up,” said Kazuma Yoshimura, head of the Manga Research Center at Kyoto’s Seika University.

“Most disasters have an end point, but the nuclear problem is ongoing. The special aspects of manga, like looking toward the future and fiction, allow tackling the subject on a different level.”

Though manga began trickling out shortly after the disaster took place, it was not until April that most of the nation became aware of them, thanks to a food-related title called “Oishinbo” (The Gourmet) and a series on Fukushima food safety.

In it, several characters suffered nosebleeds they blamed on radiation exposure — a situation that medical experts say is highly unlikely but something they have not ruled out. The manga also said the area would be unlivable for years.

This unleashed a flood of angry comments from Fukushima residents to Abe and other Cabinet ministers, who called for people to use “correct” information, in turn setting off discussions about free speech and government cover-ups.

“Of course manga are written so they’re easy to understand in one glance, which does make it possible for things to be taken wrong and rumors to be born,” Yoshimura said.

The editor of the manga apologized for some of the wording choices but remained unrepentant about running it, citing fading interest in Fukushima and the need for more discussion about the issue.

“In addition, people still aren’t really settled in what they think about Fukushima,” said Kaoru Endo, a sociology professor at Tokyo’s Gakushuin University. “They remain uneasy because they feel that . . . a lot hasn’t yet been revealed.”

· Among the most talked about is “Ichi Efu,” which is drawn by Kazuto Tatsuta (a pseudonym), who worked in the plant himself for roughly a year.

The manga, whose title is the insiders' name for the plant, is drawn in realistic detail and details the life of the workers. It touches on shady hiring practices, the trials of working in anti-radiation gear and getting an itchy nose or needing to use the toilet.

Shinohara, the "Morning" magazine editor, said they took care to ensure the manga did not stray into any sort of political stance. Even so, some other magazines have refused to run advertisements for "Ichi Efu."

"A lot of people have said that it lacks drama, but I think that just showing life at the plant is scary enough — by showing that this kind of workplace has gone on long enough to be normal," he said. "Having somebody collapse is kind of cliché."

Feed-in-tariff risks and drawbacks

June 30, 2014

Editorial: Gov't should adjust proliferation of feed-in-tariff system, burden on consumers

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140630p2a00m0na013000c.html>

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry has come under pressure to achieve a balance between the proliferation of renewable energy and the burden on consumers as the ministry is set to review the so-called feed-in-tariff (FIT) system, under which power companies are required to buy electricity generated by such energy at fixed prices.

The ministry has decided to review the FIT system amid growing concerns that the scheme could cause electric power charges to rise and dampen the economy. How to achieve a balance between expanding the use of renewable energy and limiting the financial burden on consumers needs to be addressed to end Japan's reliance on nuclear power.

The ministry's panel of experts is expected to draw up specific measures to reform the FIT system by the end of this year.

The FIT system was introduced in July 2012 by the previous government led by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which aimed to end Japan's reliance on atomic power after reflecting on the Fukushima nuclear crisis. Under the system, electric power companies are required to purchase electric power from the operators of solar and wind power generators and other power generation systems using renewable energy at prices fixed by the government. Its costs are passed on to consumers by adding the expenses to electricity charges.

The additional financial burden of the FIT on an average household in Japan comes to 225 yen per month this fiscal year, about 2.6 times that in fiscal 2012. The higher the ratio of renewable energy is, the greater the financial burden that consumers are required to bear. The extra burden is already a serious social problem in advanced countries in terms of renewable energy. In Germany where the average monthly burden of renewable energy on households has amounted to 2,400 yen per month, the country's Parliament is deliberating on bills that would narrow the scope of power generators subject to the FIT system. This move is feared to hinder the spread of renewable energy.

The prices at which utilities are required to buy power generated with renewable energy sources in Japan are subject to review every year because the costs of generating power using such energy are declining with the advancement of relevant technologies. Still, power companies that have been given special certification from the government are allowed to maintain the prices at which they sell green power to major utilities for 10 to 20 years under the system, which is aimed at encouraging newcomers. However, the system has also encouraged unfair companies that receive special certification from the authorities to launch renewable energy businesses after the costs have declined considerably to earn marginal gains.

The combined power generation capacity of companies that have been specially certified by the government from the time of the introduction of the FIT system until the end of March this year surpassed 68 million kilowatts, far above some 20 million kilowatts prior to the introduction of the system. Still, the actual amount of power that these companies are currently generating is only 13 percent of their capacity. In particular, only 10 percent of their planned solar power generation systems -- whose capacity accounts for over 90 percent of their total capacity -- are actually in operation.

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry has begun to revoke its certificates of companies as solar power generators that have not begun generating power as planned. However, the ministry should reform the system into a stricter one to prevent such unfair practices.

Another problem is that an overwhelming majority of businesses specially certified by the government are those who generate power with solar power systems. Few operators of wind power generators and geothermal power generators have applied for such certification. This is despite the fact that wind power has been widely viewed as a promising renewable energy source and that Japan has the third largest amount of geothermal energy sources in the world. It is necessary to ensure that electricity from wind power generators across the country is used in extensive areas to disperse risks because their generation

capacity largely depends on weather. It is also essential to prevent the construction of geothermal power stations from adversely affecting the environment and hot spa owners.

The government needs to tackle these tasks that cannot be settled with money to expand the use of renewable energy while gaining public consent.

Gov't calls for energy savings this summer

June 30, 2014

Calls for energy savings as Japan braces for first summer with no running nuke plants

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140630p2a00m0na010000c.html>

The Japanese government is calling for energy savings to begin from July 1, as the nation faces its first summer since the 2011 Fukushima disaster with no running nuclear plants.

Particularly in regions under the jurisdiction of the Kansai Electric Power Co. and Kyushu Electric Power Co., which both relied heavily on nuclear power prior to the disaster, there is the possibility of energy supplies becoming stretched. Still, the government has, like last year, avoided setting numerical goals.

The energy-saving period covers the time frame from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. for the whole of the country except for Okinawa Prefecture and runs until Sept. 30, excluding weekends and the period from Aug. 13 through Aug. 15. The government is calling for simple energy reduction measures like setting air conditioners to 28 degrees Celsius or higher.

This summer will be the fourth one in a row where the government is calling for energy saving efforts. The three summers so far have passed without major incident, and with the government pushing a policy of restarting the country's nuclear reactors, this summer's energy performance will come under scrutiny.

According to government estimates put together in April, the highest potential energy demand this August will be about 166.66 million kilowatts, while the highest potential energy supply will be about 174.34 million kilowatts, which would give a safety margin of around 4.6 percent, higher than the minimum desired margin of 3 percent.

However, while the August safety margin for eastern Japan is estimated at 6.1 percent, it is only 3.4 percent for western Japan, and that would be after borrowing power from the east. In September last year, the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at Kansai Electric's Oi Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture were shut down for inspection and remain offline, which has created the tight situation in western Japan.

Some 80 percent of the power supply this summer will come from thermal power plants. Around 20 percent of these thermal plants have been in operation for 40 years or longer, so they carry the risk of malfunction. Furthermore, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency, there is a possibility that a powerful high-pressure zone over the Pacific Ocean will cause higher than average temperatures in western Japan in August. Both equipment failures and extreme temperatures could potentially cause power shortages.

In its estimates for this summer, the government assumed a severe scenario with hot temperatures like in 2010 -- or 2013 for the regions supplied by Chubu, Kansai and Kyushu Electric Power -- and low generation from solar and hydroelectric sources. The government began creating such estimates in the summer of 2011 after the Fukushima nuclear plant disaster, and so far most of the estimates of power supply margins have ended up lower than what actually occurred.

The minimum power supply margin of 3 percent is to protect against momentary rises in demand that are estimated to go as high as 3 percent. During extremely high temperatures, margins of 7 to 8 percent are desired. When the margin is expected to fall beneath 3 percent, calls for power savings are issued and power companies borrow power from each other. When the margin falls within 1 percent, rolling blackouts are initiated.

More on new NRA commissioner

July 5, 2014

New nuclear watchdog commissioner received additional industry payment

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201407050057

By SATOSHI OTANI/ Staff Writer

An incoming commissioner of the Nuclear Regulation Authority received payments from the nuclear industry until last month, raising fresh doubts about his impartiality at the nuclear watchdog, The Asahi Shimbun has found.

Satoru Tanaka, a professor of nuclear engineering at the University of Tokyo, received the unknown amount of money from Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd., operator of a nuclear fuel recycling program, and Mitsubishi FBR Systems Inc., a nuclear plant maker.

Tanaka, 64, sat on the “advisory committee” of Tokyo-based Mitsubishi FBR Systems between July 2007 and June this year, according to university records obtained by The Asahi Shimbun through the information disclosure law.

He also chaired the panel for evaluating vitrification technology at Japan Nuclear Fuel in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, from May 2009 to March this year.

Tanaka was nominated for the NRA post by the Abe administration in May.

Under the guidelines for nominating NRA commissioners, candidates who received more than 500,000 yen (\$4,900) a year from the nuclear industry within three years are disqualified.

But it is not clear how much Tanaka received from the two companies because the payment entries were blackened out in the university records.

He also did not declare the payment in his report on his association with the nuclear industry that was submitted to the NRA in April, when he became a member of an NRA special committee.

“Since I am now a counselor of the NRA, I am not in a position to talk about the matter,” Tanaka told The Asahi Shimbun.

Both Japan Nuclear Fuel and Mitsubishi FBR Systems also declined to give details about the payment.

Tanaka resigned from the post at Mitsubishi FBR Systems in June, when both Diet chambers approved his nomination as NRA commissioner. He will assume the post in September.

The NRA oversees both Japan Nuclear Fuel, which reprocesses and disposes of spent nuclear fuel, and Mitsubishi FBR Systems, which is developing a fast-breeder nuclear reactor.

The nomination of Tanaka came under fire from critics of nuclear power generation. Both the ruling and opposition camps widely perceive him as a “resident” of the “nuclear village.”

Tanaka, a former president of the Atomic Energy Society of Japan, was also a director of Japan Atomic Industrial Forum, a nuclear industry group, between fiscal 2010 and 2012.

He continued to take a pro-nuclear stance after the Fukushima nuclear disaster unfolded in March 2011. The NRA was established in September 2012 to impose stricter safety standards for nuclear reactors and to help end the cozy relations between the industry and politicians that could compromise safety.

Earlier, Tanaka was found to have received a total of 5.1 million yen in research donations from nuclear power-related companies between fiscal 2006 and fiscal 2011.

He also received more than 500,000 yen from a foundation linked to Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled Fukushima No.1 nuclear power plant, in fiscal 2011.

Toyoshi Fuketa, one of the NRA commissioners, reported to the watchdog that he was paid about 460,000 yen by Japan Atomic Power Co., a nuclear power plant operator, for giving lectures and producing texts over three years between fiscal 2009 and 2011.

The former administration led by the Democratic Party of Japan compiled the guidelines for nominating NRA commissioners to ensure impartiality and transparency of NRA safety inspections. The guidelines require disclosure of the amount of donations provided by nuclear power plant operators.

They also dictate that an individual who has served as a director or worked for a nuclear power plant operator within three years of assuming the NRA post is not eligible.

But the current government led by the Liberal Democratic Party apparently has little regard for the guidelines.

“We do not refer to the guidelines set by the DPJ,” Environment Minister Nobuteru Ishihara told the Lower House Environment Committee session in June.

He also said the LDP-led government has no plans to produce new guidelines.

New from the Asahi Shimbun : The Yoshida Testimony

The Yoshida Testimony

The Fukushima accident as told by plant manager Maso Yoshida

http://www.asahi.com/special/yoshida_report/en/

Prologue

The Asahi Shimbun has recently obtained a copy of the transcripts of testimony given before a government investigation panel by Masao Yoshida, who served as general manager of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant when it succumbed to a Level 7 disaster, the highest on the International Nuclear Events Scale, following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011.

The document remains the only available official transcript of the testimony by Yoshida, the on-site commander of efforts to bring the situation under control, who died in July 2013 without having disclosed much to media organizations about the accident at the plant, operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co.

The transcript, not to be released publicly at Yoshida's request, was gathering dust in government offices.

28 hours, 400 pages

The Yoshida testimony report comprises seven parts and contains about 500,000 characters in total. It is printed on more than 400 pages of A4-size paper.

Eleven of the 13 interview sessions with Yoshida were conducted at a Japan Football Association Academy meeting room at the J-Village soccer training facility, 20 kilometers south of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. The remaining two sessions took place in a quake-proof control center building, Yoshida's workplace, at the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

The government's Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations of Tokyo Electric Power Co. interviewed 772 individuals over a total of 1,479 hours. The Yoshida testimony was compiled during that process.

While an interviewee was only questioned for slightly less than two hours on average, Yoshida was interviewed for more than 28 hours, and was asked to respond on how he acted and what he thought at decisive moments. Yotaro Hatamura, chairman of the investigation panel, called the Yoshida testimony "invaluable historic material" because it is Yoshida's only available official transcript.

Anger, Angst, Sense

In the Yoshida testimony, he is not only telling his side of the story.

“Our objective is to build a pool of knowledge that posterity can draw on,” said one member of the government investigation panel in opening the questioning. “We do not aim at pursuing responsibility.”

But the interviews were far from lenient, because prosecutors on loan to the investigation panel secretariat were leading the questioning of Yoshida. The questioning report reproduces the slightest of speech nuances.

The text of the report also shows Yoshida’s seriousness in attending the interviews.

One passage in the report shows Yoshida struggling to come to terms with a painful memory, saying, “I have the hardest time remembering this part.”

Other passages show him furious, as he referred to Masataka Shimizu, president of TEPCO at the time of the disaster, as “that gentleman” and also referred to Naoto Kan, prime minister at the time, or Haruki Madarame, chairman of the now-defunct Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan, (NSC) as “that guy.”

The emotionally open nature of his responses throughout the report indicates that, as a whole, Yoshida was recounting how he really thought and felt.

Yoshida tried to make sure he was distinguishing facts from his feelings and thoughts. He also apparently tried to distinguish what he believed when the disaster began from what he later came to believe as more information became available.

Multiple disaster of unprecedented scale

The Fukushima nuclear disaster, which involved more than one reactor stricken simultaneously, was a multiple disaster that humankind had never experienced.

The No. 1 reactor, where the suspension of water injection for cooling the core was overlooked, was the first to succumb to a hydrogen explosion on the afternoon of March 12, 2011, the day after the quake and

tsunami. Water injection efforts subsequently failed in the No. 3 reactor, which exploded on the morning of March 14. That made it impossible to suppress pressure in the No. 2 reactor's containment vessel, which spewed radioactive substances onto land areas on March 15 at higher levels than at any other time during the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The No. 4 reactor also exploded on March 15, raising concerns about a potential loss of water from its storage pool for nuclear fuel. A loss of water could have spewed even more radioactive substances.

An audio recording clip from TEPCO's teleconferencing system shows communications exchanges when the No. 3 reactor exploded.

00:00/00:00

Were lessons learned?

Unfortunately, the government investigation panel's final report failed to discuss and review the actions and judgments made by individuals who were leading concerned organizations at the time--the prime minister, industry minister, director-general of the now-defunct Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, chairman of the NSC, president of TEPCO and general manager of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, although it is up to people to stop nuclear plants from running amok and up to people to save residents from nuclear damage.

Although the panel interviewed as many as 772 individuals involved, it failed to dig deep into essential aspects of the disaster because it made it a stated policy that it would not pursue the responsibility of individuals.

It is not too much to say that the government and power utilities are eagerly working toward preparing for restarts of nuclear reactors by adding height to seawalls, installing filter vents and reinforcing other facility components because the government investigation panel limited its analysis and reviews only to phenomenal aspects of the tragedy.

Voices of those who fought the unprecedented nuclear disaster should be engraved in history. History is humankind's common property.

"I would like you to attend our hearing in the understanding that what you are going to tell us could be published almost in their original form," a member of the government investigation panel told Yoshida during the first interview session. The Asahi Shimbun notes that Yoshida replied promptly, "That is OK."

The government later released a written request by Yoshida that his interviews not be publicly disclosed.

Reports in nine installments

This is an English translation of serial feature stories on the Yoshida testimony report that began running online on The Asahi Shimbun Digital on May 20.

The series focuses on the part of human action and judgments, which the government investigation panel questioned Yoshida about but seldom mentioned in its report, and addresses three issues: who is there to halt nuclear reactors; if residents can be evacuated; and if humans can stop a crisis.

In analyzing and reviewing the Yoshida testimony report, The Asahi Shimbun perused TEPCO's teleconference records, a time-series table of events and TEPCO's other in-house documents obtained from sources. The newspaper's reporters also interviewed concerned parties.

The Yoshida Testimony (2)

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- Water is there!

Investigations by **Tomomi Miyazaki** and **Hideaki Kimura**

Production by **Morihiro Sakuma**, **Shinya Uemura**, **Masayuki Shirai** and **Madoka Kimura** Translations in English by **Taku Tada** and **Roy K. Akagawa**

Media allowed access to icewall

July 8, 2014

Media allowed access to Fukushima frozen wall site

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140709_04.html

The operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has allowed media access to the construction site of an underground frozen wall, which is designed to reduce the massive volume of radioactive wastewater.

Tokyo Electric Power Company invited the media on Tuesday for the first time to the site near the No.4 reactor building. Workers were digging 30-meter-deep holes to install pipes.

Coolant will circulate in these pipes to freeze the soil and create a wall surrounding the 4 damaged reactors.

TEPCO says workers do their jobs from the late afternoon to the evening so they won't suffer heatstroke.

The operator also says freezing the soil will start next March if everything goes well.

The wall is designed to stop groundwater from flowing into the reactor buildings and mixing with

radioactive wastewater. The huge amount of wastewater is hampering efforts to scrap the crippled plant.

Separately, TEPCO is trying to freeze wastewater in a utility tunnel at the No.2 reactor building to stop it from flowing into the sea. But the water hasn't been fully frozen more than 2 months after the work began.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority has raised concerns that the frozen wall will have the same problem.

The head of the Fukushima Daiichi plant, Akira Ono, says the 2 projects use different methods, and TEPCO has confirmed that the wall will work.

The frozen wall and the tunnel will intersect at one point.

If freezing the water in the tunnel takes longer than planned, it would delay the wall's construction.

Jul. 8, 2014 - Updated 21:15 UTC

NRA should not ignore personnel guidelines

July 8, 2014

EDITORIAL: Nuclear watchdog should stick to strict personnel rules

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201407080034>

Two key individuals of the nation's nuclear safety watchdog were in the news last weekend. Neither matter should be overlooked.

One is the revelation that Satoru Tanaka, a University of Tokyo professor slated to become a Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) commissioner in September, received payments from Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd., operator of a nuclear fuel recycling program, and Mitsubishi FBR Systems Inc., a nuclear plant manufacturer, up until March and June, respectively.

The other cause of concern is the personnel affairs decision to transfer Hideka Morimoto, deputy secretary-general of the NRA Secretariat, back to the Environment Ministry, where he worked before his stint at the NRA. Morimoto, the No. 2 bureaucrat at the NRA, assumed the post of minister's secretariat chief July 8.

These two developments raise questions of consistency with certain rules that were established upon lessons learned from the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011.

Tanaka, who received money from two companies in the nuclear power industry, does not meet the NRA commissioner selection guidelines created by the previous government led by the Democratic Party of Japan. The guidelines were crafted to secure the NRA's independence from the pro-nuclear camp.

Environment Minister Nobuteru Ishihara, who supervises the NRA, has said, "We do not refer to the guidelines set by the DPJ." But is it wise to simply scrap the guidelines?

Tanaka has refused to reveal how much money he received from the companies, saying, "Since I am now a counselor of the NRA, I am not in a position to talk about the matter." But we can't see why he should not do so.

To secure neutrality, the NRA also requires the members of its expert panels to voluntarily declare any annual remuneration of 500,000 yen (\$4,910) or more that they have received from companies under its regulations.

When he was appointed as an expert panel member in April, Tanaka didn't declare any remuneration from the two firms. That may be because he received less than 500,000 yen from each of the two companies. If that is the case, he should just say so. He should consider how the public will interpret his refusal to offer any explanation.

When he was tapped as a new NRA commissioner, Tanaka's eligibility for the job from the viewpoint of the guidelines was questioned at the Diet. Tanaka served as a director of the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum, a nuclear power industry organization, from 2010 to 2012. This fact prompted some lawmakers to call into question his independence from the industry regulated by the NRA.

Also worrisome is the transfer of Morimoto, the NRA Secretariat's deputy secretary-general, to the Environment Ministry. Morimoto has been serving as the NRA's de facto public face, supervising its public relations events such as news conferences.

There is a "no-return rule," which bans transferring an NRA official back to a government body committed to promoting nuclear power generation. This rule is designed to secure the NRA's independence by allowing its staffers to work without having to worry about the intentions of the organizations they have come from.

While it is true the Environment Ministry is not a government body that promotes nuclear power generation, this personnel change could be a first step toward making the rule a dead letter. We fear that

this personnel affairs decision, in addition to the guidelines issue, will end up being another case of "Danger past and God is forgotten."

Winning the trust of the public is vital for both the NRA and its secretariat. They should not behave in a way that hurts their credibility with the public.

--The Asahi Shimbun, July 8

Suga defends Tanaka

July 8, 2014

Suga defends Tanaka appointment to NRA

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140708_22.html

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga says the appointment of a new member to Japan's nuclear watchdog poses no problem even though he has received money from power industry groups.

Suga spoke to reporters on Tuesday about the posting of University of Tokyo Professor Satoru Tanaka as a commissioner of the Nuclear Regulation Authority.

The appointment has led to criticism that Tanaka's close ties with the industry could compromise the watchdog's neutrality.

Suga said the government is aware that Tanaka had served on advisory committees to the nuclear power industry and that he was paid for that work.

But Suga said such payments were small and were made for technical advice that Tanaka provided.

The former administration of the Democratic Party set guidelines that said people who received more than about 5,000 dollars a year from the nuclear industry could not become NRA committee members.

Suga said the current administration views such matters according to the relevant laws.

Jul. 8, 2014 - Updated 05:26 UTC

Minami-Soma: "We demand an explanation"

July 15, 2014

Minami-Soma lambastes government, TEPCO for remaining mum on rice contamination

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201407150040>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Residents of Minami-Soma in Fukushima Prefecture expressed anger with the government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. for keeping them in the dark about radiation that contaminated local rice crops.

"We cannot help but distrust the agriculture ministry, which did not promptly let us know of the matter, despite it being a serious issue," said Minami-Soma Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai.

According to the agriculture ministry, cesium levels of rice harvested in mid-August last year in Minami-Soma exceeded the safety standard of 100 becquerels per kilogram.

The ministry had determined that the removal of debris from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant caused radioactive substances to spread to 14 paddies outside the evacuation zone in Minami-Soma, more than 20 kilometers from the stricken nuclear plant.

The ministry informed TEPCO of the problem in March and ordered the utility to take preventive measures. However, the ministry failed to inform the city of Minami-Soma of the situation.

The ministry plans to hold a meeting on July 18 to brief local farmers.

Sakurai also said TEPCO is at fault and that he wants answers.

"We protest (TEPCO's) irresponsible clearing of rubble that raises concern among farmers," the mayor said. "We demand an explanation."

During a regular news conference in Tokyo on July 14, TEPCO officials apologized for causing trouble in extensive areas. But the officials added that it remains uncertain if the debris clearance work is the cause of the spread of cesium.

Although the debris clearance work is currently on hold, the utility said it will be resumed later in July. When asked if TEPCO will release radiation readings or details of the clearance process, an official said, "We will consider it before restarting the clearance work."

At a July 14 news conference, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga was asked about the dangers of contaminated rice.

"We inspect every bag of rice when they are shipped," Suga said. "If there is rice with radiation levels exceeding the standards, it won't get shipped to market."

Suga was also asked why the agriculture ministry and TEPCO failed to inform Minami-Soma about the contamination of local rice crops.

"The reasons are unclear," he said. "But I have been informed that investigations will be held soon." Regarding TEPCO's plan to dismantle the No. 1 reactor building still holding debris with high levels of radiation, Suga said, "The Nuclear Regulation Authority secretariat has asked TEPCO to come up with measures to further prevent and survey the dispersal of radioactive materials."

See : <http://fukushima-is-still-news.over-blog.com/article-debris-cleanup-at-plant-likely-to-have-contaminated-rice-paddies-124152055.html>

30 days of public hearings

July 16, 2014

Public hearings begin on restarting nuclear plant

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140717_01.html

Japan's nuclear regulator has begun accepting public opinions on a draft safety assessment it has approved for restarting a nuclear power plant in southern Japan.

The Sendai plant in Kagoshima Prefecture could be the first nuclear plant in the country to be given permission to resume operations since the 2011 accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Officials at the Nuclear Regulation Authority unanimously approved the draft on Wednesday.

They say Kyushu Electric Power Company, which operates the plant, has satisfied safety requirements that were strengthened for nuclear facilities following the accident.

The NRA will now have 30 days of public hearings starting from Thursday before finalizing the draft assessment.

At a news conference after Wednesday's meeting, the head of the NRA, Shunichi Tanaka, warned that meeting the new safety criteria does not automatically mean reducing the probability of accidents to zero.

He urged the utility to strengthen voluntary efforts to ensure the safety of the plant.

He also stressed that restarting the plant depends solely on a consensus of local residents, municipalities, and other parties concerned.

Tanaka suggested that his regulatory body should not be involved in making the decision.

It is now up to the central government and utility to convince residents and municipalities of the need to restart the plant and the appropriateness of safety measures for severe accidents.

Kyushu Electric will also be required to submit the detailed design of equipment at the plant to the NRA for approval, and clear other procedures for a restart.

Even if given the go-ahead, the reactors are not likely to be back on line before October.

Jul. 16, 2014 - Updated 21:23 UT

Too many vital problems unsolved

July 17, 2014

EDITORIAL: Too many vital questions need answering before restarting reactors

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201407170031>

The nuclear catastrophe that struck in 2011 raised a wide range of grave issues for Japanese politics and society. But none of them has been answered satisfactorily.

Debate on whether to restart the reactors that have been idled since the harrowing accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has somehow narrowed to focus only on technical issues concerning the performances of nuclear facilities.

Little progress has been made in efforts to develop effective ways to deal with emergencies, which should clarify how the central and local governments, as well as electric utilities, should respond to a major accident. By the same token, there has been little movement in drawing up plans to evacuate local residents in the event of another nuclear accident.

Under these circumstances, it is utterly reckless to try to bring offline reactors back on stream. Doing so can only be considered as a sign of a grossly irresponsible refusal to learn anything from an accident whose aftermath is still unfolding.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority on July 16 endorsed the draft of a document effectively declaring that the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors of the Sendai nuclear power plant in Kagoshima Prefecture meet its new tougher safety standards.

This is the first time that the nuclear watchdog has given the green light to the restart of a reactor since the new standards were established a year ago.

While some steps still remain to be taken, including soliciting input from the public about the document, the process of the NRA's safety checks of the two reactors has passed the most important stage.

The Abe administration has repeatedly said it will leave decisions on whether specific reactors are ready to be brought back online to the expert judgment of the NRA and promised to only restart reactors that have been recognized as safe.

The administration has made it sound as if the NRA's safety inspection was all that is needed to ensure the safety of a nuclear plant.

But that rhetoric belies the reality. **Too many issues have been left untouched, both within and outside the boundaries of the NRA's power.**

If this situation is allowed to continue, Japan could again find itself heavily dependent on atomic energy, but without having made any policy change except for some minor improvements in nuclear power regulation.

TOO MUCH HYPE

In its basic energy plan, the Abe administration asserts that Japan's new nuclear safety standards are now "the strictest in the world."

Members of his Cabinet and senior lawmakers of his Liberal Democratic Party have also said that reactors will only be restarted if their safety is confirmed under the new standards. They also make the claim that the standards are "the strictest in the world."

This is too much of an exaggeration. Hype of this kind could revive the myth that nuclear power is safe. But this was shattered once and for all by the Fukushima disaster.

To be fair, the new standards demand more vigorous measures to make nuclear facilities better prepared for earthquakes and tsunamis. But these features are but a simple reflection of the fact that Japan is one of the world's most quake-prone nations.

Using a numerical approach to gauge the likelihood of a nuclear accident occurring has been widely adopted in Western industrial nations. But Japan's new standards are not as rigorous as to use this method.

Volcanologists have raised questions about the adequacy of measures to protect the Sendai nuclear power plant from possible volcanic eruptions. But the NRA supported the argument made by the plant operator, Kyushu Electric Power Co., which claims it will be able to deal with the risk by monitoring the volcano's activity.

What is essentially important is that satisfying the new standards doesn't guarantee safety.

NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka has been emphasizing that the new standards are based on the assumption that nuclear accidents can occur.

In other words, the chief of the nuclear watchdog has been insisting that not only the NRA but also electric utilities, the central and local governments and residents living around nuclear power plants should all make a determined effort to help develop effective measures to respond to accidents. But many of the necessary measures remain to be taken.

VITAL ISSUES LEFT UNRESOLVED

More than anything else, no realistic plan has been crafted for the evacuation of local residents during emergencies.

Such plans are supposed to be worked out by the local governments by using the NRA's guidelines for dealing with nuclear disasters as a basis. But local governments are at a loss how to tackle this formidable challenge, which has been suddenly thrust upon them.

The central government has asserted that nuclear power generation is a matter of national policy. Then, why does it leave the task of developing crucial evacuation plans entirely to local governments?

The conditions for restarting reactors don't include the existence of an evacuation plan.

If local governments in areas around nuclear power plants readily agree to the restart of reactors without any prospect of crafting a workable evacuation plan, neither they nor the central government can fulfill their responsibility to protect the safety of local residents.

There are many other vital issues that have yet to be addressed.

We need to remember again and again the problems that were highlighted by the accident three years ago.

A catastrophic incident, especially if it happens in an area where many reactors are concentrated, could cause a tremendous number of people to be exposed to radiation and contaminate huge tracts of land with radioactive materials.

Despite this horrifying possibility, however, **the NRA has not discussed in any serious manner the risk posed by multiple reactors located close to each other.**

While the scope of areas that are given priority in the handling of a nuclear crisis has been widened to "roughly within 30 kilometers" of a nuclear plant, only local governments hosting the plant have a say over whether to restart a reactor. Is this reasonable?

Records of remarks made by the late Masao Yoshida, who was the manager of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant at the onset of the March 2011 accident, revealed that some senior executives of the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., temporarily fled the plant as the crisis unfolded.

He made the remarks during interviews by the government's accident investigative committee.

Should electric utilities be entrusted with handling a severe accident that is on the cusp of developing into a catastrophe?

MORE IN-DEPTH DEBATE NEEDED

One fundamental problem is that Japanese society has yet to fully absorb the implications of the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

The individuals and organizations responsible for the disaster have not been held strictly accountable for what happened. Nor have they been given immunity from responsibility to share every scrap of information that can be gleaned to understand how the accident came about.

As symbolized by the fact that the records of Yoshida's testimony have not been officially released, the truth of the accident has not been disclosed to the public.

Three years ago, we proposed in an editorial to set a target of moving Japanese society toward a future without nuclear power generation. Fortunately, the shutdown of all nuclear reactors around the nation has not caused any serious disruption like a large-scale power outage.

The May ruling by the Fukui District Court that ordered Kansai Electric Power Co. not to restart two reactors at its Oi nuclear power plant rejected the argument that suspending nuclear power generation is detrimental to the national interest because it will lead to increasing Japan's trade deficit and drain of national wealth. The ruling said, "National wealth means that people can live lives firmly rooted in rich land."

The energy policy, which also covers nuclear power generation, should not be discussed only from an economic point of view. The question that should be asked is how to secure the safety of both human beings and nature for a long time into the future.

Nuclear reactors must not be restarted without broad and in-depth debate on all key issues, including how to dispose of radioactive waste.

--The Asahi Shimbun, July 17

Lessons from Fukushima have not been learned

July 17, 2014

Editorial: Stop and learn lessons from Fukushima before restarting Sendai reactors

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140717p2a00m0na009000c.html>

A draft report compiled by the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) effectively signifies that the No. 1 and 2 reactors at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai Nuclear Power Plant in Kagoshima Prefecture have cleared new safety standards. Three years and fourth months after the devastating disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, the restarting of a nuclear plant under the newly established standards has moved a step closer to reality.

The government has labeled the new standards the "world's strictest," and it plans to restart any nuclear reactors that clear these standards. Under current rules, public opinion will now be sought, and if consent is obtained from the relevant areas, it will be possible to restart the reactors.

Following the Fukushima nuclear disaster, Japanese society has moved forward without any nuclear reactors in operation -- a situation that was previously thought impossible. Reactivation of the Sendai nuclear plant under the new standards would signal a turning point for Japan, turning it back into a country that utilizes nuclear power.

We have continued to stress that Japan should do all it can to create a society free from reliance on nuclear power. We don't deny that Japan may reactivate nuclear power plants along the way to produce the minimum necessary level of power. But there are conditions: The government must thoroughly learn from the Fukushima nuclear disaster and prevent another crisis, and it must find a way to protect residents from harm even if an accident does occur. Furthermore, it must map out a path to freedom from reliance on nuclear power, and place the reactivation of nuclear power plants in a position lying within its overall energy policy.

On both of these conditions, reactivation of the Sendai nuclear plant falls short of the mark, raising grave fears that the safety myth that surrounded nuclear power before the Fukushima disaster could be revived. First of all, the government has been slow to announce disaster prevention plans to be implemented in the event of an accident.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) lists five levels of defense to protect against a nuclear accident. The first three cover the prevention of serious accidents, the fourth covers the response to such an accident, and the fifth deals with disaster prevention measures in the event of significant external releases of radiation.

After the outbreak of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, the government expanded the areas requiring nuclear disaster countermeasures to those lying within 30 kilometers of a nuclear power plant -- much wider than the original designation of eight to 10 kilometers. However, under the Basic Law on Disaster Countermeasures, the task of handling the fifth layer of protection stipulated by the IAEA is left up to local bodies, and this is exempt from screening by the NRA.

Under regional disaster prevention plans in Kagoshima Prefecture, where the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant is located, hospitals and nursing facilities within a 30 kilometer radius of the plant have been left to formulate evacuation plans for the people in their care. But in reality, it is necessary for the prefecture to mediate and assist in the search for facilities that can look after these people.

The Kagoshima Prefectural Government has presented an evacuation plan for areas within a 10-kilometer radius of the plant. Gov. Yuichiro Ito has stated, "Evacuation plans for people requiring care within a 30-kilometer radius of a nuclear power plant are not realistic." The reason for this is that in addition to an increase in the number of people requiring care, it is difficult to secure methods of evacuation and facilities to accept these people. And this applies to other areas in the vicinity of nuclear power plants across Japan.

In the United States, emergency plans that include evacuation measures are subject to regulation, and before a nuclear power plant is moved, permission is needed from the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission. The Japanese government, too, should actively support the creation of evacuation plans for local bodies and evaluate how appropriate they are. If effective plans can't be produced, then the government should not allow the nuclear power plant to be reactivated.

In implementing measures against serious accidents, it is important for power companies to maintain a high level of safety awareness, but on this point, too, there are concerns. During safety screening under the new safety standards that went into effect in July last year, we saw power companies trying to downplay the effects that earthquakes and tsunamis would have on their plants. This applied in the case of the Sendai nuclear power plant. It was not until March this year, eight months after it had applied for safety screening of its Sendai plant that Kyushu Electric Power Co. complied with a request from the NRA and ratcheted up the level of seismic motion that the plant could be exposed to during a major quake

A total of 19 reactors at 12 nuclear power plants in Japan are up for safety screening, but it is unclear when screening of nuclear power stations other than the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant will conclude. NRA chairman Shunichi Tanaka has criticized power companies' lack of respect for safety, stating, "They are lacking when it comes to a stance of more solemnly accepting the fact that the Fukushima accident occurred."

The new safety standards incorporate fresh measures to counter terrorist attacks and strengthen measures against natural disasters, such as earthquakes and tsunami. But these standards represent the

minimum line, and power companies need to do more themselves to mitigate the risks posed by a nuclear disaster. We must not forget that after the outbreak of the Fukushima disaster, the stance of thinking, "As long as we meet the standards, that's enough," came under criticism, including from overseas.

An even bigger problem is that while the government has said that it will "reduce reliance on nuclear power as much as possible," it has gone ahead with moves to restart nuclear power plants without showing how that will be accomplished.

Admittedly, if the nation's nuclear power plants are not restarted, then imports of fossil fuels will continue to increase for the time being, and the view that this presents a problem in terms of energy security is likely to emerge. At the same time, electricity prices will go up and carbon emissions will increase.

Yet Japan is a land of earthquakes and volcanoes, and the risks involved with continuing to rely on nuclear power are great.

Power companies are expected to spend roughly 2.2 trillion yen on nuclear safety measures, roughly 1.5 times the figure cited a year ago. If the cost of the cleanup after the Fukushima nuclear disaster and related compensation payments were factored in, this figure would surge even higher.

During the recent election to select a new governor of Shiga Prefecture, a newcomer campaigning on a platform of "graduation from nuclear power" beat a rival backed by the ruling coalition. In opinion polls, it is evident that there are many residents who have doubts about restarting nuclear power plants.

Considering these points, the government has a responsibility to clearly explain to the public the risks of operating nuclear power plants and the risks of not operating them. Seeking understanding for reactivation comes after that.

July 17, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

COMMENTARY: Green light for Sendai plant shows lessons from Fukushima unheeded

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201407170044>

July 17, 2014

By RYUTA KOIKE/ Staff Writer

It clearly hasn't dawned on the central government and Japan's electric power companies that it is impossible to construct a nuclear plant that is 100-percent safe.

That is the only possible conclusion in light of the July 16 decision to resume operations at the Sendai nuclear power plant in Kagoshima Prefecture.

Over the past year while covering the safety screenings conducted by the Nuclear Regulation Authority, one glaring characteristic has stood out: the backward-looking stance of the electric power companies with regard to safety measures at their nuclear facilities.

The utilities have persistently hemmed and hawed when faced with the prospect of having to implement steps that would require a huge investment of time and money.

As if to ignore the March 2011 disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the electric power companies continued to submit understated estimates for possible earthquakes and tsunami. That meant many of those companies had to go back to the drawing board to come up with more realistic estimates.

While those companies have also griped that the safety screening was too strict, most points raised were to be expected in light of the gravity of the Fukushima accident.

The standards established by the NRA are nothing but the minimum level required for safety. If the electric power companies still are unable to comprehend the need to heighten safety, they are not qualified to remain in the business. Nor should they be allowed to seek a resumption of operations at their nuclear plants.

The safety screenings include new confirmation of the procedures to deal with a severe accident in which reactor cores go into meltdown, leading to the release of radioactive materials.

The fundamental point of those procedures is that the electric power companies themselves must bring the situation under control. There is no indication of how the central government would take responsibility should another serious situation occur in Japan.

The problem is that the target of the safety screenings have been limited to within the nuclear plant site. Other important issues, such as evacuation plans in the event of an accident, have been left to local communities.

Local residents who in the past allowed nuclear plants to be constructed in their communities, despite concerns about the technology, now know only too well how unreliable such hypothetical plans can be.

The fallout from a nuclear accident goes well beyond prefectural borders. For this reason, dealing with such accidents should not be left to individual local governments.

Despite that obvious reality, the Abe administration appears to be leaving open the possibility of avoiding responsibility for the resumption of operations at nuclear plants by using the NRA as a possible scapegoat.

What the Fukushima disaster has ingrained in the minds and memories of all of us is that once an accident does occur it will rapidly go beyond what humans can control, and the hometowns and lives of many people will be snatched from them.

Now that Japanese society knows what is involved, does it really want to again use nuclear power?

Allowing nuclear plants to resume operations is intolerable, especially since no effort has been made to gauge public opinion.

Is there a pilot in the plane?

July 17, 2014

Responsibility for reactor restarts a hot potato

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/07/17/national/responsibility-for-reactor-restarts-a-hot-potato/#.U8i7nrHi91s>

by Reiji Yoshida
Staff Writer

The impending reactivation of reactors shut down following the 2011 nuclear crisis has raised a difficult question: Who will take responsibility for the decision?

On Wednesday, the Nuclear Regulation Authority effectively finished screening the two reactors at the Sendai plant in Kyushu, certifying they meet the new safety standards adopted after the Fukushima meltdowns.

Once they go online, likely in the fall, they will be the only reactors in operation in the nation.

NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka, however, is quick to point out that it's not up to his commission to decide whether to restart any of the nation's 48 commercial reactors.

"We won't commit ourselves to making a decision on whether to restart (one) or not," Tanaka said. "It is the utility, local residents and the central government" that make the decision, Tanaka said.

It's not even the NRA's job to say whether a reactor is safe, Tanaka insists.

He says the NRA's sole duty is to determine whether the reactors meet the new safety standards.

This is not how Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga sees things.

"We will leave the judgment to the NRA's expertise as far as safety is concerned," Suga told a news conference Wednesday.

From a legal standpoint, Suga said, it is the power company's responsibility to decide whether to reactivate a reactor that has passed the NRA's inspection.

Even after 3/11, the law remains unchanged on that point.

"We won't make any political decision" to reactivate a reactor, and just follow the legal procedures, Suga added, opening the door to the eventual restart of all the other idled reactors that pass the NRA tests.

Every atomic utility is desperate to bring its reactors back online. The costs of importing fuel for thermal power are growing, exacerbated by the weakened yen, while the reactors they invested so much in to build, maintain and improve generate only losses.

On the surface at least, top government officials are trying to distance themselves from the restart process. But they won't hide their enthusiasm for immediate reactivation once a reactor gets the NRA's blessing.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has emphasized Japan is losing as much as ¥4 trillion a year importing additional fuel to make up for the idling of the nuclear plants.

"For businesses to operate (in Japan), stable energy supplies are needed. And costs should be low, too," Suga told the news conference.

"We'd like to promote the reactivation (of the plants) if the NRA conducts scientific and technological evaluations and it is concluded (they are) safe," Abe told reporters Wednesday.

Sendai plant operator Kyushu Electric Power Co. is now ready to reactivate the reactors in the fall — with the consent of the heads of local governments, including Kagoshima Gov. Yuichiro Ito.

Though not required by law to get this consent, it's a practical necessity.

According to an April 11 to 13 telephone poll by the local daily Minami-Nippon Shimbun, 59.5 percent of 1,016 respondents in Kagoshima Prefecture said they are opposed to reactivating the Sendai reactors, while 36.8 percent support the plan.

NRA panel and Diet Commission differ on cause of disaster

July 19, 2014

March 2011 power loss at Fukushima plant caused by tsunami: regulator

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140718p2g00m0dm059000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The power loss at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant's No. 1 reactor in March 2011 was triggered by tsunami, Japan's nuclear regulator said Friday, denying the possibility raised by the Diet's investigation commission that it could have been caused by the powerful earthquake.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority's interim report on the 2011 nuclear disaster said the power loss -- which led to the failure to cool the reactor and resulted in a meltdown -- and damage to equipment occurred as tsunami waves flooded the plant, citing results of its on-site probe.

Panels of the Diet, the government, plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. and the private sector have separately released investigation reports so far, but they differ regarding some issues.

While the reports of the government and TEPCO panels concluded that the power loss was caused by tsunami waves, the Diet-appointed panel noted the possibility of the earthquake as the cause. The possibility raised by the Diet panel implies TEPCO failed to prepare for earthquakes as well as tsunami.

NRA officials said they will continue their investigation.

July 18, 2014

NRA panel: Tsunami led to Fukushima meltdown

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140718_53.html

A panel of experts at Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority has concluded that the tsunami triggered the meltdown during the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident.

The panel presented on Friday a draft interim report on its probe into the accident.

The experts' conclusion differs from that of a Diet commission about the loss of an emergency power source at the Number One reactor at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

In its report released in July 2012, the commission suggested the possibility that the massive earthquake caused the reactor to lose power before the tsunami hit the plant.

But the expert panel says data found after the report was issued shows that the arrival of the tsunami coincided with the time the reactor lost power.

The panel rejects the conclusion by the Diet commission that the quake damaged pipes of the reactor and led to the meltdown.

The experts say they will continue their probe and interview former members of the commission before releasing a final report.

Jul. 18, 2014 - Updated 11:21 UTC

A revival of "safety myth" of nukes?

July 18, 2014

More needed than NRA safety nod

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/07/18/editorials/more-needed-than-nra-safety-nod/#.U8lnErHi91s>

The Nuclear Regulation Authority has effectively given the safety clearance for restarting Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s idled Sendai Nuclear Power Plant in Kagoshima Prefecture — the first under power plant safety standards updated a year ago.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has reiterated that his administration will move to reactivate nuclear reactors that have passed NRA screening, and the power industry hopes that the decision will pave the way for getting back online many other nuclear power plants across Japan that were halted in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

However, the NRA's nod covers only some technical aspects of nuclear power generation safety in this natural disaster-prone country. Blind faith in what the Abe administration has billed the world's top-level plant safety standards could lead to a revival of the "safety myth" of nuclear power that was prevalent before the March 2011 triple meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Before restarting any idled plant, the government and the power industry need to stop and consider if they have, in fact, learned the crucial lessons of the Fukushima crisis.

The Nos. 1 and 2 reactors at Kyushu Electric's Sendai plant in the city of Satsumasendai have been fast-tracked for NRA screening among the 19 reactors at 12 power plants across Japan that regional power companies have applied to restart.

The NRA will finalize its report on the Sendai plant after soliciting public comments for a month. It could be reactivated sometime after the fall, pending additional procedures and the consent of local governments hosting the plant.

Under the updated safety standards, power companies are obliged to take countermeasures against possible severe accidents such as reactor core meltdowns as well as terrorist attacks. They are required to ensure that their plants can withstand the strongest quakes and highest tsunami estimated for their locations, and make necessary reinforcements.

The new standards were introduced in light of the lessons learned from the Fukushima plant meltdowns caused by the massive earthquake and tsunami. The standards have been hailed repeatedly by the Abe administration as among the world's toughest for nuclear power plants.

Still, NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka said the watchdog's assessment does not guarantee safety at the Sendai plant; it shows only that the plant matches the updated standards. "The plant's safety has improved to a certain extent, but this is not the goal," Tanaka said, adding that Kyushu Electric needs to make further efforts to guard the plant against possible natural disasters whose severity can be exceptionally high in Japan. Questions linger about the validity of the new safety standards, which have been created even before the causes of the Fukushima meltdowns are fully identified.

Achieving absolute safety in nuclear power plants may be pie in the sky. But one of the lessons of Fukushima was that a catastrophic accident can take place because of a series of unforeseen events. What's needed are efforts to minimize the risk of severe accidents through multiple layers of safeguards at the plants, and to ensure the safety of residents in areas that could be hit by radiation fallout in such disasters.

It won't be until fiscal 2015 and 2016 at the earliest, respectively, that the Sendai plant will have an "important anti-seismic building" and a filter to remove radioactive substances from steam released in an accident.

Since the Fukushima disaster, municipalities around nuclear power plants across the country have been called on to prepare evacuation plans for residents within 30 km of the plants. However, nearly 40 percent of such municipalities have reportedly not come up with a plan, even as the power companies seek to restart the idled plants.

Creation of the evacuation plans have been left in the hands of local governments, with no NRA or central government oversight to help ensure that the plans are adequate.

Municipalities around Kyushu Electric's Sendai plant have already drawn up evacuation plans. However, local residents and experts charge that the plans are ineffective because they are often based on implausible scenarios. Last month, more than half the residents of Ichikikushikino, which borders the Sendai plant host city of Satsumasendai, signed a petition opposing restart of the plant, citing the lack of an adequate plan to safely evacuate local residents.

The Kagoshima Prefectural Government in May released an estimate that it would take roughly 29 hours, at most, for 90 percent of some 210,000 residents within 30 km of the Sendai plant to evacuate the area. But doubts were cast on the plausibility of the estimate, especially because it did not take into account the extra time that would be required for evacuating people in need of special care such as hospital inpatients and residents of welfare facilities.

Many such people died during the evacuation of areas around the Fukushima plant in 2011. Kagoshima Gov. Yuichiro Ito says the prefecture will create plans for the evacuation of hospital patients and care facility residents within 10 km of the Sendai plant, but that it would be difficult to prepare a realistic plan to evacuate all such people within the 30-km zone, given the much larger number of institutions and patients.

The Sendai plant is widely considered one of the most vulnerable to volcanic eruptions because of the concentration of calderas in the area. The NRA report said it judged as “appropriate” the assessment by Kyushu Electric — though questioned by many volcanologists — that the risk of a massive eruption that could affect the plant during its life span is “small enough.” The NRA says the power company will monitor crustal movements in the calderas for possible signs of an eruption, and take steps to halt the reactors and move out nuclear fuels — a process that would take years — when such signs emerge. NRA Chairman Tanaka admits that its screening was carried out in the absence of sufficient scientific knowledge on the subject of forecasting volcanic eruptions.

The power industry has its reasons to seek a quick restart of idled nuclear power plants. Since the Fukushima disaster put the nation’s nuclear power plants offline, utility firms have suffered huge losses due to the increased costs of imported fuel to run thermal power plants — costs that have also been passed on to consumers. For Kyushu Electric, which relied on nuclear energy to generate 40 percent of its power before 2011, a restart of the Sendai plant’s Nos. 1 and 2 reactors alone would save it ¥20 billion in fuel costs each month.

The NRA decision comes as a relief for Kyushu Electric and other power companies that hope more reactors will quickly get the go-ahead to restart. However, they and the Abe administration need to reconsider whether adequate steps have been taken to avoid a repeat of the mistakes that led to the Fukushima disaster — and to ensure that shortcuts to safety are not being taken in the drive to restart the idled plants.

Almost certain is not certain

July 19, 2014

NRA blames tsunami for equipment failure at Fukushima plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201407190041>

By AKIRA HATANO/ Staff Writer

Japan's nuclear watchdog says the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011 was **almost certainly** triggered by towering tsunami generated by the Great East Japan Earthquake.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority said key equipment and emergency power systems at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant failed due to damage from the tsunami instead of the magnitude-9.0 earthquake that preceded the deluge.

The NRA endorsed the view in an interim report draft on the nuclear disaster released July 18. Its findings are expected to influence the evaluation by the International Atomic Energy Agency due out by the end of the year.

Experts have been divided over whether the massive earthquake was responsible for the failure of key equipment and emergency power sources at the No. 1 reactor building.

Workers at the plant at the time of the disaster reported that water was already leaking on the fourth floor of the No. 1 reactor building before the tsunami inundated the plant.

The fourth floor housed isolation condensers that cool steam from the reactor's pressure vessel and condense the steam into water and return the cooling water into the reactor.

The condensers were supposed to kick in during an emergency even without a power source, but it was discovered that they barely functioned, leading to a meltdown earlier than anticipated.

A Diet investigative committee pointed out the possibility that water leaked because isolation condenser pipes were damaged by the quake. It also said that emergency power sources for the No. 1 reactor could have been lost before the tsunami struck the facility on the basis of its assessment of when the tsunami hit the plant.

The NRA, however, concluded that the leaking water that the workers saw was overflow from the spent fuel storage pool nearby.

It also determined that emergency power sources were lost due to the tsunami, based on data released in May 2013 by the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., and other sources.

The NRA conducted an on-site inspection at the plant in May 2013 to look into what went wrong at the nuclear complex.

It will compile the final report on the Fukushima disaster after interviewing former members of the Diet's Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission.

Whether the isolation condensers were already damaged by the quake is an issue of significant implications, raising the question of the adequacy of anti-quake preparedness measures at the Fukushima plant and other nuclear facilities.

ADR center cheating on victims

July 21, 2014

Nuke disaster center skipping expert opinion, cutting proposed victim compensation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140721p2a00m0na010000c.html>

The government alternative dispute resolution (ADR) center tasked with managing compensation claims against Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) by victims of the Fukushima nuclear disaster has consistently finalized payouts over deaths while in evacuation and lasting injuries without consulting third-party medical experts, it has been learned.

The Nuclear Damage Claim Dispute Resolution Center has stated that it has forgone soliciting medical opinions to speed up the compensation process. There are, however, multiple cases where the center has pushed aside the medical opinions of the victims' doctors and proposed small compensation amounts.

The ADR center's internal regulations state that "testimony from experts can be heard" during resolution proceedings, which would include statements by third-party doctors. The Mainichi Shimbun has discovered, however, that in three cases of death related to the nuclear disaster and two of injuries leading to permanent disabilities, the ADR center did not admit any expert medical testimony.

In one of these cases, medical opinions from two doctors submitted by a 66-year-old disaster victim from Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, were simply overturned by the ADR center.

Before the meltdowns at the No. 1 plant, the 66-year-old woman did have a history of high blood pressure, but had no other medical problems and had no trouble doing household tasks. She was evacuated from her home on March 12, 2011; the day after the nuclear disaster broke out in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. Ten days later, at a gymnasium being used as an evacuation center, she lost consciousness while sitting on the toilet. She was taken by emergency medical transport to a hospital in the city of Fukushima.

There, she was diagnosed with a cerebral hemorrhage, and the damage was severe. After a long rehabilitation process, she is finally able to move her left arm and leg a little, but still has no feeling in either limb. She cannot walk without a cane.

The woman's house is inside the nuclear evacuation zone, so she's living with her second son and three grandkids in a rented apartment. Once when she was trying to cook for the family, she was surprised to see blood gushing from her paralyzed left hand. She had sliced it open with a kitchen knife and hadn't even noticed. Unable to help out around the house, "I've sometimes thought it'd be better if I was dead," she says.

The woman collected the informed medical opinions of three doctors to submit to the ADR center. The doctor who examined her when she'd been rushed to the hospital in Fukushima in 2011 stated that the "impact level" of the nuclear disaster on her condition was "unknown." Her family doctor and another who oversaw her rehabilitation, however, both declared that her hemorrhage had "almost entirely" been due to the stress imposed by the meltdowns.

TEPCO submitted the opinion of another doctor who pegged the disaster's role in the woman's brain hemorrhage at "around 50 percent." The doctor, however, had never examined the woman. Despite this and the conflicting diagnoses, the ADR center never sought a third-party medical opinion. In August 2013, the center declared that the woman's hemorrhage was indeed only 50 percent due to the disaster, and proposed final compensation in the amount of 7 million yen. The center gave no explanation for why it chose the same rate as the TEPCO doctor.

Even so, the woman approved the amount the following October, saying, "I'm already an old woman. I have no choice."

The woman's son, who found out that the ADR center had not sought a third-party medical opinion only after the compensation amount had been finalized, told the Mainichi, "I wish they'd asked an expert about it. If this is how the system works, then there's no point in applying (to the ADR center)."

Hiroshi Noyama, former head of the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry section that serves as secretariat to the ADR center, told the Mainichi that the center "does not interview experts. If it carefully solicited expert opinion regarding every claimant, it wouldn't be able to complete deliberations for each case at the current pace," which now averages about six months per case.

In other news relating to the Nuclear Damage Claim Dispute Resolution Center, the group has recently set the basic amount of reparations in cases of death below the amount usual for damages suits that go before the courts. Furthermore, the ADR center sets the causal relationship between these deaths and the nuclear

disaster at 50 percent in nearly every instance, and has accordingly cut the proposed compensation amount by half in case after case.

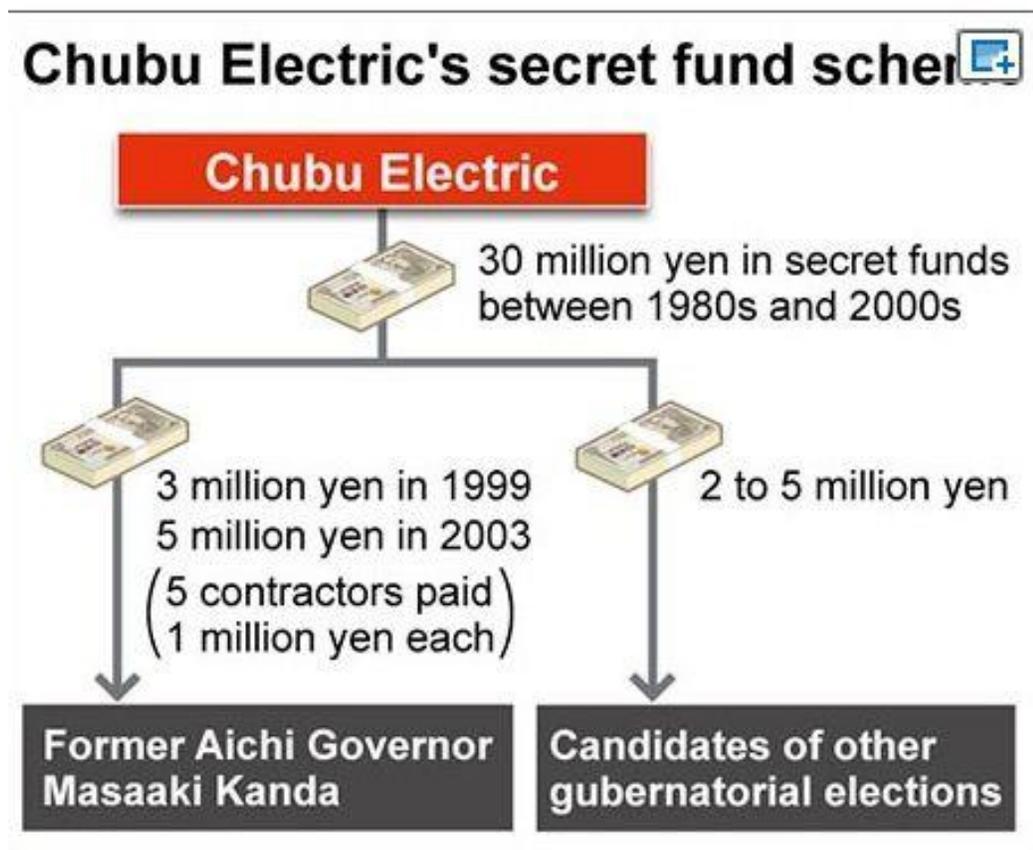
July 21, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Chubu's slush fund to buy politicians' support

July 21, 2014

Chubu Electric used slush fund for political donation to former Aichi governor

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201407210047



THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A former director of Chubu Electric Power Co. told The Asahi Shimbun that it paid a total of 30 million yen (\$296,000) from a slush fund to four gubernatorial candidates starting in the 1980s and ending in the 2000s.

Aichi Prefecture's former governor Masaaki Kanda has acknowledged he received a political donation from Chubu Electric, one of several regional utility monopolies.

Kanda, who served as Aichi governor for three terms between 1999 and 2011, admitted that he received funds from the company on at least one occasion in 1999.

Nagoya-based Chubu Electric is suspected of raising 250 million yen in off-the-book funding to buy support from politicians for nuclear power and other utility-related concerns.

The individual said he provided 3 million yen in 1999 and 5 million yen in 2003 to Kanda at his residence shortly before the start of his election campaigns.

Each time the executive said he made an appointment to meet Kanda before visiting his home and handing over cash directly to him.

Although Kanda admitted he received funds from Chubu Electric, he could not recall whether he received money in 2003. The former governor added that officials from the utility never asked him for anything in exchange.

"I remember that I received money once at the time of my first election, but I don't clearly recall whether I received (money) or not at the time of my second election," Kanda said. "I certainly did not provide favors to Chubu Electric, and they did not ask me for any favors, either."

Kanda was a member of a Chubu Electric's panel on utility policies that was comprised of locally influential people.

"Aichi's governor was a member of the panel, so he was of special importance to us compared with governors of other prefectures," the executive said.

For the 5 million yen it paid to the governor in 2003, the utility had five major construction companies contribute 1 million yen each. The executive said he told Kanda the names of the contractors.

To raise 250 million yen for the slush fund, the utility padded the amount it charged for orders that it placed to these companies, the executive said. His revelation raises the possibility that the utility used revenue paid by electricity consumers to buy the support of politicians for utility-related projects.

The executive said that Chubu Electric also paid money from the secret fund to candidates in three other gubernatorial elections during the same time frame beginning in the 1980s.

Each time, the company handed between 2 million yen and 5 million yen to relatives of the candidates or executives on their campaign teams. In some instances, a candidate's side approached Chubu Electric for a monetary contribution, the executive said.

While prefectural governors have no legal authority in the decision-making process over the construction, operation and decommissioning of nuclear power plants, the safety agreements required between power companies and local governments oblige the utilities to gain the approval of prefectural and local governments before they can construct new reactors or restart those that have been idled.

"If we alienate prefectural governors, it will cause us many problems in promoting the utility's projects," said the executive.

A spokesman for Chubu Electric said the company has no record relating to the executive's allegations.

The gubernatorial candidates from the other prefectures and former executives from their campaign teams said they are not aware of the alleged monetary handover or they have no memory of it.

(This article was written by Hiroo Sunaoshi and Hiroyoshi Itabashi.)

July 20, 2014

Chubu Electric built 250 million yen slush fund to win over politicians

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201407200021

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A former director of Chubu Electric Power Co. said the regional utility had its contractors pony up 250 million yen (\$2.46 million) over 20 years for a secret fund to buy the support of politicians for nuclear power and other utility-related concerns.

The former executive told The Asahi Shimbun that Chubu Electric padded the amount of orders that it placed to these companies for nuclear power-related projects in exchange for their cooperation with the slush fund.

His revelation points to the possibility that the utility may have used part of the revenues paid by users on their electricity bills to cover the inflated costs of the projects. Under the Electric Utilities Industry Law, a power company can recover all the costs of generating power such as building nuclear power plants and their upkeep as well as distributing electricity by including them in electricity rates.

The man said the secret funds were used to promote nuclear power generation and the electric power business in the prefectures that the Nagoya-based Chubu Electric serves--Aichi, Gifu, Mie, Nagano as well as part of Shizuoka Prefecture.

He decided to reveal the existence of the slush fund following the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which unfolded in March 2011 when the powerful Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck the plant.

In connection with a secret fund, the statute of limitations has apparently expired in filing potential criminal charges.

An official at Chubu Electric's publicity section denied the existence of a slush fund to The Asahi Shimbun, saying, "We are not aware that such facts existed."

The former executive said, "Only a limited number of officials at Chubu Electric are aware of what I had handled."

The companies that he claimed were involved in the slush funds did not officially confirm or deny his allegations.

According to the former executive, the utility began receiving funding from a manufacturer of electronics components in Nagoya and two leading general contractors in 1985.

The general contractors continued the practice until 1995, paying 10-15 million yen together annually. The manufacturer contributed 10-20 million yen a year until 2004.

The man also said another large construction company paid 100 million yen and 40 million yen on separate occasions to Chubu Electric in 1993.

He received these funds personally and handled them without entering them in accounting records. The money was “handy” since it did not exist on paper. Without receipts, it left no clues as to its source.

“I knew that managing such money violates the tax laws,” he said.

He distributed some of the funds to governors up for re-election in the jurisdiction Chubu Electric serves and senior officials with their election campaign offices.

The money was given at the governors’ homes, hotel lobbies or elsewhere after he called them in advance to “support them with what they can use at their discretion.”

“It costs a lot of money to run in an election,” he said. “They appreciated the funds, which they could use as they desired. Many of the governors had trouble raising campaign funds, unlike Diet members.”

In return for their cooperation in raising the questionable money, he asked a senior official at the utility’s supplies division, which oversees placing orders for projects, to “inflate the price of orders” for the companies or “let them take part in the projects.”

The former executive was referring to work related to the No. 5 reactor of the Hamaoka plant and other sites.

A former senior official with the Nagoya branch of one of the general contractors confirmed that his company contributed to the off-the-books fund.

“We began providing money around 1970,” he said.

The former official said that his company was willing to comply with the utility's request to pay into the slush fund.

"That Chubu Electric asked for cooperation (in building the slush fund) is evidence that it trusts our company," he said. "There was no reason for us to refuse it."

Chubu Electric's only nuclear plant, the Hamaoka plant in Shizuoka Prefecture, was taken offline in May 2011, two months after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 plant at the urging of then Prime Minister Naoto Kan.

The Hamaoka plant, which began operation in 1976, is widely considered the most vulnerable in the nation since it sits in the presumed hypocentral area of a huge quake that is expected to strike the Tokai region within decades.

The Chubu executive's disclosure followed The Asahi Shimbun's report that Tokyo Electric Power Co. requested a construction company to buy land from its secret fund for a spent nuclear fuel storage facility in Aomori Prefecture. The contractor later received a verbal promise from TEPCO for lucrative contracts.

(This article was written by Hiroo Sunaoshi, Hiroyoshi Itabashi and senior staff writer Takashi Ichida.)

Secondhand tanks at Fukushima Daiichi

July 23, 2014

TEPCO using secondhand tanks to store radioactively contaminated water

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140723p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Roughly 20 or more of the water tanks holding radioactively contaminated water at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant are secondhand, it has been learned -- a fact that plant owner Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) had not previously disclosed.

In August 2013, highly radioactive water was found leaking from one of the plant's tanks. A TEPCO representative refused to comment on whether that tank was one of the used ones.

The secondhand tanks and the tank that leaked are all types assembled by bolting steel pieces together, known as "flange" models. TEPCO has said flange tanks can be used for five years. When questioned by Mainichi Shimbun, a representative for the utility commented, "We do not believe that used tanks have a shorter usable lifespan."

However, an inside source with a Tokyo company that supplied TEPCO with the tanks told the Mainichi, "We don't guarantee the tanks for five years as a company, and they are not made to be completely leak-proof in the first place."

According to the source, TEPCO ordered tanks from the company in Tokyo's Chuo Ward after the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake to store contaminated water, but since it would take too much time to make new ones, in around May 2011, the manufacturer supplied TEPCO with 20 to 30 used flange tanks -- mud-storage tanks that it had been renting out to businesses such as construction firms.

Multiple private investigation firms have said that the tank supplier reported high profits for June 2011 as the nuclear disaster created heavy demand for its water tanks and enabled it to sell off "depreciated" tanks. The reference to the tanks as "depreciated" is believed to indicate that a considerable amount of time had passed since their manufacturing date. The flange tanks provided by the company after this point are thought to have been new ones.

In the August 2013 incident at the Fukushima plant, around 300 tons of contaminated water was found to have leaked from a flange tank. Criticism grew over the fact that this tank had been taken apart, reassembled and moved on the plant grounds before the leak occurred. At a news conference around this time TEPCO said that this tank and two others had been relocated, but it made no mention of secondhand tanks.

Since October 2012, the company has been creating and supplying TEPCO with welded tanks that are more resistant to leaks, but **most of the flange tanks, including the secondhand ones, are still being used at the Fukushima plant.**

It has also been learned from an inside source at the manufacturer that even after TEPCO started to use welded storage tanks, it continued to build new flange tanks for around a year. The source suggests that this was to save money, as it was not until September 2013 that the government decided to apply public funds to the tanks' purchase. According to the source, welded tanks cost anywhere from two to three times as much as flange tanks.

TEPCO reports that as of April 22 this year there were 332 flange tanks and 552 welded tanks at the Fukushima plant. The utility plans to start replacing the flange tanks with welded tanks this coming September to prevent more leaks.

July 23, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Use your vote!

July 23, 2014

Use your vote to dismantle shields that protect nuclear firms from post-Fukushima liability

Special To The Japan Times

To the Japanese public,

On Dec. 6, the contentious state secrets bill was rammed through the House of Councilors. No parties included this law in their manifesto in the last election, and it's highly doubtful that its enforcement reflects the will of yourselves, the voters.

Convincing measures have yet been taken to prevent the arbitrary classification and concealment of valuable information from the public. I believe this new law will reinforce the shields that already protect nuclear power companies such as General Electric (GE), Hitachi and Toshiba.

More than three years have passed since the magnitude-9 quake of March 11, 2011, but nuclear firms deeply involved in the design, construction and operation of the reactors are still not being held accountable. There is a long-running TV series sponsored by Hitachi, "Discovery of the World's Mysteries" ("Hitachi Sekai Fushigi Hakken!"), but the mysteries of nuclear firms themselves are being kept secret.

Six years ago, I left GE Japan. During my six months working in financial planning at the firm in the lead-up to the Lehman Brothers collapse, I came to realize that profit was the highest priority. Skilled managers who would use any means necessary to increase profits were hired from various fields including law, marketing and finance. They have succeeded in fending off any claims of legal responsibility for their actions so far.

Two tenable shields are being created to protect these firms. The first is the state secrets law, which will come into force in December. As The New York Times opined (“Japan’s Dangerous Anachronism,” Dec. 16), “The law is vaguely worded and very broad, and it will allow government to make secret anything that it finds politically inconvenient.”

Recently, the Asahi Shimbun, a brave “mystery hunter” among newspapers, got hold of a series of interviews with the late Masao Yoshida, former manager of the Fukushima No. 1 plant. These interviews startled the public — particularly the revelation that 90 percent of panicked workers fled the Fukushima plant after the 2011 disaster in defiance of Yoshida’s order for them to stay. I’m afraid that this law will allow the government to designate inconvenient truths such as these state secrets in order to prevent any thorough investigation into the responsibilities of nuclear firms.

The second shield is the treaty known as the Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage. In this column on Dec. 4 (“Japan should shun treaty that will shield nuclear tech suppliers”), Brian Victoria wrote to the foreign minister warning that “After ratifying the treaty, Japan will be unable to hold GE or any other domestic or foreign vendor financially liable, no matter how defective or dangerous the equipment they installed is.” The Shinzo Abe government plans to ratify it by the end of this year, as part of its strategy to support the restart of atomic plants and the export of nuclear technology abroad.

These two shields will not only hinder the revelation of the cause of nuclear accidents but also make it difficult for nuclear firms to be found liable for future nuclear damage. What powerful magical shields these will be for nuclear firms!

Three parties should be responsible for bearing the cost of the Fukushima accident: 1) taxpayers; 2) Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Tepco); and 3) nuclear firms. A total of ¥100 trillion might not be sufficient to compensate for all the damage done, considering the plight of the evacuees; the radiation exposure, damage to agriculture, land and fisheries; decontamination and continued contaminated water leakage; the decommissioning of the power plant, etc. — yet nuclear firms other than Tepco have not paid even a portion of the massive costs.

Is that fair? Greenpeace launched the “They Profit, You Pay” campaign last year and 113,996 people signed the petition. Greenpeace pleaded, “Don’t let General Electric, Hitachi and Toshiba walk away from the Fukushima disaster.”

It makes sense. Even if each firm was obliged to pay several trillion yen for decades, they would not go bankrupt.

If my way of thinking is correct, these companies are responsible for paying all the profits that they have earned from the nuclear business, just as Tepco is. Right now, taxpayers are bearing almost all the costs

through the fees we pay Tepco for electricity. I understand that we have enjoyed the benefits of electricity generated from nuclear plants, but isn't our share of the burden too high?

Finally, there are three major elections in a few years. One is a unified local election in 2015; the others are the elections for both houses of the Diet in 2016. I would like to conclude by sharing with you one crucial way you can penetrate the multi-layered shields protecting nuclear firms: Simply do not vote for the party trying to reinforce these shields.

NORIKAZU WADA
Kashiba, Nara

Confession from ex-KEPCO top official

July 28, 2014

Former Kansai Electric Power executive reveals 18 years of secret payments to prime ministers

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201407280041

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A former top official at Kansai Electric Power Co. has come forward to reveal **a nearly 20-year history of doling out "top secret" huge donations to Japanese prime ministers, funded on the backs of ratepayers.**

Chimori Naito, 91, a former KEPCO vice president, said that for 18 years from 1972, seven prime ministers received 20 million yen (about \$200,000 now) annually from Yoshishige Ashihara, who served as both KEPCO president and chairman.

At that time, political donations to individual lawmakers were not illegal. However, in 1974, electric power companies declared a ban on corporate donations to politicians because of strong public opposition to the use of electricity fees to pay for such contributions.

Naito said that "ban" was only a superficial stance taken by the electric power companies. "There is no way those companies could (ban such donations)," he said. "Nothing would have happened if we angered politicians."

Naito had long taken pride in working closely with Ashihara in making the donations as part of efforts to promote nuclear energy and to further develop the electric power industry.

However, the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2011 and the inept handling of that disaster by Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant operator, politicians and bureaucrats led Naito to have a change of heart.

"As I began to think about my own death, I also recalled the course I had taken in life," Naito said.

"A reporter (from The Asahi Shimbun) came just at the time when I began feeling that I wanted to talk about matters I had never spoken about until now. I thought it would serve as a lesson for future generations."

According to Naito, the prime ministers who were given the money were Kakuei Tanaka, Takeo Miki, Takeo Fukuda, Masayoshi Ohira, Zenko Suzuki, Yasuhiro Nakasone and Noboru Takeshita. Only Nakasone is still alive.

Naito called aides to the prime ministers to arrange meetings twice a year during the traditional Bon period in summer and at the year-end season. Naito accompanied Ashihara to those meetings where the money was directly handed over.

Naito also revealed that other important politicians, including the chief Cabinet secretary and executives of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party as well as the major opposition parties, were given donations according to how much assistance they provided the electric power industry. In total, Kansai Electric doled out several hundreds of millions of yen a year in such donations.

Naito graduated from Kyoto University in 1947 and entered what would later become Kansai Electric. In 1962, he became an aide to Ashihara, who at that time was company president. Ashihara would serve as president until 1970 when he became chairman, a post he held until 1983, the same year Naito became a vice president at Kansai Electric. He left the company in 1987. Ashihara died in 2003 at 102.

Distributing political donations to influential politicians was imperative for Kansai Electric, which depended on nuclear power plants for about half of its total electricity supply before the Fukushima nuclear accident.

Naito agreed to be interviewed by The Asahi Shimbun, and he spoke with reporters for a total of 69 hours over 23 sessions from December 2013 until July 2014.

He said the government's handling of the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant was unforgivable.

"There was a problem in the relationship created over many years among those in the political, bureaucratic and electric power sectors," he said.

Naito said the money Ashihara distributed to prime ministers and other influential politicians was a "top secret" matter.

Naito said the two major reasons for making the donations was to contribute to the stability of the electric power industry and to promote national prosperity.

"The money was given for the betterment of the nation, and there was no specific objective," he said. "That was simply one way for electric power companies to act toward public authority that had control over approval of business matters. We hoped it would work like Chinese herbal medicine and take effect after prolonged use."

An official with Kansai Electric said the company was not aware of such donations.

Officials at Nakasone's office said aides from the time of the donations had long since died so there was no way of confirming their receipt. Nakasone also did not acknowledge receiving such donations even after repeated questions from The Asahi Shimbun.

Those who knew the other prime ministers named by Naito said they were unaware of such donations.

Takashi Mikuriya, a visiting political science professor at the University of Tokyo who has long conducted oral histories of politicians, praised Naito for coming forward to leave behind testimony as a history of the nation.

"Naito likely felt that the electric power industry had never done anything wrong, but the nuclear accident made him realize that was nothing but **misplaced confidence**," Mikuriya said. "The accident by TEPCO, which for Kansai Electric was the model to strive for and to overcome, likely led to a drastic change in his sense of values that had previously believed his behind-the-scenes work was for the good of the nation."

(This article was written by Kamome Fujimori and Osamu Murayama.)

Ex-TEPCO executives should be indicted

July 31, 2014

Inquest panel calls for indictments against former TEPCO executives

July 31, 2014

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201407310062>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Rejecting a decision by prosecutors, an independent judicial panel of citizens said July 31 that three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. should be indicted over the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The Tokyo No. 5 Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution said charges of professional negligence resulting in death and injury are warranted against former TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and two former vice presidents, Sakae Muto and Ichiro Takekuro.

The Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office had decided not to indict 42 people, including the three former TEPCO executives.

In response to the inquest committee's decision, however, the prosecutors office will reinvestigate the case to decide whether to indict the three.

If prosecutors again decide not to indict them but the inquest committee maintains its stance that they should be held criminally responsible for the disaster, the three will be indicted mandatorily and stand trial.

After the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami led to the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in March 2011, residents affected by the accident and citizens groups filed complaints with prosecutors against the 42 people. Those named in the complaints included not only the former TEPCO executives, but also former high-ranking government officials, including Naoto Kan, who was prime minister at the time of the disaster.

The groups said some inpatients died on their way to evacuation centers from hospitals while others were exposed to radiation from the nuclear power plant.

The prosecutors office accepted the complaints in August 2012. But after the investigations wrapped up, they decided in September 2013 not to indict any of the 42 people.

Prosecutors said the size and scale of the magnitude-9.0 earthquake and tsunami could not have been predicted by experts. They also said evidence of negligence among the 42 people was insufficient.

But a group of people, including those affected by the nuclear accident, asked the prosecution inquest committee in October 2013 to examine the evidence against six former TEPCO executives, including Katsumata, Muto and Takekuro.

In the July 31 announcement of its decision, the inquest panel pointed out that before the nuclear accident, TEPCO estimated that a tsunami as high as “15.7 meters” could hit the Fukushima plant, based on a government organization’s forecast.

The actual tsunami was 15.5 meters at the highest point and inundated the reactor buildings that were located 10 meters above sea level.

“Assuming the arrival of such a tsunami, TEPCO should have taken countermeasures, although it is impossible to predict when it would arrive because a tsunami is a natural phenomenon,” the panel said.

Panel: Ex-TEPCO officials should be indicted

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140731_22.html

Jul. 31, 2014 - Updated 05:36 UTC+2

A prosecution inquest panel has decided that 3 former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Company should be indicted for their handling of the March 2011 disaster at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Residents of Fukushima Prefecture and others filed criminal complaints in 2012 against more than 30 TEPCO officials.

They claimed the utility's lack of precautions against a massive earthquake and tsunami amounts to

professional negligence resulting in injury.

But prosecutors dismissed the complaints in September last year, saying the officials could not have predicted an earthquake and tsunami of such scale.

The plaintiffs took the issue to a prosecution inquest panel made up of randomly-selected citizens.

They'd narrowed their target to 6 former TEPCO executives, including former chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata.

On Thursday, the panel judged the prosecution wrong and said Katsumata and 2 others should stand trial. For the other 3, the panel judged one of the non-indictments as unjust and the other 2 as appropriate.

The prosecution will now decide whether to indict the 4 who've been judged found trial-worthy.

The panel said that Tokyo Electric Power Company has recognized that the utility will not be able to easily ignore future earthquakes and tsunami projected by a science ministry panel.

The panel said that even though it is uncertain whether natural disasters like earthquakes and tsunami will come or not, TEPCO had to take measures on the basis that such earthquakes and tsunami are likely to hit its Fukushima plant.

If prosecutors decide again not to indict them, the case will automatically go back to the inquest panel. If the panel repeats its judgment, Katsumata and the other 2 will be forced to stand trial.

Regarding former Prime Minister Naoto Kan and other government leaders at the time of the disaster, another inquest panel has already judged as appropriate the decision by prosecutors not to indict them.

Former TEPCO chairman Katsumata has told NHK he is in no position to comment on the panel's judgment.

The plaintiffs' leader, Ruiko Muto, said it's disappointing that not all 6 were judged trial-worthy, but described the decision as honest and proper.

She called for an immediate re-investigation by the prosecution.

Ex-TEPCO execs merit indictment over nuclear crisis: prosecution panel

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140731p2g00m0dm055000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- An independent judicial panel of citizens said Thursday it has decided that three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. merit indictment over the 2011 nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

The Tokyo No. 5 Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution voted in favor of the decision on Tsunehisa Katsumata, chairman of TEPCO at the time of the disaster, and two former vice presidents, Sakae Muto and Ichiro Takekuro.

The panel said the former executives had failed to take sufficient steps to ensure safety despite the possibility that a massive tsunami could trigger an unprecedented accident.

The move comes after Japanese prosecutors decided last September not to indict former leaders of the Fukushima plant operator, citing their lack of criminal responsibility.

With the latest decision, the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office is expected to resume investigations into the three former officials. If they decide not to indict them or do not announce a decision within three months, the prosecution inquest panel will discuss the case once again.

Katsumata and the two others will face mandatory indictment should the panel decide again that they merit indictment.

Last September, prosecutors judged it was difficult to foresee the scale of the earthquake and tsunami in March 2011 that triggered the worst nuclear crisis since the 1986 Chernobyl disaster.

But around 5,700 people, including Fukushima residents affected by the nuclear crisis, were dissatisfied with the prosecutors' decision and asked the inquest panel to review the case last October.

Parallels with US Occupation period

July 30, 2014



Not muzzled yet: A protester shouts slogans against the state secrets law outside the Diet building in January. Anti-nuclear groups are concerned that information related to nuclear power plants could be classified as state secrets and that anti-nuclear protesters may be targeted and investigated under the new law. | AP

Voices | FOREIGN AGENDA

Fukushima disaster colors A-bomb anniversariesput into 5**

Parallels can be drawn between control of information during Occupation and today

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2014/07/30/voices/fukushima-disaster-colors-bomb-anniversaries/#.U9o0nmPi91s>

by Jason Bartashius
Special To The Japan Times

Over the past three years, the atomic bombing anniversaries in August have increasingly become a time to ask new questions.

How did the only country to experience nuclear bombings come to embrace nuclear power, a decision that ultimately led to the ongoing crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 plant? Does Japan have the capability or political will to create its own nuclear arsenal? Is it morally acceptable to export nuclear technology to countries that are prone to natural disasters or may later decide to manufacture atomic weapons?

And what about censorship? Based in large part on its attempts at withholding or manipulating information related to the Fukushima disaster, the country has seen itself spiral down the Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index, falling a staggering 31 places between 2012 and 2013.

The situation can only worsen with the recent passage of the state secrets law. Will the law be used to keep important information regarding radiation and the safety of power plants secret? What impact will it have on anti-nuclear activism? And how do the new law, the overall lack of transparency and the handling of Fukushima compare to U.S. Occupation policies — especially those that squashed discussions of the atomic bombings?

One way history has repeated itself is in the way in which individuals and agencies have rushed to assure the public that radiation levels posed little or no threat to health.

Scholars Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell note that after a team of scientists toured Hiroshima in September 1945, U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Leslie Groves, the head of the Manhattan Project, “announced to the press that if any Japanese had died from exposure to radiation, ‘the number was very small.’ . . . Vegetation was growing in Hiroshima, and radiation levels were so low, ‘you could live there forever.’ ” The U.S. public image took priority over the reporting of facts.

Skip ahead to 2011: Dr. Shunichi Yamashita, the head of Fukushima Medical University, makes controversial remarks suggesting that an exposure limit of 100 millisieverts per year is acceptable. The comments, which made international headlines, were contested. Referring to the remarks, The Japan Times’ Eric Johnston wrote, “According to a 2006 study by the U.S. National Academy of Science, an exposure of 20 millisieverts will produce 2,270 cancer cases per 1 million people annually.”

Jump to spring 2014: On April 14, the Mainichi Shimbun reports that in an effort to collect data on internal radiation exposure, the Foreign Ministry sent an email to municipalities that “suggested the data could be used to play down the radiation effects from the disaster.” The data was to be used by the International Atomic Energy Agency, but “the email suggested that the IAEA report is expected to evaluate radiation exposure among residents at lower levels than reports by other international organizations.”

Much debate, of course, has taken place regarding the safety of Fukushima since March 2011. I do not cite the above examples to make any claims about the current degree of danger in the area surrounding the No. 1 plant, but merely to draw attention to historical parallels in terms of **irresponsible and misleading communication with the public.**

We see a similar parallel in the ways in which the U.S. Occupation and Japanese governmental bodies have interfered with medical research.

During the U.S. Occupation it was extremely difficult for Japanese medical doctors to conduct and publish research. Monica Braw, a scholar of U.S. Occupation censorship, relays a conversation she had with Dr. Issei Nishimori, who intended to study the effects of the bomb on humans. Nishimori recounted all the difficulties the medical establishment faced: lack of funds, restrictions, being required by the Allied authorities to translate all reports into English, and not having access to autopsy materials that were shipped to the U.S. or the results of research conducted by the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission set up by the Americans.

Censorship was another factor. Braw informs us that medical journals were censored for various types of undesirable content, such as criticism of the Allied authorities and wartime nationalist propaganda (occurring in material written before the conclusion of the war) as well as any mention of censorship, which itself was supposed to be a secret. Two articles were censored for discussions of the effects of the atomic bombs.

All in all, around 50 reports about the atomic bombings appeared in medical journals between 1945 and 1949, but the bulk of these reports didn't appear until 1947. In 1948 and '49, the last two years of censorship, the number of published articles about the issue dropped significantly.

Academic Sey Nishimura argues that self-censorship was behind the decline: "Voluntary restraint may have played a part, since the year 1947 marked the change from prepublication censorship, when deletions were made at the galley-proof stage, to post-publication censorship, where notification of disapproval occurred after publication."

As for the situation in Fukushima, the government hasn't always been enthusiastic about radiation-related medical research. On Dec. 19, 2012, the Mainichi reported, "The Fukushima prefectural government has tried to kill a proposal by a local assemblyperson to store local children's milk teeth to examine their internal radiation exposure stemming from the Fukushima nuclear disaster, it has been learned." Fortunately, more recently, plans for a large-scale study to test milk teeth for cesium, strontium-90 and other isotopes were revealed to the public. But, understandably, the public has grown very suspicious of government involvement in research.

There are also parallels between the suppression of protests against the use of the atomic bomb by the U.S. and the potential for the state secrecy law to negatively impact upon the anti-nuclear movement.

In September 1945, a Japanese film crew visited Nagasaki with the intention of documenting the destruction and to "appeal against the inhumanity of the bomb to the Red Cross in Geneva." The crew, however, was arrested by U.S. military police and their footage was confiscated. And so began a U.S. effort

to render invisible images of destruction and the victims' suffering in order to protect the official narrative that the bombs were justifiably necessary to end the war swiftly and save American lives. When the Smithsonian was planning an exhibition to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of the war in 1995, U.S. veterans protested over what they saw as too much emphasis on Japanese casualties.

How will the Fukushima disaster be remembered? What narratives will be constructed? Archived newspaper articles and footage always play a vital role in the telling of any history. Censorship is needed to construct acceptable presentations of news not only for tomorrow's readers, but also for the students, scholars and general public of the future. Activists challenging the construction of such narratives are deemed dangerous by governments. An indisputably clear case of this is the passage of the state secrecy law, which threatens bureaucrats leaking information to the public and journalists seeking that information with jail time.

The law is primarily concerned with national security. However, skeptics are concerned that information related to nuclear power plants may be classified in the name of preventing terrorism.

Others are worried about what impact the law may have on anti-nuclear activism. Johnston writes, "Receiving less attention is the question of whether ordinary citizens who are involved in anti-nuclear protests might be targeted and investigated under the new law."

Koichi Nakano, professor of political science at Sophia University, is also concerned.

"You find a similar power with the Japanese government as existed during the U.S. Occupation," Nakano said in an interview. "Self-censorship will become more prevalent. Journalists will censor themselves before asking questions. The activists who try to find out information about the nuclear industry may get in trouble, they may not, but they'll worry about what they otherwise wouldn't."

Foreign Agenda offers a forum for opinion on Thursdays. Your comments and story ideas: community@japantimes.co.jp

Indict them!

August 1, 2014

Citizen panel pins blame on ex-TEPCO execs for accepting nuclear safety myth

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140801p2a00m0na007000c.html>

A July 31 judgment by the Tokyo No. 5 Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution that three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) merit indictment over the 2011 Fukushima nuclear

disaster not only prods prosecutors to review their decision not to indict for their criminal responsibility, but is also a sharp rebuke to TEPCO and regulatory authorities for neglecting safety.

The committee composed of regular citizens voted in favor of indicting former TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and two former vice presidents, Sakae Muto and Ichiro Takekuro. The recommendation made clear the perception gap between experts and ordinary citizens about nuclear safety as well as the double standards vis-a-vis prosecution concerning decisions to indict or not. "This kind of judgment was possible," a senior prosecutor said.

The citizens' committee strongly denounced TEPCO executives at the time of the nuclear crisis triggered by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, and requested prosecutors to reinvestigate the case. The committee pointed out that electric power companies and regulatory authorities probably shared the view that nuclear power plants were safe. It also stressed that the former TEPCO executives cannot shirk their responsibility for the Fukushima disaster simply because they had held fast to the nuclear safety myth.

What divided opinions between prosecutors and the independent judicial panel was the issue of preparedness for an accident caused by an unpredictable killer tsunami. There is an enormous perception gap between citizens who had sought every preparatory step imaginable, and prosecution and courts with conventional thinking.

The prosecution must substantiate how foreseeable a disaster is if looking to build a case for criminal negligence. It is not enough simply to recognize an abstract danger, but prosecutors are required to prove that the accused could specifically predict the disaster. The former TEPCO executives had maintained that they could not foresee the nuclear disaster because of an unanticipated huge tsunami.

In the course of the prosecution's investigations, the focal point was on how to overturn TEPCO's argument after revealing the state of research on earthquakes and tsunami. They focused on two findings, the first a governmental earthquake study task force announcement in 2002 that tsunami triggered by an earthquake may occur off Fukushima Prefecture; and second, a 2008 TEPCO forecast shows that a tsunami as high as 15.7 meters could strike in a worst case scenario.

Prosecutors determined that researchers for the 2002 study could not imagine a natural disaster comparable to the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, and the 2008 forecast outlined the most severe scenario, such that TEPCO could not predict the huge tsunami that devastated the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

On the other hand, the Tokyo No. 5 Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution said damage from a nuclear plant accident would be heavy and effects from such an accident would be long-lasting. Nuclear power plant operator executives are required to pay extremely careful attention and shoulder personal responsibility for the safety of nuclear power plants, the committee said.

The panel went on to criticize TEPCO for failing to predict a huge tsunami as one requiring preparatory steps and neglecting to follow through on the 2008 forecast. TEPCO could have avoided damage or at least minimized it had the utility installed power generators on higher ground, updated the emergency manual and conducted drills, the panel said.

Prosecutors will question Katsumata and other former TEPCO executives. But a senior prosecutor says the case has been investigated in accordance with standards permitted under previous trials. The prosecution inquest panel, however, is demanding more than that, the prosecution source said, adding the planned reinvestigation would be tough. (By Yu Yoshizumi and Ebo Ishiyama, City News Department)

August 01, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

July 31, 2014

3 ex-TEPCO execs recommended for indictment by citizens' committee**

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140731p2a00m0na021000c.html>

A committee for the inquest of prosecution announced on July 31 that it had recommended three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), including its former chairman, be indicted for their criminal responsibility over the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster.

The citizen-composed Tokyo No. 5 Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution said that while it was impossible to predict specifically that a tsunami like the one that struck on March 11, 2011, would hit the plant, the TEPCO executives should have been better prepared for the coming of a tsunami. It said that research done before the Great East Japan Earthquake was scientifically-based, but TEPCO, while knowing that it shouldn't ignore this research, avoided taking disaster-prevention measures due to reasons including their cost.

The recommendation was adopted on July 23. It overrides a former decision by the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office not to indict the three former executives on charges that included causing death and injury through professional negligence, and requires them to re-examine the former executives' cases and make a new decision on their indictment. If they again decide not to indict and the committee again decides in favor, indictment will proceed forcibly.

The three former executives are Tsunehisa Katsumata, 74, former TEPCO chairman, and former vice presidents Sakae Muto and Ichiro Takekuro. The committee also decided that two other executives did not merit indictment but that another one should be further investigated.

The committee also said that, as TEPCO's person most in charge, Katsumata "was in a position allowing him to make (company) departments take appropriate countermeasures. He is thought to have come into contact with a report on the possibility of the arrival of a tsunami much greater than had been anticipated until then, so we cannot trust his explanation that he did not know about the important points (of that report.)"

The committee further argued that Muto and Takekuro, having been in charge of the company's nuclear division, received a report in 2008 that a tsunami up to 15.7 meters tall could strike the plant, and were also in a position to enact appropriate countermeasures.

Previously disaster victims and citizens' groups sued Katsumata and other TEPCO executives who were in charge at the time of the disaster, as well as former Prime Minister Naoto Kan and other government officials who handled the government response to the tragedy. In September 2013, the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office decided not to indict the former TEPCO executives, Kan or the other government officials, turning down an indictment against the 42 sued people.

In October 2013, an organization of Fukushima Prefecture residents and disaster evacuees narrowed down their targets to the six former TEPCO executives and sought a decision by the committee for the inquest of prosecution, which led to the July 23 decision.

July 31, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Raising power prices (effects of-)

August 2, 2014

Editorial: Power companies can't ignore problems when raising electricity prices

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140802p2a00m0na004000c.html>

Hokkaido Electric Power Co. has applied to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry to charge its consumers more for power, as prospects for restarting its Tomari Nuclear Power Plant in Hokkaido remain unclear and its expenditure on other fuels has adversely affected its business performance. If the

company increases its fees, the move may prompt Kansai Electric Power Co. and Tokyo Electric Power Co. to follow suit.

If electricity rate increases are directly linked to rises in fuel costs stemming from the suspension of nuclear power plants, then it will have a major impact on the domestic economy. The government and power companies cannot waste time sidelining problems in anticipation of the restart of nuclear reactors.

Hokkaido Electric Power Co.'s planned price hike follows an increase in September last year. Households face an approximately 17 percent increase, much more than the roughly 7.7 percent implemented last year. Corporate customers for which government authorization of a price hike is not required, meanwhile, face a roughly 22.6 percent increase. Such a drastic price hike, however, will have a major adverse effect on the regional economy. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is likely to approve a price hike from November, but it needs to urge the utility to step up streamlining of its operations to limit the extent of the increase.

Hokkaido Electric Power Co. should do its utmost to cut costs. It must be noted, though, that a streamlining plan had accompanied the application for the first hike, and the extent of further cost-cutting measures will likely be limited.

It is a problem that the power company has had to apply for a price raise again after just one year. In the wake of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, the government has revised the way in which electricity rates are calculated, from year-by-year calculations to an average for a three-year period. Government officials apparently expected nuclear reactors would be restarted within three years, leading to reduced fuel costs and modest price hikes. But this was a case of counting their chickens before they had hatched. In effect, they were adopting a lax outlook and putting problems on the backburner.

If Japan's nuclear power plants are not restarted, then business models that had envisaged their operation will crumble. Hokkaido Electric Power Co., which relied heavily on nuclear power, has seen this firsthand. The model is the same for other utilities including Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant, and Kansai Electric Power Co., which relies on the Oi and the Takahama nuclear power plants.

It would be simplistic to say that nuclear reactors should be restarted because the companies rely on them. In light of the grave consequences of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, there is evidently a need to reduce reliance on nuclear power as soon as possible. And in that case, we will probably have to accept a degree of price increases. When the electricity supply is not increasing, efforts will also need to be made to conserve power.

Japan's economy cannot stand if the suspension of nuclear power plants is linked directly to price increases. The basic energy plan adopted by the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has presented a policy of reducing dependence on nuclear power. While confirming that premise, the government and people of Japan must put their heads together to find ways to control electricity prices.

To reduce the costs of power generation through liquefied natural gas, which can replace nuclear power, Japan needs to strengthen its bargaining ability in its negotiations with gas-producing countries. However, it must not rely on relatively cheap coal-fired thermal plants, which run counter to measures against global warming.

Reforms to the power system that aim to diversify services and control prices by introducing principles of competition are also important. We call for the establishment of an effective system for Japan's power industry.

Cheating TEPCO

August 3, 2014

NPO headed by ex-defense chief suspected of defrauding Tepco

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/08/03/national/npo-headed-ex-defense-chief-suspected-defrauding-tepco/#.U94nlGPi91s>

Kyodo

A former employee of a nonprofit organization headed by former Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma was arrested Saturday for allegedly swindling about ¥12 million from Tokyo Electric Power Co. by filing a bogus claim for damages from the Fukushima nuclear disaster, police said.

Kazuaki Shindo, 42, is suspected of conspiring with three others including Shigeko Nemoto, 52, to defraud Tepco by submitting a document claiming that Nemoto's company was forced to cancel a number of events from April to May 2012 due to radiation from the meltdowns, the Metropolitan Police Department said.

The NPO was launched in August 2011 to assist victims of the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and subsequent nuclear disaster. The police are considering questioning Kyuma, 73, on a voluntary basis, investigative sources said.

According to the police, the NPO represented companies in disaster-hit areas seeking damages from Tepco. The operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant has paid more than ¥100 million in compensation to more than 10 companies so far.

Shindo denied the allegation but the other three admitted to the charges, the police said.

NPO members arrested for Fukushima redress fraud

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140802_27.html

Aug. 2, 2014 - Updated 18:38 UTC+2

Tokyo police have arrested 4 people on suspicion of swindling compensation money out of the operator of the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Police say that 3 former members of a Tokyo-based non-profit organization and an executive of a staffing agency in Fukushima Prefecture defrauded Tokyo Electric Power Company of about 117,000 dollars.

The 4 suspects allegedly made a false claim in 2012 that the staffing agency suffered a sales drop because it received fewer job orders from hotels in Fukushima after the nuclear accident in the previous year.

Police say the NPO has been contracted to make applications for compensation for people affected by the accident, including local staffing agencies, since it was established 3 years ago.

More than 1 million dollars have been paid based on claims made by the NPO which is represented by former Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma.

Police say 3 of the 4 suspects have admitted to the allegations.

Responsible or not?

August 5, 2014

Responsibility for disaster

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/08/05/editorials/responsibility-for-disaster/#.U-C7ImPi91s>

Prosecutors need to take a recent decision by a judicial panel of citizens seriously and look hard again at whether Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s former top executives should be held criminally responsible for the

March 2011 disaster at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The government and power companies, meanwhile, need to see the decision by the Tokyo No. 5 Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution as a stern warning from citizens against their moves to restart the nation's idled nuclear power plants before demonstrating they've fully grasped the lessons of the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe.

The prosecution inquest panel on July 31 voted that three former Tepco executives, including ex-chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata, should be indicted on a charge of professional negligence for failing to take appropriate steps to prevent the triple meltdowns at the Fukushima plant.

The panel, comprising 11 randomly selected ordinary citizens, had been reviewing the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office's September 2013 decision not to take action against the Tepco management on the grounds that it was difficult for them to foresee the scale of the massive tsunami triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, which crippled emergency generators that supply power to cool nuclear cores during power outages and led to the meltdowns at three of the plant's nuclear reactors.

If the Tokyo prosecutors decide again not to indict the executives or to take no action within three months, the inquest panel will once again review the case. Katsumata, who was Tepco chairman at the time of the Fukushima disaster, and the other executives will face mandatory indictments if the panel decides for the second time that they should be indicted.

Last year's decision by the prosecutors not to take action against the former Tepco executives is said to have reflected the difficulty in establishing a criminal case against top leaders of a large company like Tepco over what happened at its plant. Court rulings have found individuals guilty of professional negligence only when it is proven that they could have foreseen an accident in question in concrete terms and that the event could have been averted.

Prosecutors tend to follow such court precedents when they decide whether to file charges against company executives. Unlike plant managers or the like, it is rare for top executives of a major firm to be convicted of such a crime.

The prosecutors' decision must have sounded unacceptable to Fukushima residents displaced from their homes due to radiation fallout from the meltdowns, because it meant that nobody would be held criminally responsible for the disaster that had shattered the lives of so many people.

In addition to such public sentiments, it is important to identify who was responsible for what technically went wrong at the Tepco plant — a process that will be crucial for ensuring that the same mistakes are never repeated.

In its decision last week, the inquest panel said executives of utility companies that deal with nuclear power are duty-bound to pay an “extremely high level” of attention to ensure plant safety, and that they need to take safety steps to guard against events that could go beyond their assumption.

In 2008, Tepco estimated that the biggest tsunami that could hit the Fukushima plant would reach as high as 15.7 meters, based on the government’s seismic data, but failed to take action to cope with such a risk because it was thought that such an effort could force the company to halt the operation of the plant, the panel charged.

It is said that on March 11, 2011, a 14-to-15-meter-high tsunami hit the plant, while a government computer simulation puts the tsunami’s height at 13.1 meters.

The panel also determined that Tepco was also aware by 2006 of the risk of the Fukushima plant losing its power supply— which could result in damage to its reactor cores — in the event of a massive tsunami.

As Tepco’s president and then chairman from 2002 to 2012, Katsumata had apparently been informed of the tsunami risk and was in a position to order relevant sections of the company to take preventive actions, the panel said, noting that Katsumata’s explanation that he had not known about key details pertaining to such risks is “not credible.”

The prosecutors need to clarify each of these points in the inquest’s charges. The reinvestigation should include additional interviews of Katsumata and the other executives as well as the examination of Tepco documents if necessary.

The inquest panel’s decision also serves as a reminder on how — more than three years after the Fukushima plant meltdowns — efforts to pin down the causes of the disaster are not making much progress.

Both the government’s and Diet-commissioned investigation panels on the Tepco plant disaster reported in 2012 that many aspects of what happened at the disaster remain a mystery, but there have not been many follow-up probes.

The Diet panel said the Fukushima plant crisis was a “clear man-made disaster” caused by the failure of both Tepco management and the government’s regulatory authorities to take preventive measures due to negligence on their part, which led to the shelving of problems and to decision making that conveniently

fit their own interests. It also did not rule out the possibility that the No. 1 plant suffered critical damage from the quake itself. Tepco, meanwhile, insisted in its report that the plant disaster was caused by the tsunami, which was bigger than its assumptions.

At present, the government and the power companies are pushing to reactivate nuclear power plants that were put offline after the Fukushima disaster, citing the cost burden on the economy of increased fuel imports, which push up electricity rates and cut the profits of utility companies.

The Abe administration says the plants will be safe once they've cleared the Nuclear Regulation Authority's screening under plant design standards updated to "the world's most stringent levels" in the wake of the Tepco plant crisis.

However, the inquest panel's decision shows that from citizens' viewpoint, efforts to identify the factors that caused the Fukushima disaster, including what people at Tepco did or did not do, and to learn its lessons — which should be the prerequisite for restarting nuclear power generation — are far from over.

Doubling the grants to Fukushima

August 9, 2014

Fukushima towns look set to bite on new offer of more money for storage facilities

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201408090038>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The central government has offered to double the amount of grants to be paid if local municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture accept the construction of temporary storage facilities for radioactive debris produced by the 2011 nuclear accident.

In talks Aug. 8 with Fukushima Governor Yuhei Sato and the mayors of Okuma and Futaba towns in the prefectural city of Koriyama, Environment Minister Nobuteru Ishihara and Reconstruction Minister Takumi Nemoto offered to double the grants to 301 billion yen (\$3 billion) if they OK the storage facilities.

In previous closed-door negotiations, the government had pledged grants of 150 billion yen. With a new offer on the table, it would appear that the talks are entering the final stages.

“We want to examine the contents of the proposal in detail (before making a decision),” Sato said.

Earlier negotiations became entangled and triggered a public uproar after Ishihara implied that local residents could be easily bought.

“In the end, it will come down to money,” Ishihara said June 16, angering the local governments and sending the negotiations into a stall.

The triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant triggered by the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami produced huge amounts of soil and debris contaminated with radioactive material.

Tons of debris collected during decontamination work is currently stored at makeshift sites across Fukushima Prefecture.

The government plans to store all the debris for 30 years in “intermediate storage facilities” that are planned to be constructed in Okuma and Futaba.

The 301 billion yen will be classified into three categories. The first (150 billion yen) category is for “grants for the intermediate storage facilities.” The second (100 billion yen) is for “grants for reconstruction of Fukushima,” and the third (51 billion yen) is an increase of conventional “grants for areas that host electricity sources.”

The grants in the first category will be mainly paid to the town governments of Okuma and Futaba, but funds will also be provided to the Fukushima prefectural government. The grants will be used for a variety of purposes to help residents rebuild their lives.

For example, grants will be used to cover the cost of visits to graves by residents who will lose their land due to the construction of the intermediate storage facilities.

Funds will also be provided to develop measures to alleviate concerns elsewhere in Japan that farm, forestry and fishery products in Fukushima Prefecture are contaminated with radioactive materials.

The grants of the second category will be used to construct key facilities in reconstruction projects. Funds will also be used by prefectural authorities for prefecture-wide measures to prevent malicious rumors about food safety from circulating.

As for the third category, grants have been given to localities that host nuclear power plants.

So far, 6.7 billion yen has been paid annually to local governments in Fukushima Prefecture.

The plan calls for increasing the annual amount by 1.7 billion yen to lessen the economic blow caused by decommissioning damaged nuclear reactors, and maintaining the yearly payments for 30 years, amounting to 51 billion yen.

The doubling of the total amount of grants signals that the central government is eager to begin the transportation of radioactive soil and debris to the intermediate storage facilities.

It is pushing to get the project under way by January 2015.

The decision to double the amount of grants suggests the negotiations are now starting to move forward.

Subsidies not the answer

August 11, 2014

Editorial: Subsidies not the answer to problem over storage site for radioactive soil

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140811p2a00m0na009000c.html>

The government has made a drastic decision over the planned construction of an interim storage facility for radioactive soil generated through decontamination work in the wake of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disaster, forking out an additional 301 billion yen in regional subsidies.

The subsidies, which will be used for rebuilding local residents' lives and regional development, have gained some credit from the Fukushima prefectural towns of Okuma and Futaba -- the candidate sites for the temporary storage facility -- and the Fukushima Prefectural Government. The move marks a step forward toward the central government's goal of starting partial operation of the facility in January next year.

Local residents' distrust in the central government, however, hasn't been completely dispelled, on the heels of Environment Minister Nobuteru Ishihara's gaffe suggesting the issue of where to build the interim storage facility was a matter of money. The government has yet to reveal the purchase price of land for the storage facility, leaving the fate of the negotiations with candidate towns up in the air. The town assemblies of Okuma and Futaba have asked their mayors not to make hasty decisions over the issue.

The central government is urged not to resort to money in settling the matter but instead to explain repeatedly the necessity and safety of the storage facility and the future path for the host town so as to gain local residents' understanding.

The interim storage facility is intended to store up to around 25.5 million cubic meters -- or the equivalent of filling 20 Tokyo Domes -- of soil and waste contaminated with radiation in Fukushima Prefecture for a duration of up to 30 years. The government had initially planned to nationalize a total of 16 square kilometers of land in Okuma and Futaba -- which host the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant -- and develop the land for the construction of the facility. However, the plan met a local backlash out of concern that the interim storage facility could ultimately become a final disposal site, with residents resisting to let go of the land of their ancestral legacy.

In response, the government gave up on the idea of nationalizing the land in its entirety and instead **decided to introduce a maximum 30-year surface right of land so that the government can utilize the premises while landowners retain their property rights.** The government's promise to transfer the contaminated waste from the interim facility to outside Fukushima Prefecture 30 years later for final disposal will also be legislated.

One could call the government's measures appropriate in taking local sentiment into consideration. Nonetheless, talks over the additional subsidies between the central and the Fukushima Prefectural Government have hit a snag, with the former aspiring to keep the amount somewhere around 100 billion yen while the latter demanding roughly 1 trillion yen.

Under the central government's proposal, a total of 250 billion yen in subsidies will be forked out to the Fukushima Prefectural Government and the towns of Okuma and Futaba in lump-sum payments. Aside from this, an annual 1.7 billion yen will be added to government subsidies for municipalities hosting nuclear plants over the 30-year period.

It is a matter of course that Fukushima Prefecture needs generous financial assistance in the aftermath of the gravest damage it has suffered from the nuclear catastrophe. The central government describes the new set of subsidies as "highly discretionary" for the recipient municipality and calls it the "maximum allowance" it could fork out. However, the government hasn't unveiled the basis for calculating the vast trove of subsidies.

Most areas in Okuma and Futaba still fall within the so-called "difficult-to-return" zone due to high levels of radiation. The subsidy funds would not be effectively utilized unless there is a clear picture of reconstruction in those areas. While the Reconstruction Agency explains that it will draw up a basic concept on the recovery of the two towns and work on the future vision of evacuation zones from medium- to long-term and broader perspectives, **budget measures should essentially be worked out in the presence of a clear picture of the future.**

The massive amount of subsidies is to be shouldered by none other than the general members of the public in the forms of electricity charges and taxes. The central government and municipalities concerned should reveal the usage of such subsidies and effectively utilize the funds as resources for achieving the recovery of Fukushima.

August 11, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

TEPCO's intentions

August 13, 2014

TEPCO mulls spinning off hydropower, renewable energy operations

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140813p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) is considering spinning off its hydropower and renewable energy operations as part of its plan to adopt a holding company structure in April 2016, it has been learned. The utility had planned to spin off its three business operations -- thermal power generation, power transmission and distribution, and retailing -- and make them independent companies. But it will spin off a total of four business operations after turning its hydropower and renewable energy operations, which are part of its power transmission and distribution operations, into a separate company. TEPCO, the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, is looking to secure neutrality for its power transmission and distribution unit and improve the efficiency and profitability of the other three operations as stand-alone business entities.

In its "New Comprehensive Special Business Plan" worked out in January this year, TEPCO adopted a policy of spinning off three business operations -- thermal power generation, power transmission and distribution, and retailing -- under a holding company, starting in fiscal 2016. The hydropower and renewable energy units were included in the new power transmission and distribution company to be established. As for the electricity system reform pursued by the government, major utility companies will be required to separate their power transmission and distribution operations from their power generation and retailing services by around fiscal 2018 to 2020.

Under these circumstances, TEPCO is considering separating its hydropower and renewable energy operations from its power transmission and distribution functions. Apparently, **the plan is also aimed at making it easy for the envisaged new companies to secure funds from private financial institutions as business entities that are independent of the holding company that holds responsibility to pay damages linked to the Fukushima nuclear disaster and decommission the crippled nuclear power complex.**

Promotion of nukes still going strong

August 15, 2014

Utilities still spending consumer fees to run nuclear-promotion centers

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/business/AJ201408150053>

Seven electric power utilities continue to spend billions of yen to run facilities that promote nuclear power despite dwindling visitor numbers and pressure on the companies to cut costs.

Operating expenses for these public relations centers are covered by consumer payments for electricity, the rates for which were raised after the utilities' nuclear reactors were taken offline following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The government approved the higher charges on households based on the premise that the companies would take thorough measures to improve efficiency and reduce spending.

The nine utilities in Japan that operate nuclear power plants spent 38 billion yen (\$370 million) in advertising in fiscal 2012, a 56-percent drop from fiscal 2010.

But according to research by The Asahi Shimbun, seven utilities--Hokkaido Electric Power Co., Tohoku Electric Power Co., Tokyo Electric Power Co., Chubu Electric Power Co., Kansai Electric Power Co., Shikoku Electric Power Co. and Kyushu Electric Power Co.--still run 17 promotional facilities.

Six of them revealed they will spend a total of about 3 billion yen in operating expenses this fiscal year for the public relations facilities, most of which are related to nuclear power plants. Chubu Electric declined to provide figures.

Many of the facilities were built near power plants to illustrate the mechanism of nuclear power generation. Models, images and other displays appeal the need for nuclear energy and its safety. Other facilities explain and promote thermal, hydroelectric and geothermal power generation.

The nuclear promotion sites, however, tend to be better equipped. Some offer recreational services, including a pool for residents who live in areas that host nuclear power plants.

Although entry to most of these facilities is free, visitor numbers have fallen in recent years due in part to their inconvenient locations and deteriorating conditions.

In fiscal 2012, 15,000 people visited an exhibition center near Kyushu Electric's Sendai nuclear plant in Satsuma-Sendai, Kagoshima Prefecture, below 20 percent of the peak figure in fiscal 1982. The Sendai nuclear plant is expected to be the first brought back online under stricter new safety standards of the Nuclear Regulation Authority.

TEPCO shut down two facilities related to its two nuclear plants in Fukushima Prefecture that were hit by the tsunami on March 11, 2011. A triple meltdown occurred at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant following the disaster.

They were the only nuclear-promotion facilities to close down.

But TEPCO still runs five facilities related to its nuclear power plants and one facility connected to a different power plant.

Although Kyushu Electric also shut down some public relations centers, it continues to operate two nuclear-related and two other facilities.

Kenichi Oshima, a professor of environmental economics at Ritsumeikan University's College of International Relations, said the utilities may feel they have no choice but to keep running these facilities, despite their tough financial situations.

He said the facilities were established to reassure residents in communities that agreed to host nuclear power plants, so shutting down these sites could give the impression that abandoning nuclear power is OK.

But he said that is no justification for the power companies to continue spending on the facilities.

"The costs lack economic rationality, so they should be reviewed," Oshima said.

TEPCO officials said the company continues to operate nuclear-promotional facilities because they serve as important bases to provide accurate and comprehensible information about the power plants.

Kyushu Electric also said the facilities are indispensable in gaining the public's understanding for its plans to restart nuclear reactors.

The other utilities echoed that sentiment, saying they have no plans to dismantle such necessary promotional facilities.

(This article was written by Makoto Tsuchiya and Kaname Kakuta.)

Ex-Kepeco vice-president admits secret payments to politicians

August 16, 2014

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/08/16/national/kepeco-monstrous-500-pound-gorilla-kansai/#.U_DYiGOFnKe

Kepeco: the monstrous 500-pound gorilla of Kansai

Last month, Chimori Naito, a 91-year-old former vice president at Kansai Electric Power Co., admitted what was hardly a secret but which put the utility under intense media scrutiny.

Naito said in a series of interviews with the Asahi Shimbun that he supervised under-the-table cash payments to seven prime ministers and key politicians in the ruling and opposition parties between 1972 and 1990 to ensure favorable policies, especially nuclear power policies. Naito guessed Kepeco's annual payoffs were in the hundreds of millions of yen.

Kepeco got its money's worth. Prior to March 11, 2011, Japan relied on nuclear power for about a third of its electricity needs. But half of Kepeco-supplied electricity came from nuclear power. Fukui Prefecture became home to 11 Kepeco reactors, the largest concentration in the country and, perhaps, the world. And it was Kepeco's two Oi reactors that were switched back on in the summer of 2012 despite massive public opposition.

In terms of local economic presence, Kepeco is the 500-pound gorilla. The company employs more than 22,000 people directly (and, indirectly, thousands more), has nearly 40 affiliated firms, and owns shares in about a dozen local public-relations facilities. These often take the form of "educational museums" that promote nuclear power. It also has small investments in Kansai-area television and radio stations.

All of this makes Kepeco similar to Japan's other utilities. But over the past two decades, as other Kansai firms moved to Tokyo or overseas, Kepeco has consolidated its power and influence over regional politics and policymaking to a degree unprecedented elsewhere, and in ways not always obvious to outsiders or Kansai residents.

Senior Kepeco officials serve as top representatives of hugely influential organizations such as the Kansai Economic Federation, which draws up regional political and economic strategies, and serves as a de facto political lobbying group in Tokyo. A Kepeco chairman has led the federation for 27 of its 68 years, and Shosuke Mori, Kepeco's current chairman, presently heads it. Many of Kansai's failed public works projects funded by Osaka were strongly backed by the federation.

In addition, why was the barely used second runway at Kansai airport constructed despite criticism it was a waste of public funds? You can thank a local airport promotion group headed by Kepeco's chairman.

Given that Kepeco has long provided direct election support, in the form of company "volunteers," to local LDP candidates, the fact Kepeco-favored plans usually become reality is hardly surprising.

Ideas promoted by Kepeco-led organizations have several common traits. First, they tend to result in massive physical structures (buildings, transportation systems) that, obviously, require Kepeco-generated electricity to run and maintain — nuclear-generated electricity, of course, not renewables. Second, they are often based on the "Kepeco School of Management," a mixture of top-down, centralized planning among a select few men over the age of 60 who decide what's best for the local economy — and for themselves. The result of this Kepeco-influenced Kansai economy since the mid-1990s has largely been one of stagnation, an accelerated shift to Tokyo of local money and talent, and a sense the gap between Kansai and other regions in East Asia in particular is growing. This is a major reason why Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto hates Kepeco and publicly criticizes it.

But Kansai's 500-pound gorilla remains as strong as ever, and despite the recent media attention, looks set to remain so for years to come. Which makes one wonder: Will we be reading, in 30 years, about how some Kepeco official paid off Liberal Democratic Party officials to help ensure the return of Shinzo Abe and the LDP?

View from Osaka is a monthly column that examines the latest news from a Kansai perspective.

More "donations" from facilities

August 17, 2014

TEPCO, Tohoku Electric to 'donate' 200 million yen more to village hosting nuclear reprocessing complex

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201408170015>

By SATOSHI OTANI/ Staff Writer

Embattled Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Tohoku Electric Power Co. will make a final combined 200 million yen (\$1.95 million) "donation" to a village hosting the nuclear fuel reprocessing plant, despite industry ministry criticism, The Asahi Shimbun has found.

The payment, which the two utilities have made annually since fiscal 2010, will go to assist the local fisheries industry in the village of Rokkasho in Aomori Prefecture.

An Asahi Shimbun investigation into the village's financial data and interviews with local officials showed that the Rokkasho government sent a document requesting financial assistance to TEPCO and Tohoku Electric on July 14.

Tohoku Electric is a utility serving Aomori and other prefectures in the Tohoku region.

Local officials say the money will be spent on renovating port facilities and an operation to prevent the poaching of fish.

The two companies replied in a letter on July 22 that they will comply with the request.

TEPCO is expected to pay 133.4 million yen and Tohoku Electric 66.6 million yen as early as this month, as was requested by the village hall.

The decision comes despite a TEPCO announcement in 2012 that it would end donations in order to come up with funds to pay compensation to those affected by the 2011 triple meltdown at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which oversees the nuclear industry, concluded in 2012 that such a payment to Rokkasho "is not necessary in terms of operating the business of supplying power and is tantamount to a donation."

The finding means that TEPCO, which has been virtually nationalized after the nuclear accident, will still contribute the funds, despite passing the enormous costs of dealing with the accident onto taxpayers and electricity users.

The payment by the utilities will bring the total paid to Rokkasho to 1 billion yen over five consecutive years.

Such a payment by the companies began in fiscal 2010 under the aim of assisting the fisheries industry in the surrounding area of Higashidori, a village neighboring Rokkasho.

Higashidori hosts a single-unit nuclear plant operated by Tohoku Electric. The utility plans to build a new reactor there. TEPCO also plans on the construction of two reactors in the same area.

After the nuclear disaster, TEPCO received an injection of 5 trillion yen in government assistance to offer compensations to victims.

In addition, the government will spend 47 billion yen in taxpayer money to help the crippled Fukushima plant deal with the hundreds of tons of contaminated water being generated daily on the site.

TEPCO raised its power rates in September 2012, while Tohoku Electric took similar action in September 2013.

Hideyuki Ban, co-director of the Citizens' Nuclear Information Center in Tokyo, criticized TEPCO for making the payment at a time when little progress has been made on bringing the nuclear crisis under control and compensating those affected.

"It is beyond our understanding why TEPCO continues with the payment when it is effectively bankrupt," he said. "That money should be spent to compensate victims."

Both utilities defended the payment, stressing that this will be their last such expenditure.

"We have paid the money because we are convinced that it is indispensable in terms of the construction of a new nuclear plant, and that it is not the same as a donation," said a TEPCO public relations official. "The payment during the current fiscal year is expected to be our last."

A Tohoku Electric official said, "We have made the payment because it is based on an agreement made before the nuclear disaster.

"Our cooperation to help the local fisheries industry will end in the current fiscal year, and we do not plan to continue it."

METI's nuclear committee shows total disregard for disaster lessons

August 20, 2014

Editorial: Nuclear policy committee shows disregard for Fukushima lessons

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140820p2a00m0na011000c.html>

One of the most important lessons we've learned from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster is that the closed nature of the nuclear power industry led us to underestimate the dangers of nuclear reactors. The industry tuned out sound criticism from outside sources, largely influencing the government's policy and risk assessment. We must put this lesson to good use by making the policymaking and risk assessment process public and raising information transparency.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) -- established after the onset of the Fukushima disaster -- streams video of its meetings and press conferences live, and the footage is also available for viewing online after the events take place. A Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) deliberative council that reviewed the government's basic energy policy does the same. Such arrangements not only allow debate to extend to outside experts, it also serves to raise awareness and interest among the general public.

However, the Nuclear Energy Subcommittee of METI's Advisory Committee on Natural Resources and Energy, which has been holding meetings since June, accepts silent observers but does not publicly broadcast its meetings. Some subcommittee members have demanded that the meetings be broadcast, but as of the fourth meeting held Aug. 7, no video had been made available.

The subcommittee was established for the purpose of deliberating specific policies in the nuclear energy field based on the Basic Energy Plan approved by the Cabinet in April. Topics under discussion include reconstruction and revival in Fukushima, reduced dependence on nuclear energy, human resource development and nuclear fuel cycle policy. Such discussions will have a great bearing on what the country decides for its energy mix.

With the subcommittee debating topics that will dictate Japan's nuclear policy, transparency of its discussions is crucial.

Some may argue that allowing silent observers to watch from the visitors' gallery and the release of the minutes are sufficient. But those who can actually attend the meetings comprise a tiny percentage of the general public. Overviews of the meetings are released within a week or so of each meeting, but they do

not indicate who said what. It takes about a month before the minutes are released, by which time the next meeting has already taken place.

This state of affairs prevents the public from closely following the deliberation process. Some have proposed a compromise of providing audio broadcasts of the meetings, but such broadcasts fail to provide a complete picture, since it's difficult to identify who has the floor at any given time.

The subcommittee chair, Itaru Yasui, has cited the uneasiness some members would feel in voicing their views if the meetings were to be broadcast via video. However, nuclear energy policy is an important matter bearing on Japan's post-Fukushima energy policy. It's a matter of great interest to the public. If indeed the subcommittee's members feel they can't be honest if their meetings are broadcast, then perhaps there's a lack of understanding about the significance of the meetings and the importance of their transparency.

At its fourth meeting, the subcommittee recognized the importance of making its meetings public, saying that it would "discuss how to improve the situation." We hope the subcommittee will modify its policy and move ahead with video broadcasts of their meetings.

Local leaders and shareholders seek disclosure of Yoshida's testimony

August 21, 2014

Local leaders seek disclosure of testimony by former nuclear plant chief

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201408210044>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Leaders of local governments near the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant want the testimony given by the plant manager months after the accident to be disclosed.

The Asahi Shimbun ascertained that eight local leaders want full disclosure after seeking the views of the Fukushima governor and heads of 13 cities, towns and villages located within 20 kilometers of the plant and areas outside the 20-km radius where radiation levels were more than 20 millisieverts per year.

Masao Yoshida was plant chief when the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami set off the nuclear accident.

He gave hours of testimony to the government's Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations, and died in July 2013 from esophageal cancer. Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the plant, said Yoshida's cancer was not related to radiation exposure.

The survey also revealed that five of the leaders said there would be no problem if their own interviews with the government investigation panel were made public.

After the onset of nuclear crisis, the government's investigation panel interviewed 770 officials and others involved in the disaster.

Although the central government currently plans to publicly disclose part of those records by the end of the year, it will not release the contents of Yoshida's interview, citing Yoshida's request not to disclose his testimony.

The Asahi Shimbun asked Fukushima Governor Yuhei Sato, as well as those who served as leaders of the 13 municipalities at the onset of the disaster, for interviews.

Kawamata Mayor Michio Furukawa, who served on the investigative panel, and former Hirono Mayor Motohoshi Yamada refused to comment on The Asahi Shimbun's inquiries, while Katsuya Endo, former Tomioka mayor, died in July after the newspaper asked for an interview.

Of the 11 local leaders interviewed by The Asahi Shimbun, the mayors of Futaba and Okuma, which host the Fukushima No. 1 plant, as well as leaders in Namie, Minami-Soma, Naraha, Kawauchi, Katsurao and Iwaki, said Yoshida's testimony should be made public. The Fukushima governor and mayors of Tamura and Iitate were undecided.

Six of the 11 leaders said they were interviewed by the government panel, and five of them said they would not mind if their accounts were disclosed.

The central government is trying to ascertain if the hundreds of people who were interviewed mind if their statements are released into the public domain. It has said it will disclose the contents if it gets their approval.

Exceptions will be testimonies whose disclosure could infringe on the rights of third parties or compromise national security, officials said.

Goshi Hosono, who served as minister in charge of the nuclear accident under the Democratic Party of Japan-led administration at the time of the disaster, said he does not mind if his statements are publicly disclosed.

(This article was written by Shinichi Sekine and Naoki Kikuchi.)

TEPCO shareholders go to court for disclosure of Yoshida testimony on nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201408210065>

By HIDEAKI KIMURA/ Staff Writer

Shareholders of Tokyo Electric Power Co. filed a lawsuit Aug. 20 for disclosure of testimony about the 2011 nuclear disaster given by the late manager of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. "(The government) should make public investigative records of 772 people, including Masao Yoshida (then plant manager), to enable a re-examination of what was wrong and what was correct," said Yui Kimura, who heads the plaintiffs' group.

The 10 TEPCO shareholders and others are calling on the Cabinet Secretariat to disclose records of the government investigation panel's interviews with 772 people involved in the nuclear crisis triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

As the Cabinet Secretariat refused their request to make public Yoshida's testimonies, the shareholders filed a suit with the Tokyo District Court, demanding disclosure of the 28-hour-long interviews in Q&A format.

The plaintiffs also plan to file suits for disclosure of other interview records if and when the Cabinet Secretariat refuses to disclose them. The shareholder group has sued the utility's executives for not taking necessary preventive measures against a severe nuclear accident, as well.

The group's written complaints state, "No other materials exist that would allow for direct examination of steps taken by the top official who took command at the accident site."

The group's complaints also describe Yoshida's testimonies as "necessary to figure out the cause of the disaster," and argue that, "The disclosure of (the records) is an extremely high priority in terms of the public benefit."

Many citizens have demanded Yoshida's testimonies be publicly disclosed. But the government has refused, citing Yoshida's written request submitted when the government panel handed his statements to a Diet investigation committee that asks the state not to disclose them.

Yoshida died in July 2013 from esophageal cancer.

A copy of Yoshida's statements obtained by The Asahi Shimbun, however, shows that the late plant manager agreed when told by interviewers that the records could be made public in the future. The TEPCO shareholders also mention the point in their complaints, saying, "Interviews were conducted after gaining his clear consent (for disclosing his interview records)."

August 20, 2014

Lawsuit filed seeking Yoshida interview release

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140820_28.html

Aug. 20, 2014 - Updated 10:08 UTC+2

A Japanese citizens' group has filed a lawsuit seeking the release of interviews with the former head of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

A government-appointed investigative panel interviewed Masao Yoshida, who was then head of the plant, for a report on the March 2011 accident. The government has not released records of the interviews.

Yoshida died in July of last year. The government says before his death he submitted a petition requesting that they not be disclosed to a third party.

A group including shareholders seeking compensation from the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, filed a lawsuit with the Tokyo District Court on Wednesday.

The plaintiffs say that the interviews with Yoshida are a public asset that could be key to finding out ways to prevent a similar nuclear disaster.

They say the interviews should be disclosed for analysis by experts.

Yoshida's testimony to be released

August 25, 2014

After leaks, government to release interviews with deceased Fukushima plant boss

Staff Writer

Following months of leaks, criticism and controversy, the government said Monday it will release most of the transcribed testimony of the late Masao Yoshida, who dealt with the 2011 triple meltdown crisis as head of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The interview records will be made available to media outlets next month, with some parts redacted to protect third parties mentioned in the interviews and information related to national security, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a news conference.

"The situation is changing and there will be no problems in disclosing these records," Suga told a regularly scheduled news conference at the prime minister's office.

Asked if the government had obtained the consent of Yoshida's family, Suga declined to comment, saying only that the administration "has made the decision by itself."

Yoshida, who died of esophageal cancer on July 9 of last year, asked the government not to publish the interview transcripts. He said he was concerned that what he discussed during the interviews, which were

conducted from July to November 2011, might include factual errors. He was also worried that the public might take everything said in the interviews as confirmed fact.

Facts about the crisis at the Tokyo Electric Power Co. plant should be gleaned from interviews with other people and other materials, Yoshida argued in a written request submitted to the government in May 2012.

Officials had refused to publish the transcripts despite requests from media outlets, including The Japan Times.

But Suga said Monday that Yoshida's concerns "have already become a reality" with the publication by the Asahi Shimbun and Sankei Shimbun of what they say are the transcripts. At this point Yoshida's original intention would be better served through disclosure, Suga said.

The Asahi claimed in May it had obtained the roughly 400 pages of testimony covering 28 hours of interviews. The paper reported that most plant workers temporarily fled to the nearby Fukushima No. 2 power plant despite Yoshida's order to remain at the No. 1 plant amid the meltdown crisis in March 2011. The Asahi's report, which was published in Japanese and English, caught the attention of media outlets overseas because it went against the image of the plant workers, whom they had praised as the brave "Fukushima 50."

But the Sankei, which said it had later obtained the same transcript of the interviews, caused a stir earlier this month by claiming that the Asahi's report was wrong. Yoshida discussed the apparent confusion in the way his order was conveyed to workers at the crippled plant, but he didn't believe they had acted against his instructions, according to the Sankei.

According to the Asahi, Yoshida said he did not order workers to evacuate to the No. 2 plant, but many went there anyway.

"Actually, I never told them to go to 2F," Yoshida was quoted as saying by the Asahi, referring to the still-functioning Fukushima No. 2.

But according to the Asahi, Yoshida later concluded that the decision of those workers was right, which may have been why the Sankei claimed that Yoshida didn't believe the workers acted against his orders. "I came to believe that going to 2F was by far the right thing to do if only you gave more thought to it," Yoshida said, according to the Asahi.

Meanwhile, the Sankei also reported that Yoshida harshly criticized then-Prime Minister Naoto Kan, who claimed that top Tepco executives were considering withdrawing all of the plant workers, which would have left it deserted at a critical stage in the meltdown crisis.

August 25, 2014

Govt. to issue ex-Fukushima plant chief testimony

Aug. 25, 2014 - Updated 08:49 UTC+2

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140825_25.html

Japan's government is soon to release interviews with the former chief of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, Masao Yoshida, who dealt with the 2011 accident.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said on Monday the interviews given to a government panel will be made public at an early date in September.

The government intended to keep the testimony out of the public eye because Yoshida did not want them released, citing concerns about misinterpretation. Yoshida died of an illness in July last year.

Suga said some newspapers have published excerpts of the interviews, and the late plant chief's concerns have become a reality. He said withholding the interviews would run counter to Yoshida's wish.

He added the situation has changed and releasing them will not cause problems.

The government spokesperson also said information that concerns privacy and national security in the interviews will not be disclosed.

Suga said government officials are contacting more than 700 people interviewed by the panel to gain consent for making their interviews public.

He said Yoshida's interviews will be made open with some of those interviews. Suga said the government will disclose the rest of the interviews as soon as it gets approvals and finishes the work by the end of the year.

Gov't to disclose Fukushima nuclear plant chief's testimony in Sept.

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140825p2g00m0dm051000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The government said Monday it will release in September testimony regarding the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant in March 2011 given by then plant chief Masao Yoshida.

"Former plant chief Yoshida did not want his testimony to be made public as he had mentioned concerns about misinterpretation, but the situation has changed," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said at a daily press briefing.

In addition to the Yoshida testimony, the content of interviews with others who had key roles in handling the disaster "will be released at the earliest possible date in September, starting with whichever is ready first," Suga said.

The top government spokesman added that information related to privacy and national security will not be disclosed.

The testimony of Yoshida, who died of esophageal cancer in July 2013 at age 58, was compiled by a government panel formed to examine the disaster at the plant northeast of Tokyo.

The panel interviewed Yoshida for more than 20 hours from July to November 2011.

The government had declined to make public Yoshida's testimony, citing a statement Yoshida signed saying he did not want it made available to any third party.

But interest in Yoshida's first-hand account of what transpired in the days immediately after March 11, 2011, when a massive earthquake and tsunami knocked out power to much of the six-reactor power plant, leading to a series of explosions and the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl, has been piqued by reports that most staff fled.

The Asahi Shimbun daily reported this past May that 90 percent of workers left despite being ordered by Yoshida to stay, citing his testimony to the government panel.

Another daily, the Sankei Shimbun, also reported the content of the Yoshida testimony earlier this month, while victims of the nuclear accident have filed a lawsuit seeking to make the documents public.

Government to finally release Yoshida testimony on nuke accident in September

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201408250031>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The government will release the testimony on the March 2011 nuclear accident by Masao Yoshida, the late manager of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, in September, the government's top spokesperson said Aug. 25.

"We will make public (the testimony) at the earliest possible date in September," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a news conference. He added that the first release of the testimonies of other interviewees would occur at the same time.

Dubbed the "Yoshida Testimony," the government panel's investigative record of Yoshida, who was plant chief at the time of the disaster, gained worldwide attention after The Asahi Shimbun obtained the document and published an article on the content in its May 20 morning edition.

The government has refused releasing the content, saying that Yoshida had written a request asking the state not to disclose his testimony.

But after the Sankei Shimbun began reporting on the document in its Aug. 18 edition, the government changed its stance, saying there is no need to withhold the Yoshida interview now that more than one media company has reported it.

August 23, 2014

Gov't to disclose Fukushima nuclear plant chief's testimony (see article in Japan Times)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140823p2g00m0dm001000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The government plans to make public testimony regarding the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster given by plant chief Masao Yoshida, government and other sources said Friday, possibly shedding light on whether Yoshida ordered staff to remain at their posts.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga will announce as soon as Monday the decision to release the testimony by mid-September or later, the sources said.

The testimony of Yoshida, who died in July 2013, was compiled by a government panel formed to examine the March 2011 disaster at the nuclear plant northeast of Tokyo.

The panel interviewed Yoshida for more than 20 hours from July to November 2011.

The government has thus far declined to make public Yoshida's testimony, citing a statement Yoshida signed saying he did not want it made available to any third party.

But interest in Yoshida's first-hand account of what transpired in the days immediately after March 11, 2011, when a massive earthquake and tsunami knocked out power to much of the six-reactor Fukushima Daiichi power plant, leading to a series of explosions and the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl, has been piqued by reports that most staff fled.

The Asahi Shimbun daily reported this past May that 90 percent of workers left despite being ordered by Yoshida to stay, citing his testimony to the government panel.

Another Japanese daily, the Sankei Shimbun, also reported the content of the Yoshida testimony earlier this month, while victims of the nuclear accident have filed a lawsuit seeking to make the documents public.

August 23, 2014

Yoshida testimony on Fukushima nuclear accident may be disclosed after all

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201408230029>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

In an about-turn, the government is weighing full disclosure of testimony about the 2011 nuclear accident given by the late manager of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The government initially insisted that it would not make public the investigative record of Masao Yoshida, who was plant chief at the time of the disaster, citing "Yoshida's written request submitted asks the state not to disclose them."

However, the government has been forced to re-evaluate its position, as some news outlets have reported on parts of the records written by the government investigation panel.

"The contents (of the testimonies) are in effect circulating in the world," a senior official at the prime minister's office said Aug. 22 in response to the reports by the media. "(That has created) the atmosphere that we, as Japan's government, have no choice but to disclose them."

The Asahi Shimbun reported on contents of the testimonies that the newspaper obtained through its sources in the morning edition of May 20 and on its website. Although the government at that time refused to disclose them, it was compelled to alter its stance after The Sankei Shimbun began covering the testimonies in its Aug. 18 morning edition.

The government said it will consult with Yoshida's bereaved family with regard to the disclosure of more than 400 pages of testimony, which contain 28 hour-long interviews in Q&A format.

Late Fukushima nuclear plant chief's testimony may be made public

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/08/23/national/late-fukushima-nuclear-plant-chiefs-testimony-may-made-public/#.U_jqkWOmrIU

Kyodo

The government plans to disclose testimony by Fukushima No. 1 chief Masao Yoshida that could shed light on whether he ordered staff at the stricken power plant to stay at their posts during the triple meltdown crisis, sources revealed Friday.

The decision could be made by mid-September, governmental and other sources said, noting Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga might comment on the leaking testimony on Monday.

Yoshida, who died of cancer in July last year, gave testimony to a government panel that was formed to probe the March 2011 disaster. It interviewed Yoshida for more than 20 hours between July and November 2011.

The government has thus far declined to release Yoshida's testimony because he signed a statement saying he did not want it made available to any third party.

But public interest in Yoshida's first-hand account of what transpired in the days immediately after the March 2011 megaquake and tsunami triggered the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl has soared since the testimony was reportedly leaked to the daily Asahi Shimbun.

The disasters knocked out nearly all power to the six-reactor plant, leading to a series of massive explosions that tainted much of east Japan with radiation.

In the midst of the meltdowns, 90 percent of the plant workers fled despite being ordered by Yoshida to stay, the Asahi Shimbun reported in May, citing a copy of his testimony to the panel.

Another daily, the Sankei Shimbun, began reporting on Yoshida's testimony earlier this month.

Those victimized by the nuclear disaster are suing for full disclosure of the Yoshida documents.

Okumura and Naito

August 25, 2014

Political Pulse: Those who accuse, those who are accused

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140825p2a00m0na008000c.html>

There are people who accuse others of wrongdoing, and people who admit to wrongdoing. Hiroshi Okumura, 84, who specializes in research on private companies, has for decades called into question electric power companies' reliance on nuclear power through their collusion with the political world and the bureaucracy.

Chimori Naito, 91, former vice president of Kansai Electric Power Co. (KEPCO), recently told the Asahi Shimbun daily about the firm's behind-the-scenes efforts to curry favor with the political world and bureaucrats over the promotion of atomic power. He then admitted that the industry's collusion with politicians and bureaucrats was problematic and urged that Japan reconsider its dependence on nuclear power. (The Asahi Shimbun ran a series of 14 stories on the matter in its morning edition beginning on July 28, 2014, and released the video of an interview with Naito.)

Naito, who had ignored Okumura's criticism and actively promoted nuclear power (KEPCO's rate of dependence on atomic power is the largest of all nine major regional utilities), finally changed his mind. Some skeptics speculate that Naito fabricated the story as someone who lost a power struggle within the company, while others speculate that it was just an old man acting delusional. However, fragments of Naito's testimony show an aspect of his dignity as a behind-the-scenes fixer and his convincing personality.

The government's nuclear power policy appears completely unaffected by his testimony on the surface. Still, what he said will likely win sympathy from the public and help reinforce the undercurrent of moves to end Japan's dependence on atomic power.

Okumura and Naito have close connections with each other even though they are not personally acquainted.

The Sept. 12, 1986 issue of the weekly magazine Asahi Journal (which ceased publication in 1992) ran a story headlined, "KEPCO -- a black continent." It was one of the installments in a series on Japanese companies. The article uncovered KEPCO's personnel appointments made behind closed doors through the "reigns of terror" by then honorary president Yoshihige Ashihara (now deceased) and Naito. The article was written by Okumura, who was then professor at Ryukoku University.

How Okumura obtained the information based on which he wrote the story is interesting. He asked KEPCO for an interview, only to be rejected. After he repeatedly contacted the company, he received a phone call from a woman who called herself the wife of a KEPCO employee. The woman told Okumura that Naito was meeting with an influential member of a right-wing organization at a high-class restaurant. She provided him with further detailed information on the matter.

The story based on such specific information was convincing, prompting the KEPCO board to dismiss Ashihara and Naito at a Feb. 26, 1987 meeting.

Naito had kept silent about the scandal, but admitted in the interview with the Asahi that the company paid the ultra-rightist and some antisocial forces to settle the firm's disputes.

Okumura worked as a staff writer at the economic news department of the Sankei Shimbun daily's Osaka office for nine years after graduating from Okayama University's faculty of law and literature in 1953. He reportedly sat just behind Teiichi Fukuda, then associate editor at the paper's cultural news department, who is known as novelist Ryotaro Shiba.

From the time he became a journalist, Okumura was particularly interested in Japan's industrial structure and corporate groups. After working at a think-tank, he became professor at Ryukoku University and then at Chuo University, conducting research on huge private companies.

Okumura says private corporations sped up their expansion in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly after the 1970s. The influence of labor unions has weakened while executives' control

over their companies has strengthened. As a result, uncontrollable and irresponsible giant organizations that place profits above anything else played a central role in capitalism. Okumura views the bailout of General Motors (GM) that relied on U.S. taxpayers' money and the current situation of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) that has failed to bring the Fukushima nuclear crisis under control despite an infusion of public funds as examples of the ailing capitalism that is at the mercy of big business.

"The poor law that originated in Britain is aimed at using taxpayers' money to save the poor. But now, taxpayers' money is being used to bail out GM, TEPCO and commercial banks," Okumura laments.

Okumura insists that TEPCO should be disbanded and split into multiple entities based on economic principles. However, the government has dismissed this suggestion saying, "It's unrealistic, considering the costs of bringing the nuclear crisis under control and paying compensation to those affected by the disaster." Such being the case, **there appears to be an endless effort to maintain the status quo. no end to the nuclear crisis.**

In the interview with the Asahi, Naito said, "**Apart from power companies, the government regulator that gives instructions to them and scholars is also at fault. They think, 'It's best to maintain the status quo.' How can progress be made?**"

Twenty-seven years have passed since Okumura created a stir over Japan's reliance on atomic power and Naito was expelled from KEPCO. These two figures, whose personal history and ideas are completely different, are now insisting on the same thing. (By Takao Yamada, Expert Senior Writer)

11 trillion yen

August 27, 2014

Fukushima nuclear crisis estimated to cost ¥11 trillion: study

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/08/27/national/fukushima-nuclear-crisis-estimated-to-cost-%C2%A511-trillion-study/#.U_45HmOnrIU

Kyodo

The Fukushima nuclear accident will cost an estimated ¥11.08 trillion, almost double the government projection made at the end of 2011, according to a recent study by Japanese collehe figure includes ¥4.91 trillion to compensate affected residents, ¥2.48 trillion for radiation cleanup work, ¥2.17 trillion to scrap the Fukushima No. 1 plant and ¥1.06 trillion to temporarily store radioactive soil and other waste generated by decontamination work, according to the study.

Kenichi Oshima, environmental economics professor at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, and Masafumi Yokemoto, professor of environmental policy at Osaka City University, calculated the costs based on materials and data released by the government and plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co.

In December 2011, the government said it would cost at least ¥5.8 trillion, but Oshima and Yokemoto included some expenses that the government then said were difficult to estimate, according to the researchers.

"The costs for the accident are designed to be borne by the people through taxes and utility bills," Oshima said.

The actual cost could be much higher, as the estimated figure does not include costs for the final disposal of radioactive material from cleanup work, while the compensation and plant decommissioning expenses are expected to increase down the road.

A separate estimate puts the cost of decontamination work as high as ¥5 trillion, double the professors' figure.

Tepco is currently paying compensation to those affected by the Fukushima meltdowns using money provided by the Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp. The state-backed fund has raised the limit of its payout from ¥5 trillion to ¥9 trillion.

Tepco is expected to reimburse that money in the future — meaning that electricity consumers will eventually have to bear the cost.

Critics have pointed to the ambiguous responsibilities of the state and the utility, which did not go bankrupt despite the worst nuclear crisis since the 1986 Chernobyl accident thanks to taxpayers' money and increased electricity rates.

The government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is pushing to revive the nuclear industry, with Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai plant in Kyushu possibly allowed to restart in the near future.

"Nuclear plant operators would become less able to make a right business judgment under the situation where the state covers the costs of accidents, as they cannot recognize risks of nuclear power generation," said Oshima.

TEPCO held accountable for evacuee suicide

August 27, 2014

Editorial: Ruling on nuclear evacuee suicide holds TEPCO accountable

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140827p2a00m0na017000c.html>

The Fukushima District Court ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) to pay some 49 million yen in damages to the family of a 58-year-old woman who killed herself after she was forced to evacuate due to the Fukushima nuclear disaster, dealing a hard blow to the utility.

It is not uncommon for accountability for suicide to be contested in the courts. Corporations have faced tough rulings in recent years for suicides induced by overwork. And it is amid such a climate that a Fukushima court tackled head-on and recognized a causal link between the stress of evacuation and suicide.

While the ruling applies to an individual case, it is bound to have a significant impact on other lawsuits and settlement talks regarding the nuclear disaster.

The deceased woman, who had been evacuated from the Fukushima Prefecture town of Kawamata, was at her home for a temporary visit in July 2011 when she killed herself. Her husband and three children brought the damages suit against TEPCO.

The nuclear disaster had forced the woman to leave the town where she'd grown up and live in evacuation facilities. She had to live away from her children, and became unemployed when the chicken farm where she'd worked was shut down. The close ties she had with her neighbors, with whom she used to share vegetables, was also lost. The court ruled that these stressors, which arose in quick succession in a short period of time, had caused the woman's depressive state.

The woman had suffered from insomnia and had been receiving outpatient treatment for psychosomatic disorder since before the disaster. TEPCO cited this fact as an indication of "the individual's fragility," denying responsibility for the woman's suicide.

The court, taking the woman's pre-existing condition into consideration, recognized that 80 percent of her suicide was due to stress caused by the nuclear disaster and calculated the compensation amount accordingly.

The presiding judge also said that TEPCO should have been able to foresee that if radioactive materials spread across a wide area, residents would be forced to evacuate, and that such displaced residents could develop depression or commit suicide from the stress.

Among evacuees, there are those who are susceptible to stress and those who are less so. It is unacceptable to write victims off as "fragile." Understandably, the ruling has shown consideration for those who are especially vulnerable in disasters.

An alternative to lawsuits in resolving conflicts surrounding the nuclear disaster is the dispute resolution process through the government's Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center. The center pursues TEPCO's accountability not only for suicides but various other cases. There is a wide range of thinking on what constitutes the appropriate range of compensation for the claims of damages raised by residents. Regardless, TEPCO, having caused the disaster, must listen carefully to the voices of disaster victims and compensate amounts comparable to the damage that has been done.

In Fukushima Prefecture, the number of those who have died from suicide and other causes related to the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster has surpassed 1,670 -- greater than the number of those in the prefecture who died as a direct result of the quake and tsunami. We need further debate on how the families of those people should be compensated.

Halving evacuee compensation: Confirmed

August 30, 2014

Nuclear disaster evacuee compensation halved across board: internal document

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140830p2a00m0na004000c.html>

The governmental Nuclear Damage Claim Dispute Resolution Center, tasked with reaching out-of-court settlements for individual claims filed over the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdowns, has set compensation uniformly at 50 percent, a document obtained by the Mainichi Shimbun has confirmed. The internal document is being circulated among center staff and used in the processing of individual cases -- calling into serious doubt the center's previous denials that the "50 percent rule" had been an official practice.

The center calculates the total amount of damages for pain and suffering in individual settlement proposals by multiplying a base amount by a percentage figure representing the impact of the nuclear accident upon the particular case at hand.

On July 9, the Mainichi Shimbun reported that Hiroshi Noyama, former head of the nuclear damage claim dispute resolution mediation office (the section of the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry serving as secretariat to the center) had attested during an interview that "the decision had been made to assess the contribution ratio (of the nuclear accident to the deaths) at around 50 percent." It was also reported in the same article that the contribution ratio had indeed been set at 50 percent in numerous cases. Noyama's successor Joji Danto, a former judge, denied Noyama's testimony, however. "I don't know what Noyama said, but there are no rules in place," he stated. Danto also commented on July 14, while attending a regular meeting of several teams of lawyers offering support to survivors of the

nuclear disaster, "We are continually asked by numerous sources whether a '50 percent rule' exists (with respect to the compensation). To this, we say a resolute 'no.'"

The document obtained by the Mainichi Shimbun, however -- four A4-sized pages dated Dec. 26, 2012 -- includes the following statement: "(Compensation) shall be set across the board at 50 percent. Fine adjustments, such as setting the figure at 40 or 60 percent, shall not be made."

The document also states that "the operation (of the 50 percent rule) is in the process of being established at the practical level." The document additionally reveals the possibility for individual settlement proposals to be set at lower amounts, stating, "When it is difficult to ascertain that the 50 percent rule should be applied, it is possible as an exception to set the figure at 10 percent."

The document additionally notes that it is possible to set the base amount of compensation at a lower level than that established for standard lawsuits, and that details such as medical records or opinions from doctors shall not be taken into significant consideration when deciding final compensation amounts - - corroborating previous Mainichi reports.

In addition to the nuclear damage claim dispute resolution mediation office, the center also employs examiners who organize documents submitted by both disaster survivors and Fukushima No. 1 plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co., as well as mediating officers responsible for drawing up the actual settlement offers -- all of whom are lawyers.

According to a source affiliated with the center, the document obtained by the Mainichi was authored by an employee of the mediation office, and subsequently distributed among several examiners.

An official who previously served as an examiner commented, "I explained the content of the document to the mediating officers," adding, "If it appeared that an individual settlement offer was not going to be in line with the document's guidelines, I pointed it out to the mediating officer" -- thereby revealing that the document has in fact been used as a standard.

Center representatives initially claimed that "no such document exists." They later followed up by saying, "(We found) that such a document did exist," but continued to deny that it served as a standard guideline, saying, "It is possible that it was simply a personal memo."

August 30, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Yoshida feared catastrophe for Eastern Japan



August 31, 2014

The heavily damaged ceiling in the central control room for reactors 1 and 2 at the Fukushima No. 1 power station is seen on March 12, 2011, in this shot provided by a plant worker. | KYODO

Fukushima No. 1 chief feared nuclear doom for eastern Japan

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/08/31/national/fukushima-1-chief-feared-catastrophe-eastern-japan/#.VAMUn2Onq1s>

Kyodo

The chief of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant said in testimony before his death that he feared the core meltdowns he was trying to contain in March 2011 would cause catastrophic damage to eastern Japan, government documents show.

“Our image was a catastrophe for eastern Japan,” Masao Yoshida told a government panel probing the Fukushima nuclear crisis. “I thought we were really dead.”

Yoshida wanted his testimony to remain confidential after his death because the account might contain mistakes from the confusion created by the crisis triggered by the massive earthquake and tsunami of March 11. But leaks to two major Japanese dailies prompted the government last week to announce its intent to disclose most of the documents, which detail the drama that took place during the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl.

According to documents obtained Saturday, Yoshida rejected the government’s opinion that the plant owner Tokyo Electric Power Co. attempted a “complete withdrawal” of all staff from the plant on March 15. He was also angry with Tepco headquarters and the administration of then-Prime Minister Naoto Kan, which he thought had failed to understand the dire situation his workers were facing on the ground.

“We did not escape,” Yoshida is quoted as saying in the roughly 400 pages of testimony, scheduled to be released next month.

Yoshida's testimony was reflected in the panel's final report in July 2012 along with those of more than 770 other people involved in the disaster. Yoshida died of esophageal cancer the following July at age 58. In May, the daily Asahi Shimbun reported in Japanese and English that 90 percent of the plant's workers left the damaged complex despite being told by Yoshida to stay put, citing his testimony. But Yoshida did not say they were violating his order on purpose.

At one serious point in the crisis, on March 14, 2011, when it looked like the containment vessel of reactor No. 2 was going to fail and pollute the area with high amounts of radiation, Yoshida said he thought he was finished.

"I really don't want to recall this part," he said, because he was bracing for the worst — a total failure in which the fuel melts and breaches both the pressure vessel and the containment vessel.

"All the radioactive materials would go out and be scattered," he said.

But the workers who were failing to inject water into the No. 2 reactor to cool the molten fuel caught a break when the air pressure in the containment vessel dropped, allowing the fire engines to get the water in.

When the Asahi first reported the contents of the testimony, the government said the documents would be kept confidential to honor Yoshida's wishes. But the government has since reversed itself because withholding the documents amid the leaks might actually contradict Yoshida's wishes.

Fukushima nuke plant chief feared catastrophe for eastern Japan

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140831p2g00m0dm007000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The chief of the disaster-struck Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant said in testimony before his death that he had feared catastrophic damage to eastern Japan while he was struggling to contain the crisis in March 2011, according to government documents obtained Saturday.

"Our image was a catastrophe for eastern Japan," Masao Yoshida told a government panel that was examining the nuclear meltdowns at the plant about 220 kilometers northeast of Tokyo, triggered by a powerful earthquake and tsunami on March 11, according to his testimony. "I thought we were really dead."

On the government's interpretation that plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. was seeking a "complete withdrawal" from the plant on March 15, Yoshida denied such a view, expressing anger at the office of then Prime Minister Naoto Kan and TEPCO headquarters, which he thought had failed to understand the dire situation his workers were facing on the ground.

"We did not escape," Yoshida said, according to his roughly 400-page testimony, which is scheduled to be released by the government next month.

The testimony was reflected in the panel's final report compiled in July 2012 along with testimonies from more than 770 others. Yoshida died of esophageal cancer the following July at age 58.

The Asahi Shimbun daily reported in May that 90 percent of plant workers had left the complex despite Yoshida's order to stay put, citing his testimony to the government panel. But Yoshida did not say there had been a violation of his order.

At the height of the crisis on March 14, 2011, when the No. 2 reactor's containment vessel faced the risk of releasing a massive amount of highly radioactive materials due to the loss of cooling functions, Yoshida said he thought he was really dead.

"I really don't want to recall this part," Yoshida said, because he had been imagining the worst -- nuclear fuel melting down and breaking through the reactor pressure vessel and the outer vessel containing it.

"All the radioactive materials would go out and be scattered", he said.

Workers continued efforts to inject water into the No. 2 reactor to cool the molten-hot nuclear fuel in the reactor core and managed to avert the crisis following a drop in air pressure inside the containment vessel that had kept fire engines from injecting water into the reactor.

Yoshida did not want his testimony to be made public on the grounds he could have misidentified some facts due to the fading of and confusion in his memory and that he feared that all he had said in the testimony would be taken as fact.

When the Asahi newspaper first reported the contents of the testimony, the government said it would keep the testimony from the public according to his wishes.

But more recently, the government has decided to disclose the testimony on the grounds his concerns have already become evident as other media began reporting on it, and that continuing to keep the testimony from the public would actually go against his will.

August 31, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Full disclosure

September 3, 2014

Editorial: Fully disclose testimonies on Fukushima nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20140903p2a00m0na017000c.html>

The investigative committees on the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster, set up both at the executive and legislative branches of the government, interviewed a large number of people over the cause of the unprecedented disaster.

To be precise, the government's Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations of Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) interviewed 772 individuals spanning a total of 1,479 hours, and the National Diet of Japan Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission (NAIIC) interviewed 1,167 persons, which runs a total of over 900 hours.

These investigation records are extremely priceless resources, which can serve to verify how people responded to the disaster and to prevent a recurrence of any similar accident. These documents must not be monopolized by a limited number of people but should widely be shared by the public -- even by the international community.

Nevertheless, most of the vast volumes of the documents remain closed to the public, though some of them have been quoted in reports and released. While the interviews are said to have been conducted on an off-the-record basis on the grounds that no one should be held personally responsible for the enormous disaster, recent reports on the testimony of Masao Yoshida, the late former plant chief at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, have catalyzed the move to disclose the government investigation committee records to the public.

The government is now poised to declassify the testimonies of Yoshida as well as those of others who gave consent to their release. We should be able to learn a lot from those materials -- from the cause of the disaster to crisis management -- once experts from all walks of life scrutinize every word in the testimonies of the concerned parties. It is hoped that the move will spark the disclosure of all the other information on the disaster, including the NAIIC records.

The Asahi Shimbun has sparked controversy after it reported in May that 90 percent of workers at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant withdrew to the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear plant in violation of Yoshida's

orders on March 15, 2011 -- just a few days after the outbreak of the nuclear disaster. In his testimony, Yoshida concluded that the plant workers' evacuation to the No. 2 plant was in the end the correct decision though it was different from what he had originally intended. It is likely that the Asahi Shimbun reports highlighting only a portion of his testimony have led to widespread misunderstanding and hindered level-headed discussions over the matter.

That said, the essence of the issue is that orders given amid confusion sometimes fail to get across to workers on site. It is rather important to draw lessons from that incident about how the chain of command should be carried out. One such lesson we should learn is the significance of planning in advance who should evacuate whom to where and who should remain on site in the event of a severe accident.

Yoshida's testimony also underscores once again the lack of ability in the prime minister's office and TEPCO headquarters in Tokyo in providing support to the on-site workers in crisis. It is imperative for the government and power companies -- which are eager to reactivate idled nuclear reactors across Japan -- to thoroughly scrutinize whether these essential challenges have already been resolved.

In the meantime, it is also important to remember Yoshida's testimony is a mere fragment of the whole picture of the nuclear catastrophe. What counts is we should compare all the testimonies by numerous people concerned and documents to re-enact in minute detail what exactly happened. Authorities should make efforts to gain approval of the interviewees in the investigative committee reports to disclose the entire documents to the public as soon as possible.

September 03, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Yuko Obuchi' appointment - Will this help?

September 6, 2014

LDP star Obuchi to lead nuclear debate

AFP-JIJI

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe may have hoped that Yuko Obuchi, a 40-year-old mother of two with an impeccable political pedigree, will provide an acceptable face for his nuclear power push when he appointed her industry minister last week.

However, say observers, Obuchi will have her work cut out convincing a public still badly scarred by the Fukushima disaster that it is safe to switch the country's 48 atomic reactors back on.

"I, too, am raising children," Obuchi told reporters shortly after being made the country's first female minister of economy, trade and industry. "If people say they are worried, I think it is only natural. If you are a mother, I think it is a kind of feeling that everyone has. The central government must offer a full explanation to these sentiments."

Naming a young mother to the job was "a cunning move by Abe," said Greenpeace Japan's Kazue Suzuki, because the implicit message is that if someone who has children says nuclear power is safe, it sounds more credible.

However, Suzuki said people will not fall for that kind of sleight of hand, and that if Obuchi wants to represent them she should speak out against nuclear restarts.

"When (Obuchi) makes decisions, she should consider the reaction of ordinary women, the majority of whom do not want nuclear power stations reactivated," Suzuki said.

Obuchi, daughter of late Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, is a rising star in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, and having first become a minister at the age of 34, holds the record as the youngest woman ever to make the grade. Now, as industry minister, her portfolio includes overseeing the power industry. Ever since the March 2011 nuclear disaster erupted at the Fukushima No. 1 power station, where a tsunami knocked out cooling systems and sent reactors into meltdown, the country's entire nuclear stable has gone offline, taking with it more than a quarter of the electricity supply. That has left Japan reliant on expensive fossil fuel imports, which are playing havoc with its balance of payments and pushing up prices for hard-pressed consumers.

At her inaugural news conference, Obuchi repeated the Abe administration's line that her policy would be "to reduce our reliance on nuclear plants by actively introducing renewable energy and thorough energy saving."

Then she added, "We will restart (nuclear power plants) by making safety our priority."

The new minister highlighted the importance of earning "the understanding of hosting communities" who may be hostile to the prospect of firing up their nearby reactors again, despite beefed up safety rules and — by domestic regulatory standards — a ferocious new watchdog.

Obuchi is expected to visit the crippled Fukushima plant in the coming days, as well as the Sendai nuclear power station in southwestern Kyushu, where two reactors are the most likely to be restarted in the coming months.

The new regulator might confirm that the units are safe as soon as next week. The regulator has received nearly 17,000 public comments since it announced the Sendai plant's re-evaluation in July.

Junichi Takase, a political science professor at Nagoya University of Foreign Affairs, dismissed speculation that Obuchi's appointment was a cynical ploy. Rather, he says, she got the job because she is a capable individual with a bright future.

"Japanese people are no fools, and they know there will be no change in the safety of nuclear plants just because the minister changes," he said.

"At this point (Abe has) no intention to use her politically to make the restart of nuclear reactors easier," he said. "In the future, if she moves near a nuclear plant with her two children and says 'it's safe,' then that would mean her status as a mother would be being politically used. But it's not at this point."

Political talents notwithstanding, Obuchi faces an uphill challenge, said Hikaru Hiranuma, a research fellow at The Tokyo Foundation, a think tank.

"She needs to address several difficult issues: safety at nuclear plants, preparations in case of an accident, such as evacuation schemes and drills, compensation for accident victims and how to dispose of spent nuclear fuel," he said. "It will be difficult for her to justify the government's plan to continue using nuclear as an important source of power, unless she comes up with answers to these challenges."

Testimonies disclosure depends on Gov't

September 11, 2014

Suga: Record disclosure at govt. discretion

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140911_29.html

Sep. 11, 2014 - Updated 12:15 UTC+2

Japan's chief cabinet secretary says the government has decided at its discretion to release interviews with the former head of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Masao Yoshida, who was in charge of the plant at the time of the 2011 nuclear accident, died in July of last year.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said on Thursday that before his death Yoshida submitted a petition requesting that the interviews not be disclosed to a third party.

Yoshida reportedly said he was afraid his testimony could develop a life of its own and people could believe all he said was true.

Suga said the government has started disclosing interviews with other people after obtaining their consent. He also said that some newspapers have published fragments of Yoshida's interviews.

Suga said this kind of situation was what Yoshida was afraid of. He said the government decided on the release of his testimony based on the changing situation and the intention of his petition, after seeking consent from his family.

The spokesperson noted that **the government will not release testimony of other interviewees if they object to any disclosure.**

He added that the government plans to release other interviews by the end of the year.

What to make of disclosure

September 11, 2014

Govt. panel member reacts to interview release

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140911_28.html

Sep. 11, 2014 - Updated 12:20 UTC+2

A member of the Japanese government panel which investigated the 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant has noted the significance of the release of interviews with people involved.

Non-fiction writer Kunio Yanagida said **the panel interviewed officials of the plant operator, TEPCO, and the government, under the condition that their testimonies would not be disclosed so they would not be held responsible for what they said.**

Yanagida said the government's disclosure of the interviews is significant and would impact investigations if a similar accident were to occur.

He pointed out that **the government needs to give the public a full and logical explanation as to why it released the documents.**

Yanagida criticized the government for not making enough effort to lead the investigation into the accident. The cause of the accident is unclear, even though 3-and-a-half years have passed since the crisis.

He said he hopes the release of the documents will give experts from various fields an opportunity to look into the accident from their own perspectives.

Most of the disclosed documents are testimonies of the government officials who had dealt with the accident.

Yanagida said their testimonies may help provide a look at the nation's risk management, but accounts by engineers and operators who responded to the accident on the site are more important in providing the big picture.

Asahi to retract on Yoshida's testimony

September 11, 2014

Asahi Shimbun admits error in Fukushima plant chief testimony report

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140911p2g00m0dm042000c.html>
TOKYO (Kyodo) -- The Asahi Shimbun newspaper admitted Thursday its controversial report on the testimony of the late chief of the disaster-hit Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant contained erroneous information and that it will retract the article.

"We have judged the report was incorrect," President Tadakazu Kimura said at a press conference. "We have significantly hurt our readers' trust."

He was referring to the daily's May 20 report that said 90 percent of plant workers had left the complex despite their boss Masao Yoshida's order to stay put. The report was based on Yoshida's then unpublicized testimony to a government panel.

Kimura added he will decide whether to resign after "paving the way for a drastic reform for revival." He also apologized for its erroneous past reports on "comfort women," after the Asahi retracted last month its articles published in the 1980s and 1990s that reported a Japanese man's statements about women on the South Korean island on Jeju forcibly and violently taken to serve at wartime Japanese military brothels.

"I apologize for publishing the erroneous stories and that the correction was long overdue," he said.

Kimura said the newspaper publisher will set up a third-party panel of experts to review its past reports concerning the comfort women issue.

The Asahi's report on the Fukushima plant, operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co., was cited by a number of overseas media and it has been one of the most controversial points in the process of examining the crisis.

On Thursday, the government released documents including Yoshida's testimony compiled by the government panel that was probing the devastating accident, triggered by a powerful earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

Asahi to retract article on nuclear plant head

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140911_31.html

Sep. 11, 2014 - Updated 13:05 UTC+2

The Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun says it will retract a story about testimony by the former head of the Fukushima Daiichi plant on the 2011 nuclear crisis.

Asahi's President Tadakazu Kimura said at a news conference on Thursday that **the article was incorrect due to insufficient research.**

He said he apologizes to readers and to employees at Tokyo Electric Power Company. Kimura said he will pave the way for an editorial overhaul, and then consider resigning.

The article, carried in the morning edition on May 20th, said it was based on a copy of the account of plant chief Masao Yoshida to a government investigative panel.

The article said that while the nuclear disaster was unfolding, 90 percent of the plant's workers defied Yoshida's order and fled to the Fukushima Daini nuclear plant, 10 kilometers south of the Daiichi plant.

It quoted Yoshida as saying that he never told them to go to the other plant.

Asahi's retraction came on the day the government released the interviews with Yoshida, who died of cancer last year.

In the documents released on Thursday, Yoshida said that after carefully reconsidering the matter, he finds the workers' decision to go to the Daini plant far better.

The Asahi article came under criticism from other media organizations that also obtained a copy before the release. They reported that **Yoshida apparently did not think the workers disobeyed his order.**

Gov't releases transcripts of interviews

September 11, 2014

Yoshida transcripts on Fukushima nuclear crisis released

Staff Writer

Masao Yoshida, chief of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 power plant, had lost hope and was exhausted on the night of March 14, 2011, three days into the nuclear meltdown crisis.

When he saw workers from companies cooperating with Tokyo Electric Power Co. at the plant's emergency headquarters, Yoshida just muttered: "Everyone, please just go home. Just go back home." Yoshida was urging all nonessential workers to leave in case another catastrophe hit the plant, and possibly all of eastern Japan. At the time, both the pressure and temperature were surging inside of quake-hit reactor No. 2, evoking fears of the worst-case scenario.

"All of the nuclear materials could escape and spread. Our image was that of a catastrophe for eastern Japan," he is quoted as saying in the government's formerly top-secret transcripts of its interviews with him, finally released Thursday after leaks.

Any explosion in reactor No. 2 resulting in the release of massive amounts of deadly nuclear material would immediately halt the injection of coolant water into reactors 1 and 3, putting them in the same situation as reactor 2.

“This is the part I really don’t want to recall,” Yoshida said during the interview session, which took place in August 2011.

Prompted by months of media reports based on apparent leaks of the text, as well as formal disclosure requests from the media, including The Japan Times, the government on Thursday released more than 400 pages of the Yoshida transcripts, which cover his testimony from July to November 2011 to its investigative panel on the disaster.

The government initially refused to disclose the transcripts because Yoshida had asked, in a May 2012 written request, that they not be publicized. But after the leaks, the government relented and posted them on its website Thursday.

In the interviews, Yoshida explained in detail how the crisis developed and how he and his team responded. He also stressed that, during the crisis, he and his colleagues never thought of withdrawing everyone from the crippled plant.

Given the lack of information from the plant, the government’s leaders, including Prime Minister Naoto Kan, suspected that Tepco’s top executives in Tokyo were at one point considering pulling everyone out and abandoning the six-reactor station.

“(Tepco’s) head office and the prime minister’s office may have been having absurd discussions (about a withdrawal), but did (the workers) run away? They didn’t,” Yoshida is quoted as saying.

He said that even when he was pondering the worst-case scenario, he thought he would have to keep a skeleton crew on hand, including himself. Nonessential workers, however, would have been urged to leave, he added.

The release of the transcripts has drawn a great deal of public attention because Yoshida, who died of esophageal cancer last year, is viewed as a national hero for containing the crisis and people wanted to know more about the already published accounts of his actions.

But another reason is because some of those accounts seemed to contradict each other.

The Asahi Shimbun, which claimed in May to have the full text of the interviews, published several reports about them. One said that Yoshida on March 15, 2011, ordered workers to find somewhere on the No. 1 plant grounds to avoid radiation, but most didn’t follow that directive and instead fled to the nearby Fukushima No. 2 plant, 10 km to the south.

That report caught the attention of overseas media because it contradicted the story that was perpetuated about the brave “Fukushima 50” who stayed to handle the emergency. Later, the Asahi’s rival, the Sankei Shimbun, claimed that the Asahi’s report was erroneous.

The full text released Thursday, which has the names of some people redacted for privacy, shows that **both reports could be described as at least partially correct: Yoshida said he did not order workers to evacuate to the No. 2 plant, but nonetheless workers went there. But he also said he later concluded the workers’ decision to go to No. 2 was far more appropriate than following his order.**

“Actually, I never told them to go to 2F,” Yoshida is quoted as saying, referring to the still-functioning Fukushima No. 2. “(Later) I came to believe that going to 2F was by far the right thing to do if only you gave more thought to it.”

In the interviews, Yoshida often used blunt language to criticize top Tepco executives and government leaders for intervening in technical decisions that should have been left to the plant chief.

He also alleged that the desperate effort by Self-Defense Forces personnel, firefighters and police officers to get water into the dangerously hot spent-fuel pools “were all meaningless” given the small amount of water they were working with.

An SDF helicopter, dipping a huge bucket in the ocean, flew over the fuel pools and tried to dump the water into them. Water cannon trucks operated by the SDF, firefighters and police also shot water at the pools, and they were all praised as brave heroes.

But Yoshida said much of that water didn't even reach the targets. "Even if all of the (water) had gone into the pools, the amount would have been something like 10 or 20 tons. That would be meaningless," he said. He didn't elaborate, but the spent fuel pool for reactor 4, for example, had the capacity to hold 1,425 tons of water.

Yoshida also sought to defend himself for not preparing for a monster tsunami, despite a 2008 simulation by experts that showed 15.7-meter waves could hit Fukushima No. 1 if a powerful earthquake were to hit off the coast. Yoshida was at that time the head of Tepco's nuclear equipment management department, which is responsible for preparing for potential natural disasters such as quakes and tsunami. In the aftermath of 3/11, media outlets harshly criticized Tepco for ignoring the simulation.

But according to Yoshida, the simulation was fully hypothetical and based on an arbitrary assumption that a mega-quake would take place in the sea off Fukushima, with no scientific studies showing such a possibility.

No one in academia had said such a scenario was likely before the March 11 quake, and no one in the government was seriously considering such a possibility, Yoshida said. With no consensus among quake and tsunami experts, Tepco could not have assumed that such a big tsunami would hit the Tohoku region, Yoshida argued.

"I want to raise a loud voice to say this. This time, (the tsunami-quake disasters) killed 23,000 people. This is not just about issues regarding the safety of a nuclear power plant," Yoshida said. "If you (criticize) us, why didn't you take measures to prevent those people from dying? . . . People just discuss the design of a nuclear power plant."

Govt. releases interviews about nuclear accident

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20140911_33.html

Sep. 11, 2014 - Updated 14:56 UTC+2

Japan's government has released transcripts of interviews about the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The government on Thursday disclosed interviews with 19 of 772 government and Tokyo Electric Power Company officials. A government-appointed panel carried out the interviews between 2011 and 2012.

The released interviews include those of former plant manager Masao Yoshida and former prime minister Naoto Kan, who were both in their posts at the time of the 2011 accident.

The government had not disclosed the testimony. But it reversed its initial policy after some media outlets published what they say are transcripts of Yoshida's testimony.

Asked about TEPCO's possible removal of all staff members from the plant at the time of the accident, Yoshida said he spoke over the telephone with Goshi Hosono, an advisor to Kan at that time.

Yoshida said he told Hosono he believed they would need to evacuate those who were not directly involved and that they were preparing to do so.

Hosono said he'd never before worked with such a strong sense of tension, and that he had no memory of

what he said then.

Then-chief cabinet secretary Yukio Edano recalled conversations with then-TEPCO president Masataka Shimizu.

Edano said he had heard from someone that utility officials were talking about withdrawal from the plant. Edano said he then received a telephone call from Shimizu, who said something similar.

Edano said he didn't remember the exact words Shimizu used, but he was sure the president was talking about a full-scale withdrawal. Edano said other government officials received separate phone calls and that he couldn't have misunderstood the nature of the conversation.

Then-prime minister Naoto Kan spoke about his time at the headquarters of the utility after the accident.

Kan said he told TEPCO officials that they were the party in charge and that he urged them to work as if their lives depended on it.

Kan said he told them that there was no way to escape or withdraw. He said he urged the chairman and president to get prepared to have employees over 60 years old go to the accident site.

Kan reportedly said he himself was resolved and that TEPCO would collapse if they decided on withdrawal.

Then-industry minister Banri Kaieda spoke about Shimizu's appearance at the prime minister's office.

Kaieda said cabinet ministers were frustrated with the utility and their sense of distrust was at a peak. He said the ministers felt pressed to summon the president to tell him what to do.

Former plant chief Yoshida said in testimony that he wondered what the ministers were making a fuss about. Yoshida said he wanted to make sure that people were not leaving and that he by no means had told his employees to get away.

The government plans to release testimony by other interviewees subject to their consent by the end of the year.

Asahi retracts article

September 11, 2014

[Asahi retracts article about Yoshida testimony that reported 'workers withdrew against order'](http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201409110080)

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201409110080

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tadakazu Kimura, president of The Asahi Shimbun, held a Sept. 11 news conference at which he retracted an article (English translation at AJW) that appeared in the morning edition of May 20, 2014, reporting on the testimony provided by Masao Yoshida, the plant manager of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The testimony was compiled by the government's Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations of Tokyo Electric Power Co.

Kimura also apologized to readers and individuals with ties to TEPCO.

In addition to relieving Nobuyuki Sugiura as executive editor, Kimura said he would decide on whether to resign after he has set the course for reform and revitalization of the daily. He will not receive any remuneration as president during the period.

The Asahi independently obtained the Yoshida testimony at a time when the central government had still not released it. On the front and other pages of its May 20, 2014, edition, the Asahi reported "about 650 TEPCO and other workers, or 90 percent of the total number who were at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant on the morning of March 15, 2011, four days after the Great East Japan Earthquake, went against the order of Yoshida to wait for further instructions and withdrew to the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear plant 10 kilometers to the south."

However, as a result of a detailed internal examination, the judgment was made that there was no corroborating evidence for the headline or article contents related to "withdrawing against the order." It was a mistaken article that gave the impression that many plant workers had fled while knowing about the order given by Yoshida.

The judgment was made that the reasons for this occurrence were that the team of reporters working on the Yoshida testimony made the wrong appraisal in the course of reading and trying to understand the document, and the checking function did not operate sufficiently because only a small number of reporters shared the information due to excessive concerns for protecting the source of the information. The Asahi will continue with its investigation into the course of events that led to the article. But taking into account the seriousness of the situation and from the standpoint of the effects of the article and the problems associated with the information-gathering and reporting, the Asahi has asked the Press and Human Rights Committee, an internal third-party organ, to conduct an examination of the matter.

At the same time, Kimura touched upon the recent decision by the Asahi to retract articles related to testimony judged to be a fabrication by the late Seiji Yoshida about forcibly taking away "comfort women" from Jeju Island, South Korea. The testimony was used in past reporting about comfort women.

"I would like to apologize to the readers for having failed to issue the correction earlier," Kimura said.

Regarding past reporting on comfort women, the Asahi will set up a new third-party organ apart from the Press and Human Rights Committee. The new organ will consist of experts outside of the Asahi, such as lawyers, historians and journalists.

The panel will be asked to conduct a thorough examination, based on the voices of doubt that have been submitted to the Asahi, and look into such issues as the process behind the writing of the past articles and the developments that led to the correction; the appropriateness of the recent special coverage; and the effects that Asahi's reporting on the comfort women had on relations between Japan and South Korea and in the international community.

The Asahi will ask the panel to conduct its examination in a prompt manner, and it will present the results in the pages of the Asahi.

The Asahi will set up a committee centered on the new executive editor to work toward regaining trust and revitalization. The committee will check and examine the problems that have emerged in the course of past information-gathering and reporting as well as consider what is required to regain the trust of readers and use those results in Asahi's future newspaper coverage.

President Kimura's statement at

(http://digital.asahi.com/articles/SDI201409125171.html?iref=comtop_pickup_01)

Yoshida first feared worst-case scenario

September 12, 2014

Yoshida feared nuclear 'annihilation' of eastern Japan, testimony shows

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201409120034>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Plant manager Masao Yoshida envisioned catastrophe for eastern Japan in the days following the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, according to his testimony, one of 19 released by the government on Sept. 11.

The testimonies of 19 of the people interviewed by the Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations of Tokyo Electric Power Co. shed light on the early days of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and the front-line response.

They include statements from then Prime Minister Naoto Kan and Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano when the Democratic Party of Japan-led administration was in power.

Explaining why the government decided to disclose the documents, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said at a news conference: "Several newspapers have run stories in a piecemeal fashion that cover only part of the hearings of former plant manager Yoshida. As a result, Yoshida's fear that words in his testimony would be misused out of convenience was warranted."

In his testimony, Yoshida described the condition of the No. 2 reactor at the Fukushima plant between the evening of March 14, 2011, and the next morning: "Despite the nuclear fuel being completely exposed, we're unable to reduce pressure. Water can't get in either."

Yoshida recalled the severity of the situation. "If we continue to be unable to get water in, all of the nuclear fuel will melt and escape from the containment vessel, and radioactive substances from the fuel will spread to the outside," he said.

Fearing a worst-case scenario at the time, Yoshida said, "What we envisioned was that the entire eastern part of Japan would be annihilated."

On the morning of March 15, Yoshida instructed all non-essential personnel to evacuate the command center building. While many took refuge in the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear plant, Yoshida said, "In fact, I never told the workers to go to 2F (Fukushima No. 2 nuclear power plant).

"I thought I gave an order to temporarily evacuate to a location where radiation levels were low near the Fukushima No. 1 plant, irrespective of whether it is in the compound of the plant, and await further instructions."

If the workers had evacuated to areas near the No. 1 plant as instructed, however, "all of them would be wearing full-face masks. They would have died within hours of evacuating," Yoshida pointed out. He praised the response of workers who took refuge in the No. 2 plant, saying, "Upon sufficient consideration, I realized it was much more correct to go to 2F."

Asahi retracts article (2)

September 12, 2014

Asahi Shimbun runs front-page apology article over retraction of 'Yoshida testimony'

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140912p2a00m0na006000c.html>

The Asahi Shimbun newspaper ran an article of apology on the front page of its Sept. 12 morning edition over the retraction of reports on testimony from the late chief of the disaster-hit Fukushima nuclear plant, following a news conference given by Asahi President Tadakazu Kimura on Sept. 11.

The Asahi has retracted a May 20 article on the testimony of Masao Yoshida, chief of the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant at the time of the March 2011 disaster, wherein it reported that some 90 percent of workers who were at the plant withdrew in opposition to his orders to remain at the site.

During the Sept. 11 news conference, Asahi Shimbun President Kimura admitted that the May 20 article included erroneous information, and apologized to readers and individuals associated with the matter.

It is a very rare case for the Asahi Shimbun to run an article on the front page of its newspaper regarding an issue such as the president's apology over a company scandal.

The newspaper carried a total of five pages on the matter in its Sept. 12 morning edition, including reports on self-evaluation wherein the company admitted failures in fact-checking and partially omitting testimony. An explanation was also given as to why the Asahi's apology was delayed after other media outlets pointed out the erroneous reports.

Asahi also posted the English version of the president's apology on its website.

September 12, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Confusion reigned after disaster

September 12, 2014

Testimony shows confusion at Fukushima plant, chief's anger

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140912p2a00m0na012000c.html>

The newly released transcripts of testimony by Masao Yoshida, the late chief of the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, revealed **not only his leadership qualities to cope with the crisis in the immediate aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in 2011 but also the weakness in his preparation for nuclear contingencies.**

"As a result, nobody came to help us. I am still full of resentment and bitterness," Yoshida said in his testimony.

In response to questions from a governmental investigative panel on the Fukushima nuclear disaster, Yoshida expressed anger at the prime minister's office and the headquarters of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the nuclear power plant.

The TEPCO head office was supposed to back up Yoshida and his team at the nuclear power plant but did not offer help. Instead, the TEPCO headquarters simply conveyed messages from the prime minister's office, baffling the Yoshida team.

During a meeting on the night of March 12, one day after the huge quake and tsunami struck the Fukushima nuclear power plant, then Prime Minister Naoto Kan asked Haruki Madarame, chairman of the Nuclear Safety Commission at the time, about the possibility of recriticality if seawater were pumped into the plant's No. 1 reactor. But Madarame did not give a clear-cut answer. Ichiro Takekuro, then a fellow and senior adviser to the TEPCO leadership, listened to the dialogue between Kan and Madarame and

telephoned Yoshida to tell him to stop pumping seawater into the reactor. But Yoshida did not heed the advice and kept pumping seawater.

In his testimony, Yoshida said Takekuro ordered him to follow the order without question. He also recalled that he never thought of stopping pumping in the seawater.

When asked about Kan's visit to the stricken nuclear power plant on the early morning of March 12, Yoshida said he had no idea, adding, "He came, sat and left." Meanwhile, Kan harbored a growing sense of frustration over the alleged absence of essential information from the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency and TEPCO headquarters. Kan said in his testimony that he decided to visit the Fukushima plant to talk directly with Yoshida and his team in the absence of smooth communications.

Yoshida categorically denied the possibility that he had contemplated a total pullout from the disaster-hit nuclear power plant amid the nuclear crisis. During questioning by the investigative panel, Yoshida was visibly irritated about TEPCO head office's handling of the crisis, heaping scorn on then TEPCO President Masataka Shimizu and calling him "that man."

Tsuneo Futami, former chief of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant and now professor at Tokyo Institute of Technology, said after reading Yoshida's testimony that TEPCO headquarters should have fully explained their decisions in response to orders and inquiries from the prime minister's office and protected the team.

September 12, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

March 13, 2011

September 14, 2014

Responders cowed by explosion at reactor 3 building of Fukushima No. 1

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/09/14/national/responders-cowered-by-explosion-at-no-3-reactor-building/#.VBc3kBanq1s>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – At 9:25 a.m. on March 13, 2011, workers at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant started pumping water into the No. 3 reactor from firetrucks after finding a way to ease the internal pressure more than six hours after it lost its cooling ability and started to overheat.

Despite their efforts, a blast would gut the No. 3 reactor building a little over 24 hours later, blowing off its roof and sides and leaving a towering mushroom cloud overhead. It would be the second hydrogen explosion to rock the plant since it was crippled by tsunami from the magnitude-9.0 earthquake on March 11.

But this one was more powerful. Tokyo Electric Power Co. employee Mitsuhiro Matsumoto, 47, was outside during both explosions. As a member of the restoration team, he was trying to restore power to the reactors by connecting a power truck to a switchboard in the No. 2 reactor's turbine building, which still looked viable after being flooded by the waves.

After the first explosion, Matsumoto was reluctant to go out again, but he knew there was still a lot of work to do after rubble from the previous explosion, at reactor No. 1, damaged the heavy electrical cables he was trying to lay.

The thundering second explosion came at 11:01 a.m. on March 14, just after he had finished checking the switchboard's insulation in the No. 2 turbine building and was walking toward a nearby vehicle.

The explosion kicked up so much dust that he couldn't see anything around him, including his car, which was only about 10 meters away. When finally reached it, he found the driver's seat had been crushed by a concrete block.

"I shuddered at the sight. If I had been inside, I would have been dead," he recalled.

Around the same time, four other workers were trying to connect cables in a corridor between the No. 2 reactor building and its turbine building. After the explosion, banging sounds pelted them over and over again from overhead. They later found out it was chunks of concrete from the No. 3 reactor building, landing on the roof.

The workers felt it was impossible to continue laying cable due to the damage and the climbing radiation.

After the dust settled, Matsumoto ran along the road between reactors 2 and 3 toward the emergency response building. It was hard to breathe with a full face mask, but he kept running anyway. He just wanted to get away from wherever he was as quickly as possible.

When he arrived, a member of his restoration team, Kimio Ikeda, 50, began sobbing.

"You're alive! I'm so glad!" he said upon seeing Matsumoto covered head to toe in dust. But Matsumoto laid into him: "You told us we would be OK. You liar!"

Ikeda, in fact, hadn't given Matsumoto any reassurances. But Matsumoto couldn't help himself — he was incensed.

After the explosions, he was unable to believe anyone or any of the information he received.

"I completely lost my will to fight. I was determined to never go out again," he recalled. The explosion at No. 3 remains a vivid memory in Matsumoto's mind.

"I have heard people in the office saying that after the nuclear accident broke out, they were prepared to die," he said. "But in my case, I wasn't prepared to die, even when I actually came very close to dying. And death was staring me in the face."

Finding time to spare, Ikeda phoned his wife for the first time since the crisis began. His wife started crying over the phone. Ikeda also heard his parents and son rejoicing.

"I cannot believe you are alive even after those explosions. You are alive!" she said.

"Yes, I am alive," he answered, keeping his voice low in consideration of those who hadn't been able to contact their families yet.

About 30 people in charge of the electricity equipment, including Matsumoto and Ikeda, had hardly slept. Many had already absorbed more than 100 millisieverts of radiation — the maximum allowed by Tepco over a five-year period.

After the second explosion, Yumiko Kato, 37, rushed to the emergency care room on the first floor of the emergency response building to help the injured.

A man injured by the rubble was soon brought in on a stretcher. Kato had to send him to the hospital because there were no doctors on hand. Before doing so, she wiped down his body with a wet cloth to remove some of the radiation-tainted dust.

The man moaned, his face distorted by pain.

Another man in the room was uninjured but in a state of panic.

“It’s my fault,” he said, as if he was the one to blame for the explosion.

Those feeling ill were taken to a meeting room on the second floor, next to the emergency response office. But Tepco quickly ran out of mattresses and had to put down cardboard for them to lie on.

Among them was a reactor operator who was in the main control room at the time of the explosion. Kato entered the room to see how he was doing.

But when the door closed behind her, the operator shouted: “Is that an explosion? Again?” He then clasped his arms around his knees and trembled, muttering “I am afraid, afraid, afraid.”

Kato patted him on the back and assured him he was in a safe place, frustrated that she couldn’t do anything else.

Four Tepco employees, three contractors and four Self-Defense Force soldiers were injured by the explosion at No. 3.

Those at the emergency response office were mentally shaken.

“I want to go home,” a young female Tepco employee said as she started to cry. “What are we all doing here? What are we going to do if there is another explosion?”

She then asked Kato to take her away from the plant.

Kato put her arm around her shoulder and said, “Let’s believe in our people, because they are working very hard.”

The situation, however, only got worse, cornering everyone at the plant.

The story about injecting seawater

September 14, 2014

Yoshida's call on seawater kept reactor cool as Tokyo dithered

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/09/14/national/yoshidas-call-seawater-kept-reactor-cool-tokyo-dithered/#.VBc3MBanq1s>

Kyodo

This is the sixth in a series on the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe based on the accounts of people who struggled to contain the crisis in its early stages. Job titles and ages are as of March 2011.

Fukushima — When the No. 1 reactor building exploded at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear complex on March 12, 2011, blowing its concrete roof high into the sky, the employees were traumatized.

Still, the officials at Tokyo Electric Power Co. knew they had to continue injecting water into its reactor, which had lost all cooling ability after the massive earthquake and tsunami the day before robbed the power plant of all electricity and several backup generators.

At the time, Tepco was running out of fresh water to cool the reactor and had decided to use seawater that had pooled inside a large pit near the No. 3 reactor after the tsunami. Then planned to pump the water all the way over to the No. 1 reactor using three firetrucks.

They needed the help, however, of the Ground Self-Defense Force troops who had arrived at the plant in their own firetrucks. GSDF officer Yuichi Sato, 22, headed over to the pit for a second time later in the evening.

About 90 minutes before, he had been driving toward the pit when the hydrogen blast, set off by gas generated by the reactor's melting nuclear fuel rods, gutted the No. 1 reactor building, hurling tons of debris into the air.

A chunk of steel frame from the building smashed into the passenger-side window of the truck, breaking the arm of Hiroyuki Ogawa, the 50-year-old chief of Tepco's firefighting unit, who was guiding them to the site.

Sato, a member of a GSDF artillery regiment based in the prefecture, said he was afraid that another explosion might take place but knew he had to do his job.

The GSDF firetruck was supposed to pump seawater out of the pit and pass it to another GSDF firetruck, with Tepco's firetruck later injecting it into the overheating reactor.

But heated exchanges broke out between officials from Tepco and one of its affiliates over who would run Tepco's firetruck.

"Are you telling us to go? Can you guarantee our lives will be protected?" an official of affiliate Nanmei Kousan Co. shouted at Tomoyuki Arai, who had taken over as Tepco's firefighting chief after Ogawa was injured. Arai was asking the affiliate to provide more manpower because the job of operating the firetrucks belongs to Nanmei and Tepco employees aren't trained to run them.

Arai said he could not guarantee their safety, but added, "If we don't go, things will get worse."

A team including Arai and a Nanmei employee eventually left for the No. 1 reactor's turbine building. As they approached it, their dosimeters climbed, warning of hazardous amounts of radiation in the area.

After Arai's team replaced the hoses damaged by the hydrogen explosion, the three firetrucks were connected by 300 meters of hoses.

It was 7:04 p.m. when they started pumping the seawater into the reactor. But unknown to Sato and Arai, there was another struggle developing between the plant's emergency response office and members of the prime minister's office in Tokyo.

Given the critical need to inject seawater into the overheating No. 1 reactor, plant chief Masao Yoshida, 56, was in for a surprise when he was ordered over the phone to suspend the operation.

“Stop it immediately,” Ichiro Takekuro, a senior Tepco official who had been dispatched to the prime minister’s office to provide explanations on technical issues, said around 7:20 p.m.

“Why?” asked a defiant Yoshida. The plant was finally in a position to continuously inject water into the reactor and yet Takekuro, who had once been the head of Tepco’s nuclear division and knew better than anyone that the reactors needed to be cooled as soon as possible, was telling him to stop.

“Shut up! The prime minister’s office keeps on pestering me,” Takekuro, 64, said, before hanging up the phone without listening to what Yoshida had to say.

About 20 minutes before the call, Takekuro had explained to Prime Minister Naoto Kan that it would take more than an hour and a half to switch from freshwater to seawater injection at the reactor.

Kan, 64, told Takekuro in the meantime to consider whether there was a possibility of “recriticality” taking place. Kan was referring to a phenomenon in which melted fuel rods resume a chain reaction if seawater is used.

“I wanted him to consider the possibility because I was told that there was time before the seawater injection,” Kan later said.

Takekuro was aware that mixing boric acid with seawater could prevent recriticality, but before telling the prime minister about it, he learned from Yoshida by phone that the seawater injection had already begun.

Thinking that he could not tell Kan that reactor cooling operations with seawater had already commenced, Takekuro ordered Yoshida to stop the operation.

Yoshida was fuming after the telephone conversation. He could not understand why a decision by someone who was not at the site was being given priority. Dissatisfied, he consulted Tepco’s head office in Tokyo through a real-time teleconference.

The head office said the utility had no choice but to follow the order. Yoshida was told he should cease injecting seawater and describe the injections that had already taken place as having been done “on a trial basis.”

Yoshida could not understand what was wrong with seawater injection and turned to Shiro Hikita, 56, his most trusted subordinate, who knew all about the structure and design of the reactors, for a second opinion.

Emboldened by Hikita’s assurance that there was no problem, Yoshida then approached the Tepco employee who was supervising the seawater injection operation and whispered, “I will put on an act. No matter what happens, you must not stop injecting the water.”

Later, at 7:25 p.m., Yoshida said during a teleconference that the “trial” seawater injection would be temporarily halted on the prime minister’s order, but was expected to resume soon because Takekuro was negotiating the issue in Tokyo.

Hundreds of people at the plant’s emergency response office and senior Tepco officials in Tokyo believed the injection had been halted.

At 8:10 p.m., Yoshida declared that the seawater injection would “resume” following approval by the prime minister’s office. **But the operation had never actually been suspended.**

“I felt that, in the end, it had to be my decision. There was just no time for debate,” Yoshida later told a subordinate.

About two months after the nuclear crisis unfolded, media reports quoted government sources as saying Kan ordered the suspension of seawater injection. Opposition lawmakers then criticized Kan for intervening in Tepco’s efforts to contain the crisis.

Kan, however, denied giving such an order.

“I knew that water had to be injected, be it seawater or any kind of water. I was not informed that seawater injection had begun in the first place, so I could not have ordered its halt,” he said.

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/09/14/national/yoshidas-call-seawater-kept-reactor-cool-tokyo-dithered/#.VBc3MBanq1s>

Economics of ageing reactors

September 14, 2014

Economic realities of old reactors

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/09/14/editorials/economic-realities-of-old-reactors/#.VBhIjhanq1s>

Reported moves by power companies to consider decommissioning their older nuclear power reactors indicate that they are beginning to selectively evaluate their nuclear power plants by weighing the costs of meeting safety criteria that has been tightened in the wake of the 2011 disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The government appears ready to facilitate such moves in the hope that terminating the old and more risky nuclear reactors will, in turn, help win public support for reactivating idled reactors that clear safety screening by the nuclear watchdog — the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA).

Both the power industry and the government need to take a realistic view of the prospect of nuclear power in this country — where currently all of its 48 nuclear power reactors are idled amid safety concerns following the 2011 disaster.

The Abe administration should follow up on its pledge to reduce “as much as possible” the nation’s dependency on nuclear power to meet its energy needs, and set specific targets, including a timeline, toward that goal so that the utilities can proceed with restructuring their power generation facilities, including scrapping nuclear reactors that will no longer be viable either for economic or safety reasons.

Recent media reports that Kansai Electric Power Co. is moving to scrap the Nos. 1 and 2 reactors at its Mihama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture — both of which began operating in the early 1970s and are more than 40 years old — were followed by a comment by trade minister Yuko Obuchi that the government would promote both the smooth decommissioning of aging reactors and the reactivation of reactors whose safety has been confirmed.

It is obvious that the government has in sight shutting down several nuclear power reactors that have become so old as to require an untenably high cost to meet the safety standards.

Under the new safety regulations introduced after the 2011 triple meltdowns at the Fukushima plant, nuclear reactors are in principle not allowed to operate for more than 40 years. Exceptions are allowed. Companies may be allowed to continue operating for up to 20 more years if they go through special inspections, including detailed checks on the decay status of their equipment such as the reactor pressure vessel — a process likely to require a major overhaul at huge cost, such as replacement of old power cables.

Meanwhile, the aging reactors introduced in the early days of the nuclear power industry typically have much smaller power output capacity than the reactors of subsequent generations, making it unlikely that their continued operation will make profits worth the investments.

Kansai Electric is not alone. In March, Chugoku Electric Power Co. President Tomohide Karita noted the company's "option" of decommissioning the No. 1 reactor at its Shimane nuclear power plant, which began operating in 1974.

Kyushu Electric Power Co. is also reported to be weighing the possibility of not seeking an operating extension of the No. 1 reactor at its Genkai nuclear power plant in Saga Prefecture. Thirty-eight years have passed since it started up; it has the lowest output capacity among the utility's six nuclear reactors. Of the nation's existing 48 nuclear power reactors, 18 are more than 30 years old. Seven reactors either have passed or are nearing the 40-year mark, and their operators need to apply to the NRA for safety screening by July next year if they plan to extend the reactors' operation. The power companies are expected to make a decision as early as yearend on what to do with the seven reactors.

The post-Fukushima regulations require power companies to make additional investments to upgrade their plants' resilience against natural disasters such as big earthquakes and tsunami as well as severe accidents.

Plants that are found to have active faults running under reactor buildings as a result of having the tightened standards applied to them will also face scrapping even if they have operated for fewer than 40 years.

Citing the cost of increased fuel imports to run thermal power plants and the burden of rising electricity charges, the Abe administration has pushed for reactivating idled nuclear reactors once they have been given the NRA's safety nod.

Since July last year, the power companies have applied for NRA screening of a total of 20 reactors. Of these, only two — the Nos. 1 and 2 reactors at the Sendai plant of Kyushu Electric in Kagoshima Prefecture — have so far been approved for the process by the NRA. **It is considered doubtful that the power companies will spend the money and time needed to restart the aging reactors.**

The increased cost of meeting the safety regulations raises doubts about the government's claims of the cost advantages in running nuclear power plants instead of other energy sources. There may be cases where power companies decide to discontinue some reactors even before the 40-year limit.

Trade Obuchi has indicated that the government may consider measures to help the power companies scrap the aging reactors smoothly.

Since discontinuing a nuclear reactor reduces the asset value of the plant facility, its operator would need to report losses from the cut — an additional financial burden on the firms suffering from years of losses due to rising fuel costs. The trade ministry is reportedly mulling changes to accounting standards to ease the burden of the power companies.

But operators of nuclear power plants are supposed to set aside the costs of decommissioning their reactors from the profits gained from power generation at the facilities.

The government should not offer special treatment for the power companies merely because of the massive costs involved, as that would contravene economic principles and become difficult for taxpayers to support.

TEPCO makes arrangements with Chubu

September 18, 2014

TEPCO to tie up with Chubu Electric on thermal power, fuel procurement

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140918p2a00m0na005000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) has decided to grant Chubu Electric Power Co. preferential negotiation rights to form a joint venture aimed at thermal power generation and fuel procurement, it has been learned.

The potential alliance transcends service areas, thereby hinting at a possible realignment of the power industry.

TEPCO made the decision due to its belief that an alliance with Chubu Electric -- which has strengths in operating thermal power plants and procuring liquefied natural gas (LNG) -- would be the best choice for fleshing out its growth strategy in order to cope with the 2016 liberalization of the country's retail electricity market.

TEPCO, the operator of the incapacitated Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, is aiming to form a joint venture with Chubu Electric by the end of the current business year to integrally handle fuel procurement and thermal power generation. An agreement to start negotiations may be signed as early as the end of this month.

The combined total volume of LNG procured annually by the two utilities stands at slightly less than 40 million tons. This is one of the highest levels globally, which is likely to give the joint venture a competitive edge in price negotiations with oil-producing countries and other suppliers. Through the new joint venture, the two utility companies will also aim to replace most of TEPCO's aging thermal power generation facilities around Tokyo Bay -- whose total output is 10 million kilowatts -- with new facilities. TEPCO incorporated a scheme to form a comprehensive partnership on thermal power generation into its "New Comprehensive Special Business Plan," which was approved by the government in January. TEPCO has been negotiating with Chubu Electric, Tokyo Gas Co., Kansai Electric Power Co., and JX Holdings Inc. since June -- sounding them out about jointly rebuilding its aging thermal power stations at three locations in Chiba Prefecture, as well as jointly procuring LNG.

TEPCO and Chubu Electric are in the final stage of the negotiations, which outlines the establishment of a fifty-fifty joint venture. Because TEPCO is facing huge compensation claims stemming from the Fukushima nuclear disaster, Chubu Electric was concerned about the possibility of the new joint venture's profits being partially used for compensation payouts, to an extent exceeding its capital contribution ratio. Chubu Electric also fears that the government, which holds a majority stake in TEPCO, could intervene in the management of the new joint venture. Consequently, the two companies are moving in the direction of stating in their final agreement that the new joint venture will not be held responsible for compensations over the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

TEPCO is eyeing the integration of the two firms' thermal power sections, and is therefore calling on Chubu Electric to transfer its existing thermal power generation facilities and LNG procurement contracts to the new joint venture. As a result, attention will be focused on how much of their assets the two companies will transfer to the new alliance.

Chubu Electric has been importing U.S. shale gas jointly with Osaka Gas, which is enthusiastic about taking part in thermal power generation projects in the Tokyo metropolitan area -- thereby also hinting at a possible three-way partnership between TEPCO, Chubu Electric and Osaka Gas.

Worried about political message

September 18, 2014

Hibakusha group withheld nuclear testing protest photos from exhibition

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201409180048

By ASAKO HANAFUSA/ Staff Writer

A hibakusha group in Tokyo bowed to concerns raised by the Tokyo metropolitan government this summer and withheld photos of protests against nuclear weapons testing from an exhibition. The July 18-23 exhibition was organized by Toyukai (Tokyo Federation of A-Bomb Sufferers Organizations), which will celebrate its 56th anniversary in November. About 4,800 of the 6,000 or so hibakusha living in Tokyo belong to Toyukai.

"We wanted to display the photos to illustrate the activities of our group toward the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons," said 82-year-old Kohei Oiwa, who heads Toyukai. "However, we decided to accept the position of the Tokyo metropolitan government because the atomic bomb exhibition could still go on even without the photos."

Tokyo metropolitan government officials were concerned that foreign visitors to the observatory at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building, where the exhibition was held, would be offended by photos showing Japanese protesting against specific nations for conducting nuclear weapons tests.

Exhibitions about the August 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been held at the observatory every year since 2009 under the group's auspices.

This year's exhibition was held under the theme, "The actual situation of atomic bomb suffering and Tokyo's hibakusha." About 170 items, including photos, illustrations and tiles that survived the atomic bombings, were displayed. The exhibition also described the radiation damage from the bombings, as well as Toyukai's activities over the years.

About 5,500 visitors took in this year's exhibition.

Toyukai initially planned to display photos of protests held between the late 1990s and early 2000s against nuclear tests conducted by the United States, Britain, France, China and India. The photos showed protesters holding banners that specifically named the nations that conducted the nuclear tests.

The photos were shown to Tokyo metropolitan government officials in charge of the exhibition on July 10. **The officials raised concerns that some people might mistakenly construe that the photos carried a political message.** Toyukai members then decided against displaying the photos.

An official of the Tokyo metropolitan government section that decided whether to support the exhibition said: "Although we are not opposed to the organizing of the atomic bombing exhibition and the anti-nuclear stance of the hibakusha itself, the Tokyo metropolitan government has exchanges with many nations and many foreigners visit the observatory. There was the possibility of offending the feelings of those visitors by displaying contents of opposition to past nuclear tests conducted by specific nations."

The section which manages the observatory also concluded that the photos would fall under the condition of "containing political coloring," which is used to decide against renting out observatory space.

But Masahiro Takasaku, a professor of constitutional law at Kansai University, said **freedom of expression could be threatened if local governments and organizing groups become increasingly hesitant about dealing with controversial topics.**

Let's try and learn

September 17, 2014

[Learn from the 3/11 transcripts](#)

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/09/17/editorials/learn-311-transcripts/#.VBsoGxanp1s>

The transcripts of the interviews of 19 people who dealt with the March 2011 triple meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, including the late Masao Yoshida, then chief of the plant, may offer little new information about the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl but still provide important lessons that must be learned for management of future crises.

Last week's release of the transcripts had been closely watched, especially due to conflicting reports by some members of the media over the interview of Yoshida, who led the desperate efforts to contain the situation at the crippled plant after the 3/11 tsunami destroyed the emergency generators needed to operate the reactors' cooling system, and an apology by the Asahi Shimbun after the release stating that its earlier report — which alleged that many of the workers at the No. 1 plant had defied Yoshida's orders and fled to the Fukushima No. 2 plant at the height of the crisis — was erroneous.

However, the naming of names should not let us lose sight of what the transcripts tell us about what transpired among people at the plant, the Tepco headquarters in Tokyo and the government as they tried to deal with the crisis — which will be all the more important as the power industry and the Abe administration move to restart nuclear power plants idled in the wake of the 2011 disaster.

The 19 people, including then Prime Minister Naoto Kan and key members of his Cabinet, were among a total of 772 people interviewed for the government's probe into the Tepco plant disaster. Yoshida, who died of esophageal cancer last year, reportedly asked that the transcript not be made public saying that his statements may include erroneous recognition of facts, but the government decided to release his and others' transcripts after media reports gave conflicting accounts of Yoshida's testimony.

In the roughly 400 page transcript, Yoshida gives vivid descriptions in candid words of what he thought and did as he and his men faced the loss of power at the plant. His testimony shows that Tepco had not been prepared for the cutoff of emergency power. Yoshida admits that he did not have an answer ready on how to cool the reactors in such a situation. He repeatedly talks of "death" in the initial days of the crisis as the realization sinks in that the nuclear fuel had already started to melt, and might melt through the reactors' container vessels and release massive amount of radioactive substances.

Yoshida flatly denies that he thought of withdrawing all his men from the plant even as fears rose of the worst-case catastrophe — which Kan and his Cabinet suspected as they heard reports from the power company's top executives. He says he pondered keeping a skeleton crew at hand to manage the crippled reactors but having all other nonessential workers to evacuate. The transcript shows that many workers in fact braved the danger and worked desperately to keep the situation under control.

Still, even the men who Yoshida counted among the nation's most capable engineers with troubleshooting experience were unable to prevent the core meltdowns, which left large areas around the Fukushima No. 1 plant uninhabitable due to the radiation fallout more than three years after the disaster — and likely even much longer.

The safety standards updated in the wake of the Fukushima crisis call for measures to make nuclear power plants resilient against natural disasters, including maximum possible quakes and tsunami forecast on their sites, as well as steps to deal with severe accidents. It still needs to be verified if a system has been established in which workers at each plant will be able to manage situations that have not been foreseen — as happened at the Fukushima plant — in future possible crises. Upgrading plant hardware alone would not be sufficient to manage crises, in which, as Yoshida's accounts show, things may not work out as they are presupposed to.

In his testimony, Yoshida defends Tepco's inaction in response to a 2008 simulation by experts that the No. 1 plant could be hit by a tsunami as high as 15.7 meters if a strong quake hits off Fukushima Prefecture. As head of Tepco's department responsible for managing its nuclear power plant equipment to prepare for natural disasters when he was informed of the scenario, Yoshida says that the power company needed to assess the cost-efficiency of measures to invest money in measures to deal with the hypothetical simulation — which turned out to have rightly gauged the estimated 15.5 meter height of the tsunami that hit on March 11, 2011. It needs to be closely monitored if the power companies still follow the same business logic as they respond to the updated plant safety standards.

The July 2012 report by the government's investigation into the Fukushima nuclear disaster pointed to a shortage of information about events at the plant reaching the prime minister's office. Kan's administration came under criticism that its "meddling" — apparently based on insufficient information — created confusion in the on-site team's fight to contain the situation at the plant. The released transcripts underline the communication failures between the government and Tepco headquarters — and between Tepco's top executives in Tokyo and the Fukushima plant team.

A typical episode is the order by a senior executive at Tepco headquarters to Yoshida on March 12, 2011, to stop the injection of seawater to cool Reactor 1 after the supply of fresh water ran out. The executive, who had reportedly been urged by Kan to look into the possibility of seawater injection causing a nuclear chain reaction known as recriticality, told Yoshida that seawater injection had not yet been approved by the prime minister's office. Yoshida's decision to ignore the executive's order and keep on injecting seawater is credited for preventing the situation from worsening. Kan, in his interview transcript, says he never told Tepco to halt the seawater injection and blames miscommunication and misunderstanding on Tepco's part.

In the part of the transcript where Yoshida recounts the repeated urging from the Tepco headquarters and the government to hasten the venting operations to release radioactive steam from the stricken reactors to reduce the buildup of pressure on the morning of March 12, he says there was a distinct gap between the on-site staff at the plant and the Tokyo headquarters in the recognition of what's going on — which he says was even wider between the plant staff and the prime minister's office.

It remains unclear if the government and power companies have learned from such communication gaps — perhaps other than to blame leaders of the previous DPJ-led administration. The government does not appear to have done much to follow up on its 2012 report to dig deeper into how the Fukushima disaster evolved into a crisis. It needs to use the testimonies of Yoshida and others, including those that remain confidential, to learn what went wrong before and during the events in 2011, and to help avert or contain future crises.

Tanaka vows to secure NRA's independence

September 20, 2014

New regulator vows to secure independence of nuclear safety body

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140920p2g00m0dm028000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Satoru Tanaka, who became a commissioner of Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority on Friday, vowed to proceed with safety screenings of nuclear facilities with independence, brushing off criticism he has close ties with nuclear power companies.

Tanaka has come under fire for receiving payments and donations in the past from bodies including one linked to Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the disaster-hit Fukushima Daiichi plant. Critics say the regulator's fairness and independence could be compromised with his addition to the NRA decision-making panel.

A former chairman of the Atomic Energy Society of Japan, Tanaka said at a press conference he will do his job "on the basis of science and technology" and he will show that stance through "my language and behavior."

"All experts engaged in nuclear power should work toward enhancing safety, and any organizations or experts who cannot do that have no rights to engage in nuclear power," Tanaka said.

While all of Japan's 48 commercial reactors currently remain offline amid safety concerns, the regulatory body is assessing the safety of nuclear plants based on a new set of regulations introduced following the March 2011 Fukushima accident, a process necessary for any nuclear units to be allowed to go back online.

The NRA was established in 2012 as a new nuclear safety regulatory body after the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, which used to oversee the nuclear industry, was dismantled following the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

While the NISA was placed under the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry, a promoter of nuclear power, the NRA is given a high degree of independence, reflecting criticism that the pre-Fukushima regulatory body had failed to function properly.

With the first reshuffle of the five-member NRA decision-making panel since its establishment, geologist Akira Ishiwatari also took up one of the two vacant positions.

Ishiwatari, a former Tohoku University professor, will oversee the assessment of earthquake and tsunami hazards that could affect nuclear plants, replacing Kunihiko Shimazaki, a seismologist who had led rigorous safety screenings during his two-year tenure despite utilities' push for a speedy resumption of idled reactors.

Kenzo Oshima, a former ambassador to the United Nations, also left the post on Thursday.

1954 radiation tests on sailors resurface

September 20, 2014

'Missing' documents reveal 1954 U.S. H-bomb test affected 556 more ships

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20140920p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Recently released government documents reveal that the crews of 556 Japanese ships were tested for radiation exposure in the wake of the United States' 1954 hydrogen bomb tests around the Bikini Atoll -- one of which irradiated the crew of the Daigo Fukuryūmaru tuna boat from Shizuoka Prefecture.

The records were released by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare on Sept. 19 in accordance with the Access to Government Information Act, following a freedom-of-information request by a citizens group in Kochi Prefecture known as the Pacific Ocean Nuclear Disaster Assistance Center and other organizations.

According to representatives from the group and the health ministry, the national and local governments conducted the testing between March and December 1954 on fishing and cargo ship crews from a total of five Japanese ports that had been in waters affected by the U.S. nuclear test in the central Pacific.

The recently released documents included results from tests conducted between March and June that year. The testing, which included Geiger counter measurements of radiation levels among crew members from the 556 ships, revealed that individuals from a total of 12 ships were found to have been exposed to 100 counts of radiation or more per minute.

The highest level of exposure to a single sailor was 988 counts per minute, which would result in a total dose of 1.68 millisieverts if this rate of exposure was kept constant over a two-week period.

International standards say that exposure of 100 millisieverts or more can impact health, prompting health ministry officials to comment, "These were not levels that would have resulted in immediate adverse health impacts."

The Daigo Fukuryūmaru crew allegedly absorbed doses of between 1.6 and 7.1 sieverts.

When a lawmaker made an inquiry about the testing-related document during a 1986 House of Representatives Budget Committee meeting, a top official of the then Ministry of Health and Welfare replied, "**We cannot locate it.**"

The Kochi Prefecture citizens group filed their freedom of information request in July this year, and the document was found in a records storage warehouse in Ibaraki Prefecture.

While a total of 992 fishing vessels are said to have been forced to discard fish due to radiation contamination following the hydrogen bomb tests around the Bikini Atoll, health ministry officials have commented, "We have not found records for any ships beyond the 556" detailed in the recently found document.

A memo that was sent out to prefectures nationwide in 1956 by the then Ministry of Health and Welfare stated that "no cases of radiation sickness were recognized" beyond those found among the Daigo Fukuryūmaru crew.

"Some crew members (from the additional ships) have been dying from leukemia and cancer that is likely due to the effects of radiation," says Masatoshi Yamashita, who heads the Kochi prefectural citizens group. "I'd like to analyze the radiation levels and other aspects of these documents together with an expert."

Clear pro-nuke message from Obuchi

September 21, 2014

Obuchi starts nuclear power pitch

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/09/21/national/politics-diplomacy/obuchi-starts-nuclear-power-pitch/#.VB7qtBanp1s>

AFP-JIJI

New industry minister Yuko Obuchi started to spin a clear pro-nuclear message Sunday, seeking to convince a deeply skeptical public of the upside of atomic power by arguing that the resource-poor Japan should be realistic about meeting its energy needs.

More than three years after the Fukushima disaster, the public remains unconvinced about the safety of nuclear power, and the tricky task of winning them over has fallen to Obuchi, the first woman to head the powerful Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

“It would be very difficult to make the decision not to have nuclear power right now,” Obuchi, who visited the Fukushima No. 1 plant two weeks ago, claimed during a debate broadcast live Sunday by NHK. Nevertheless, Obuchi, appointed during this month’s Cabinet reshuffle, conceded that “it’s an issue that is difficult to explain in short phrases,” and acknowledged that “we have to take seriously the concerns voiced after Fukushima.”

She also made note of Japan’s soaring energy costs, which were exacerbated by the “Abenomics”-weakened yen’s further slide in value last week.

“After the Fukushima accident, the cost of fossil fuel imports jumped by ¥3.6 trillion (\$33 billion), or ¥10 billion (\$92 million) per day,” she said.

Before the March 2011 quake and tsunami crippled the Fukushima No. 1 plant, nuclear power accounted for nearly one-third of Japan’s energy needs. Now Japan’s self-sufficiency rate is just 6 percent, versus 85 percent in the U.S. and 50 percent in France.

The need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions means Japan can’t afford to rely heavily on fossil fuels, she added, noting that electricity supply from solar and wind power remain unsteady.

Obuchi claimed the Nuclear Regulation Authority, an independent nuclear watchdog set up in the aftermath of the meltdowns, has “the world’s strictest safety guidelines.” As a result, she argued, “The government policy is to restart a nuclear plant that has passed these guidelines.” The NRA’s decision-making panel lost its only seismologist last week in a mandatory reshuffle and added a pro-nuclear engineering professor seen as having cozy ties with the industry.

An unsteady supply of electricity from renewable sources such as solar and wind power and the need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions to combat global warming means Japan cannot afford to rely heavily on fossil fuels, Obuchi argued, adding that “after the Fukushima (disaster), the cost of fossil fuel imports jumped by ¥3.6 trillion, or ¥10 billion per day.”

The NRA earlier this month gave the green light to two reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.’s Mihama nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture. Hurdles remain, however, in getting the consent of local host communities who may still be scarred by the Fukushima crisis.

All of Japan’s 48 commercial reactors remain offline pending beefed up safety tests.

Widespread anti-nuclear sentiment has simmered ever since the quake and tsunami sparked the worst atomic disaster since Chernobyl.

Tens of thousands of residents had to be evacuated as the Fukushima reactors spewed fallout on their municipalities and the central government imposed a 20-km no-go zone around the plant. Many have not been permitted to return home, and scientists warn that parts of the hot zone might have to be left abandoned forever.

September 21, 2014

Very true

September 25, 2014

Safety net for nuclear power

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/09/25/editorials/safety-net-for-nuclear-power/#.VCREbxanp1s>

A new system being considered by the government to guarantee a certain price for electricity generated by nuclear power — even after the retail sale of power is deregulated — **would amount to the subsidization of nuclear energy by consumers.**

It contradicts not only what the government has long touted as the cost advantage of nuclear power over other energy sources but also the government's pledge in the basic energy plan to reduce as much as possible the nation's dependence on nuclear power to meet its energy needs.

During a meeting of experts to discuss nuclear energy issues last month, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry proposed creating a new system in which the government and power companies set a standard price on electricity produced by nuclear power plants that reflects the total expenses of power generation, including the costs of future decommissionings of plants and the disposal of spent nuclear fuel. If the market price of electricity falls below the standard, power companies will be allowed to close the gap by increasing utility charges to consumers. If the market price exceeds the standard, the power firms will repay the margin back to consumers. This mechanism ensures that **the power companies will not incur losses from nuclear power generation no matter how much it costs.**

Under Japan's regional electricity monopoly business model, power companies have set utility charges on households — as authorized by the government — on the basis of the total cost involved in the generation and transmission of power plus their profit margin. This system is to be phased out after the regional monopoly is ended in 2016, and it is hoped the deregulation will push down electricity prices as competing new players enter the market.

The major power firms have complained to the government that decontrol of prices could make it difficult for them to recoup the cost of their investments in nuclear power generation through utility charges.

In the METI's latest proposal, the government effectively acknowledges that nuclear energy will no longer be an economically competitive source of power when power industry deregulation moves forward.

Even under the regional monopoly, it has long been said that the delivery of nuclear power — despite its supposed advantage over thermal power in terms of fuel and other operational costs — is more expensive when all costs are counted, including the cost of future decommissionings of reactors, disposal of spent fuel, as well as government grants distributed to host municipalities.

The cost of safety steps at nuclear power plants substantially increased under the new standards updated in the wake of the 2011 meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 plant. It has prompted some power firms to consider decommissioning their aging nuclear power reactors, and the government is reportedly weighing introduction of a new accounting system to ease the impact of the decommissioning cost on their finances.

The government's first Basic Energy Plan since the 2011 nuclear disaster, adopted in April, calls nuclear power an important base load energy source for Japan. Meanwhile, the Abe administration is pushing to reactivate nuclear power reactors — all of which currently remain idle because of safety concerns following the Fukushima disaster — once they have cleared the Nuclear Regulation Authority's screening under the updated safety standards.

But the energy plan also obliges the government to try to reduce the nation's dependence on nuclear energy as much as possible through energy-saving efforts and the introduction of renewable energy sources.

The proposed system apparently would run counter to this goal by enabling the power companies to circumvent the cost problem in running nuclear power plants — and possibly in building new reactors — under the competitive environment envisioned after industry deregulation.

If the government accepts the premise that nuclear power may no longer be economically competitive, it needs to explain to consumers why they would end up paying the added costs of maintaining such an energy source.

Too much clean energy?

October 2, 2014

Clean energy boom challenges power grid

Bloomberg

Four regional utilities stopped signing contracts to buy renewable energy from big solar power plants and other suppliers starting Wednesday, limiting an influx that is testing the nation's electricity grid. The decision by the utilities serving Shikoku, Hokkaido, Tohoku and Okinawa, and a similar move last week by Kyushu Electric Power Co., threatens to undermine the national push to expand renewable energy supply in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

Grid access "has been the largest impediment for clean energy developers in Japan," Mika Obayashi, director of the Tokyo-based Japan Renewable Energy Foundation, said in a statement last week after Kyushu Electric's announcement.

At the heart of efforts by utilities to limit clean energy access is the design of the electricity distribution network and whether it is able to handle the flow of intermittent supplies of power from hundreds of different producers. The grid is being challenged and utilities are starting to balk.

Kyushu Electric, which supplies power to almost 9 million residential and business customers, said Sept. 24 that it will suspend responding to applications by developers seeking access to its grid while it reviews how much more clean energy it can handle.

Shikoku Electric Power Co., Tohoku Electric Power Co., Hokkaido Electric Power Co. and Okinawa Electric Power Co. are also restricting access to varying degrees, as blackouts could occur if all output from renewable energy suppliers is transmitted to the utilities' grids, causing overcapacity.

The moves run counter to the efforts of policymakers to promote and increase the use of renewable energy to alleviate the publicly touted plight of energy-dependent Japan.

Japan introduced incentives to encourage renewable energy development in July 2012, offering some of the world's most attractive rates to developers through the feed-in tariff program, which required utilities to purchase electricity generated from renewable sources at fixed prices. A boom in clean energy projects — particularly in solar — resulted.

"The design of the feed-in tariff program could have included clauses to avoid a situation like this," said Takehiro Kawahara, an analyst for Bloomberg New Energy Finance. "The current design did not take into account any measures on matching renewable energy project development with local electricity demand nor ease of integration of approved projects into the existing grid infrastructure."

A working group will be set up to review Japan's grid, including how much access is available for clean energy and how access can be expanded, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry said Tuesday.

About 72,000 megawatts of clean energy projects have been approved since the feed-in tariff program's inception. The bulk of the approvals, or 96 percent, has been solar. Japan had 31,000 megawatts of renewable energy at the end of 2010, according to Bloomberg New Energy Finance data.

Not all clean energy projects qualifying for incentives have been built, signaling various bottlenecks ranging from the availability of land to the cost of equipment and labor. As of June, METI said that 11,090 megawatts of approved projects had started operating, 15 percent of the total.

Kyushu Electric's decision is already affecting developers and installers with plans in the region.

Sanix Inc., a solar-panel installer with headquarters in Fukuoka, said it may shift workers.

"We will inevitably be affected as we won't be able to install systems in areas covered by Kyushu Electric," the company said in a statement Sept. 25. "We will review our plans for hiring, advertising and adding branches to minimize the impact" of the utility's decision, the company said.

Kyushu Electric's decision may also affect a 430-megawatt solar station under development on Ukujima, an island off Kyushu in Nagasaki Prefecture. The project, touted by developer Kyocera Corp. and its partners as the largest in the world to be built on agricultural land, has yet to secure grid access from Kyushu Electric.

"We want to continue talks with Kyushu Electric while gathering more information and working with our partners," Kyocera spokesman Sanae Iwasaki said Sept. 25 after Kyushu Electric's announcement. Orix Corp. and Germany's Photovolt Development Partners GmbH are among Kyocera's partners in the Ukujima project.

Some industry officials say the surge in feed-in tariff applications overwhelmed expectations, meaning utilities had difficulty estimating how much additional power they could take on. But the same phenomena has been witnessed in other countries.

Developers rushed at the end of the fiscal year for approval before the government lowered tariffs for solar projects. In March, Kyushu Electric received about 70,000 applications for grid access, equaling the amount received in the previous 11 months.

"The way solar expanded so abruptly was something that people in the industry didn't anticipate, including myself," said Hiroshi Takahashi, a research fellow at Fujitsu Research Institute who says the tariffs for solar energy were too high. "The scheme has some problems. Developers rush at the end of fiscal year because the tariffs are only changed once a year."

For the Japan Renewable Energy Foundation's Obayashi, the pushback from Japan's utilities is symptomatic of a larger problem. Besides solar, Japan has installed very little in the way of competing clean energy, such as wind or geothermal.

"The serious problem is little growth in renewables other than solar," Obayashi wrote in a Sept. 5 column in which she looked at the challenges to the incentives program.

For wind power, grid access is proving a particularly troublesome hurdle for developers in Japan, Obayashi wrote.

"Operation of grids by power utilities that own generation facilities is obviously problematic in securing fair management in grid connection," she wrote.

Too much clean energy? (2)

October 4, 2014

EDITORIAL: Measures needed to prevent renewable energy boom from going bust

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201410040038>

The positive growth of electricity production using renewable energy powered by the feed-in-tariff (FIT) system is beginning to show signs of losing steam.

Major power utilities are suspending the acceptance of new entries into the FIT program **because the capacity of their transmission lines to take additional electricity has reached its limit in some areas**. Of the 10 big utilities that are legally required to purchase all power generated from renewable energy sources at fixed prices, five, including Kyushu Electric Power Co., have stopped making new FIT contracts in almost all the areas they serve.

This inability by utilities to accept all the electricity produced under the FIT program due to capacity deficiency reflects the strong investment interest in renewable energy and the high expectations for the use of green power.

But solar and wind power has one big drawback. The amount of electricity generated with these energy sources tends to fluctuate wildly due to factors such as weather conditions, time of day and the season. Such fluctuations in power generation, unless they are properly adjusted, can affect the frequency and voltage of the power, causing power failures and malfunctioning equipment.

One solution is to expand transmission lines for integrated operations to wider areas so that the effects of the fluctuations in power generation can be buffered more easily.

Thicker power lines between utilities will allow for the transmission of surplus power generated from renewable energy sources in one area, say Kyushu, to other areas where there is demand.

Decisions on investing in power grids in the past had been left up to the individual utilities.

The situation, however, will change when the scheduled power market reform separates the operation of transmission lines from the business of power generation. This will encourage investment in transmission grids based on a broader perspective that is not restricted by the needs of the individual utilities.

Starting in April next year, a new operational entity will take charge of integrating the transmission lines operated by regional power companies. The new body will be responsible for developing trunk transmission lines and connecting lines between utilities.

This new system will make it easier to expand and enhance transmission grids in response to policy needs and requests from power generation companies.

Some issues remain to be sorted out, such as how the costs should be shared. But it is vital to carry through such power system reforms without delay.

It will take time, however, to build up a large network of transmission lines covering wide areas. There are also problems that need to be solved, including the insufficient capacity of transmission lines at locations where they are connected to power plants.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry will set up **a working group to study the formula for calculating the maximum amount of green electricity individual utilities can accept**, as well as conditions for such acceptance.

The ministry should consider taking steps to ensure early, preferably ahead-of-schedule, implementation of plans to bolster transformers and storage batteries, instead of leaving utilities to decide when to take these measures.

As for large-scale solar farms, which account for the majority of applications for power sales under the FIT program, the ministry may need to ensure the appropriate scale by using the price mechanism. It can do so, for instance, by reviewing the purchase prices more frequently than the current once a year.

Promoting the use of renewable energy is a global trend. It is important from the viewpoint of developing alternative energy sources that can replace nuclear power and fossil fuels and of tackling global warming.

In its new basic energy supply plan, the government designated about three years from 2013 as a period for “maximum possible acceleration” in the effort to spread the use of renewable energy. It has set a target of increasing the share of clean power as part of the nation’s overall electricity production to more than 20 percent by 2030.

The government should figure out ways to prevent the current renewable energy boom from going bust.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Oct. 4

Too much clean energy? (3)

October 5, 2014

Unprepared for green electricity

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/10/05/editorials/unprepared-green-electricity/#.VDFjNxnpl1s>

Under the feed-in-tariff system introduced in July 2012 by the then Democratic Party of Japan administration, the nation’s major power companies are required by law to buy, in principle, all the electricity generated by solar, wind, geothermal and medium-to-small-scale hydro-power sources and biomass at fixed prices.

The purchase costs are to be added to electricity charges. It was hoped that the system would help revitalize local economies and reduce Japan’s dependence on nuclear power. Recently, however, one power company after another has announced a decision to stop such purchases.

They say the oversupply of green electricity due to the required purchase of all such power could wreck the stable supply of electricity to businesses and households.

The situation has prompted the trade and industry ministry to prepare for a review of the feed-in-tariff system. Given what has happened, it is clear that the system was not well thought out and needs to be redesigned.

But in the review, the ministry should not use the recent development as an excuse to put a brake on the expansion of power generation through renewable sources and to maintain the weight of nuclear power in the supply of electricity. It should uphold the goal of expanding green power generation, and bring together the accumulated knowledge and technologies of the power and other industries to achieve it.

On Sept. 24, Kyushu Electric Power Co. announced that it would halt the purchase of green electricity in the whole Kyushu region, starting the next day, including putting on hold some 70,000 plans for generation of green power by entities that have applied to Kyushu Electric for contracts to sell the electricity.

Kyushu Electric's decision affected not only the renewable energy businesses but also local governments, including the Kumamoto prefectural government, which had pushed for introduction of green electricity. Okinawa Electric Power Co. had stopped the feed-in purchases in August.

Hokkaido Electric Power Co., Tohoku Electric Power Co. and Shikoku Electric Power Co. followed the Kyushu power firm with a decision to suspend the purchase of green electricity beginning this month. Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Kansai Electric Power Co. have also halted such purchases in some parts of the areas serviced by them.

In making their moves, the power companies have cited a clause in the Law on Special Measures Concerning Procurement of Renewable Electric Energy by Operators of Electric Utilities, which exempts them from the duty to buy green electricity if the purchase of such power poses a danger to stable supply of electricity.

Behind their moves is a rapid increase in the volume of green electricity they have had to agree to buy. Green energy operators rushed to make last-minute applications for electricity sales to the power firms before the government lowered on April 1 the prices at which the utilities must buy power from various renewable energy sources.

The power companies explain that if all the electricity from renewable energy sources is supplied to their transmission grids, the total supply will exceed their capacity, which could lead to stoppage of the power companies' generators.

They also say that the wild ups and downs in the output of solar and wind power due to weather changes will make it extremely difficult for them to adjust the output of their power generators to cope with the fluctuations. If the adjustments fail, it could damage their power grids.

Both cases could result in blackouts.

The government should be blamed for failing to foresee a large number of applications for sale of green electricity to the power companies.

There may be some entities that have applied to the power firms for the electricity purchase contracts without proper investment plans. However, many entities have already carried out necessary investments for power generation through renewable energy sources on the belief that the power firms will fulfill their duty to buy the electricity from them.

The government and the power companies should realize that power from renewable sources accounted for only 2.2 percent of the total electricity generated in fiscal 2013.

Green electricity has the advantages of emitting very little carbon dioxide in the process of power generation. Severe accidents like the one that may happen at a nuclear power plant are unlikely. Green power generation facilities scattered around the country reduce the risk of severe power shortages. It is clear that green electricity's weight in total power generation in this country should be sharply increased. In reviewing the feed-in-tariff system, the trade and industry ministry should not forget this point and should remember that the government's energy basic plan adopted in April calls for reducing Japan's reliance on nuclear power as much as possible as well as for aggressive introduction of renewable energy, citing a government advisory body's document that states that green electricity should account for about 20 percent of the total power generation in 2030.

The Natural Resources and Energy Agency estimates that if all the green energy facilities that have signed feed-in-tariff contracts with power companies and received approval from the government as of the end of May went into operation, their total output in 2030 would top 20 percent of the nation's total power generation.

Development of large-capacity and high-efficiency batteries, an increase in the capacity of the power grids, including building of transmission lines across different service areas, and upgrading of the facilities to

convert the different frequencies of electric currents — 50 Hertz in eastern Japan and 60 Hertz in western Japan — are needed to solve major technical problems inherent to the supply of electricity generated through green sources.

Trillions of yen are estimated to be needed for such projects, and power companies are reluctant to invest. To stimulate such investments, the government should first declare clear percentages as goals in expanding the share of green electricity in the nation's total power generation.

Also important for the government would be to clarify what party or parties should shoulder the cost of such investments — which was left unaddressed when the system was introduced in 2012.

Restart of reactors not based on "scientific" judgement

October 6, 2014

Japan Political Pulse: Scientific uncertainty

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20141006p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Distinguishing between a "scientific judgment" and an "unscientific judgment" can prove difficult at times. The recent eruption of Mount Ontake in central Japan has drawn attention to Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai Nuclear Power Plant in Satsumasendai, Kagoshima Prefecture. The reason is that the plant is located just 50 kilometers northwest of Mount Sakurajima, a prominent active volcano in Japan.

Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) Chairman Shunichi Tanaka, 69, told a news conference on Oct. 1 that it is "unscientific" to discuss Mount Ontake and Mount Sakurajima together. Volcanologists, meanwhile, say the logic behind countermeasures to protect the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant from volcanic eruptions is "unscientific." This gap is at the heart of discussions surrounding volcanic activity and reactivation of the Sendai plant.

Why does the government -- including the NRA -- view it as unscientific to link Mount Sakurajima with Mount Ontake? Confronting experts, we find the following explanation: While the eruption of Mount Ontake resulted in many deaths, it was a phreatic eruption, involving the explosion of steam and rock. No magma was ejected. Meanwhile, the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant is made to withstand an eruption 10,000 times the size of the Mount Ontake eruption.

What's the basis for "10,000 times"? It's actually nothing complicated. The size of an eruption is measured by the amount of ejected matter, and the amount of ejected matter can be roughly determined based on the accumulation of ash and other ejecta.

In the Ontake eruption, the amount of ejected matter was estimated at 1 million tons, an amount comparable to that produced by Mount Sakurajima in a year. At the same time, the 1914 reaction of Sakurajima a century ago produced 100 times the ejecta normally seen in a year. Kyushu Electric Power Co., the operator of the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant, bases its guideline for safety countermeasures on the Sakurajima-Satsuma eruption held to have occurred in the Jomon period roughly 12,800 years ago. The scale of that eruption is believed to be about 100 times bigger than the 1914 eruption.

Multiplying 100 by 100, we get 10,000. If an eruption 10,000 times the size of the Ontake eruption occurred, the pyroclastic flow would not reach the nuclear plant. The amount of ash that would fall on the

Sendai plant would reach an estimated 12.5 centimeters. Since it can withstand up to 15 centimeters, there is no problem.

That's what Kyushu Electric Power Co. has to say, and it's also the reason behind the government's judgment that the Sendai plant's countermeasures for a volcanic eruption are adequate.

We see, then, this is rational and scientific. But there is another point from the volcanologists who maintain this is "unscientific" that gives us cause for concern -- namely, the method of determining the possibility of a catastrophic eruption exceeding the scale of the Sakurajima-Satsuma eruption.

Government data based on Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s explanation says, "The space between periods of activity from catastrophic eruptions is about 90,000 years. The latest such eruption occurred about 30,000 years ago, so the possibility of one occurring while the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant is in operation is sufficiently low."

But doubts remain over this theory that a cycle lasts 90,000 years. The space between major eruptions should be evaluated on each caldera. However, Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s evaluation is based on a combination of the Aira caldera including Sakurajima and four other calderas in the area.

Ryusuke Imura, 50, an associate professor at Kagoshima University and an expert on volcanic geology, comments, "A hotchpotch of estimates cannot be called scientific. In terms of volcanology, it is a very rough discussion, on a level that couldn't pass the peer reviews of academic journals or specialist magazines abroad."

Of course, if there were ever to be a disaster on the scale that destroyed all of southern Kyushu, then it would not be a case of simply having to worry about a nuclear power plant. In the name of science, both the government and Kyushu Electric Power Co. share that clear stance.

But hold on -- we have witnessed one catastrophic eruption not just within the past few tens of thousands of years, but in the 19th century, in Indonesia.

From my various questions to people on the issue, **it does not seem that a scientific judgment will determine whether the nuclear power plant goes back into operation or not. In the end, it's a choice of values.** From Oct. 9 the NRA will start holding meetings to explain its screening results to residents living within 30 kilometers of the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant. (By Takao Yamada, Expert Senior Writer)

Renewables too important to be left to utilities

Editorial: Gov't must not leave promotion of renewable energy to private utilities

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20141007p2a00m0na004000c.html>

A dark shadow has been cast on efforts to spread the use of renewable energy.

Major power companies are suspending new applications for access to the power grid from solar- and wind-power suppliers through the feed-in tariff (FIT) system, because supply has soared at a rate that exceeds the capacity of utilities' transmission lines.

To accelerate the spread of power generated from renewable energy sources, the government must take responsibility for expanding the capacities of utilities to take on energy.

Over 10 million kilowatts of electricity is generated from renewable sources in Japan, and when combined with facilities that already have FIT contracts, the total comes out to over 70 million kilowatts. If all such generators were put into operation, the government's goal, as stated in its basic energy plan, to produce over 20 percent of energy through renewable sources in 2030, would be fulfilled.

Under current circumstances, however, such an accomplishment may become just a pie in the sky. The Kyushu, Hokkaido, Tohoku, Shikoku and Okinawa electric power companies have announced that they are temporarily suspending new entries into the FIT system.

The fixed prices at which utilities are required to purchase renewable energy are re-evaluated every April. In March, shortly before that re-evaluation took place, there was a rush of applications from renewable energy producers hoping to sell power -- primarily solar -- at high prices, before prices dropped. As a result, the supply of energy with certification from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) exceeded the peak demand of the aforementioned five utilities. That means that even if the power companies stopped all of their power generators, there would still be surplus energy if all the renewable power generators were in operation.

Disruption in the balance between energy supply and demand can put excess strain on the power grid, potentially causing large-scale power outages. The utilities say they will spend several months assessing the capacity of their transmission grids in accepting renewable power. We urge them to make the utmost effort to accept as much clean energy as possible, instead of rejecting it because of supply fluctuations. METI plans to set up a panel of experts to verify the capacities of the five companies' transmission lines. This process is necessary, but that work alone will not solve the fundamental problem of utilities being unable to accept electricity that exceeds peak demand.

Renewable energy farms are mostly located far away from cities, where land is cheap. The current situation of surplus energy could have been predicted when the FIT system was first adopted. The system's design must promptly be reworked.

To expand renewable energy, efforts must be made to strengthen transmission grids across utilities, and allow the buying and selling of power across regions. However, this will cost several trillion yen. At a time when there is no clear vision for the future of energy in Japan, it is too heavy a burden for private power companies to shoulder by themselves. Assistance from the government is indispensable.

Assuming that Japan will continue to use nuclear power, the government estimates that a nuclear fuel cycle program will cost close to 20 trillion yen. At the same time, the expansion of renewable energy projects is essential if we are to reduce our dependence on nuclear energy. Our limited funds should be diverted to the latter.

TEPCO + Chubu Electric

October 7, 2014

TEPCO, Chubu Electric to form comprehensive alliance

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/business/AJ201410070059>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Chubu Electric Power Co. said they had reached a basic agreement to form a **comprehensive alliance covering the entire energy supply chain.**

They said the memorandum of understanding on Oct. 7 covers upstream investments and fuel procurement through power generation.

The companies said they aim to establish a joint venture within the second half of the fiscal year ending March 2015 to ensure a stable supply of energy on an internationally competitive basis.

With LNG procurement on the scale of 35 million to 40 million tons annually, the two utilities said they will work together to expand upstream, transportation and trading businesses.

The two companies will also apply their combined management resources to replace old and energy-inefficient thermal power plants with the latest high-efficiency power generation facilities. This, they said, will result in substantial thermal efficiency improvements that will lead to low-cost power supplies.

What hazard pay?

October 8, 2014

Fukushima No. 1 plant workers kept in the dark over hazard pay

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/10/08/national/nuclear-workers-kept-in-dark-about-fukushima-hazard-pay/#.VDUIhhanp1s>

by Mari Saito and Antoni Slodkowski

Reuters

HIRONO, FUKUSHIMA PREF. – Almost a year after Japan pledged to double hazard pay at the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, workers are still in the dark about how much extra they are getting paid — if anything — for cleaning up the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl.

Under pressure to improve working conditions at the crippled Fukushima plant after a series of radioactive water leaks last year, Tokyo Electric Power Co. President Naomi Hirose promised in November to double the hazard pay the utility allocates to its subcontractors for plant workers. That would have increased the amount each worker at the nuclear facility is supposed to earn to about ¥19,000 (\$180) a day in hazard pay.

Only one of the more than three dozen workers interviewed by Reuters from July through September said he received the full hazard pay increase promised by Tepco. Some workers said they got nothing. In cases where pay slips detailed a hazard allowance, the amounts ranged from \$36 to about \$90 a day — at best half of what Hirose promised.

In some instances, workers said they were told they would be paid a hazard bonus based on how much radiation they absorb — an incentive to take additional risks at a dangerous work site.

One worker interviewed by Reuters said he was told he would get an additional \$45 per day every time he was in so-called hot zones near Reactors 1 and 2. Another worker was told he would receive an hourly rate that worked out to about ¥485,000 (\$4,500) extra in hazard pay for being exposed to the radiation limit for the nation's nuclear workers over a five-year period. And a third worker said he was told the payout for that same exposure would be about ¥3.9 million (\$36,000).

Assessing how much Fukushima workers are being paid is complicated by Tepco's insistence that pay is a private matter for its contractors. The power utility, which runs Fukushima No. 1 and has been nationalized, sits at the top of a contracting pyramid that includes construction giants such as Taisei Corp. Tepco has declined to disclose details of any of its legal agreements with its subcontractors.

The top Tepco official at the plant conceded during a July press tour of the complex that he did not know how much of the increase in hazard pay was being disbursed.

"When it comes to the pay rise, I don't have an exact understanding of how much money is getting directly to the workers," said Akira Ono, the Fukushima No. 1 plant manager.

Tepco said in a statement to Reuters that it instructs subcontractors to ensure workers' pay is included in all contracts and it also asks companies working at the plant to submit documentation for all the subcontractors they use. The utility said it had recently begun random checks of some of the smaller contractors to determine how much of the hazard pay is reaching workers. A worker who filled in a Tepco survey told Reuters in September that one of the questions was directly related to hazard pay.

Tepco still relies on **some 800 mostly small contractors** to provide workers for the cleanup after the tsunami that swamped the plant on March 11, 2011, sparking meltdowns at three reactors.

Subcontractors provide almost all of the 6,000 workers now employed at the plant. Tepco employs only about 250 on its own payroll at the facility.

The workforce at the plant has almost doubled over the past year, mostly as part of an effort to protect groundwater from being contaminated and to store water that comes in contact with melted fuel in the reactor buildings.

Some of the workers who arrived recently at the plant have been building bunkers to store highly radioactive sludge, which is a byproduct of the process whereby contaminated water is treated. Others are installing equipment to freeze a ring of earth around four reactors at Fukushima No. 1 to keep groundwater from reaching the melted cores, an unprecedented effort directed by Kajima Corp. that is expected to cost nearly \$300 million.

Kazumitsu Nawata, a professor at the University of Tokyo's department of technology who has researched conditions inside Fukushima No. 1, said that if workers do not receive pay that is commensurate with the risks they are taking, they will ultimately look elsewhere for employment. If more experienced workers leave for safer jobs in Tokyo, where construction projects are accelerating ahead of the 2020 Olympic Games, it will also increase the likelihood of accidents at the plant, Nawata said in an interview.

"Until now, we have relied heavily on the goodwill of workers. But it's already been three years since the accident. This is no longer sustainable," he said.

Like other workers, Koji Sakurada learned about the hazard pay pledge soon after Tepco President Hirose made his announcement last November. News of the promised increase spread by word of mouth and text messages at a crowded break room at the plant.

"I expected one of my (subcontractor) employers to call a meeting to talk about a raise, but there was nothing," Sakurada said. "They completely ignored Tepco's announcement."

By then, Sakurada, 52, had already spent 18 months scanning buses and work vans for radiation as they left the plant. Wearing a protective suit and mask, he worked a nine-hour shift running a Geiger counter over the vehicles in a makeshift tent set up as a decontamination station. He was paid about \$9 an hour.

Sakurada was one of four Fukushima workers who last month filed a lawsuit seeking to hold Tepco responsible for conditions at the plant, even for workers it does not employ directly. It marks the first time Tepco has been sued for a failure to police the employment practices of its subcontractors.

The lawsuit, which was filed in a court in the city of Iwaki, about 60 km (37 miles) south of the nuclear plant, seeks \$600,000 in unpaid wages. It also seeks to have Fukushima workers put on Tepco's payroll or have the utility otherwise take responsibility for their pay.

Tepco said it had not yet received Sakurada's lawsuit.

"If a suit has indeed been filed, we will check the demands and claims and make a sincere effort to deal with it," the company said.

Interviews with 37 current and former workers, almost all of whom spoke on condition of anonymity, revealed **a wide variance in how they were being compensated, particularly for hazard pay.** Six workers employed by different subcontractors for Taisei and who were working side by side in July building concrete bunkers were receiving a hazard allowance that ranged from zero to \$90 a day.

Taisei said it could not comment on the claims without more details about the identity of the workers. The company said it oversees and monitors all the subcontractors it employs.

Only one worker interviewed by Reuters, a crane operator who reports to Raito Kogyo, a large Tokyo-based construction company, said he was receiving the promised hazard allowance of \$180 per day.

Tepco's pledge last November to increase hazard pay came after a nudge from the government, which was seeking to burnish its image in the weeks leading up to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's pitch last year for Tokyo to host the 2020 Olympics. Abe assembled a previously undisclosed public relations team for this purpose, including officials from the trade and foreign ministries, according to two members of the team. With Fukushima spinning back into crisis as new revelations emerged of radioactive water leaks, the Japanese were concerned that their chances of pulling off a successful Olympic bid might be damaged. Abe's then-trade minister compared Tepco's attempts to control the leaks to a game of "whack-a-mole." In Buenos Aires in early September, Abe told the International Olympic Committee that the water leaks from Fukushima were "under control," a remark that attracted widespread criticism from opposition lawmakers and environmental activists back home.

By late October, after Tokyo was awarded the games, Abe's PR team was battling negative publicity over working conditions at Fukushima, the two team members said. Abuses at the plant were outlined in a report by Reuters that exposed illegal labor practices as well as the involvement of organized crime in providing workers for the cleanup.

The government encouraged Tepco to take action, partly in response to the reports. That led to Hirose's announcement in November to double hazard pay, according to one of the people on the PR team.

Within weeks of the pledge, Tepco was quietly backpedaling. In a letter issued to contractors in late November, first reported in the daily Mainichi Shimbun, the company said **the promise to double the hazard allotment was "aimed at improving pay for workers," but that did not mean each worker would necessarily see a pay increase of that amount.**

In March testimony before the Diet, where he was questioned about hazard pay, Hirose said he wanted to encourage Tepco's contractors to pay "an appropriate wage to each and every worker."

Sakurada moved to Fukushima in May 2012 to be closer to his fiancée in Iwaki. He took a job with a local company because he was promised a place to stay.

TOP, a local firm that supplies workers for construction, only told Sakurada he would be working in the nuclear plant two days before he started. When Sakurada asked for a pay rise to compensate for the increased danger, he said a TOP manager told him it would be unfair to others to pay him more.

By early 2014, Sakurada said he'd seen a 56-year-old worker fired for reaching his radiation limit. He had also watched another middle-aged worker — a man he did not know — die in front of him of an apparent heart attack. None of the other workers knew how to revive him with a defibrillator kept in the break room, he said.

Sakurada quit in May. Unlike the other plaintiffs in the lawsuit, he agreed to be interviewed and identified by name for this report.

TOP's manager did not respond to repeated calls to the company headquarters or faxed questions about Sakurada's claims.

"The whole structure at Fukushima, everything from working hours to radiation levels, needs to be made clear. Like hitting a reset button," Sakurada said.

Household power bills to increase

October 14, 2014

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/10/14/business/corporate-business/hokkaido-electric-wins-government-ok-to-raise-rates/#.VDzYSxanrIU>

Hokkaido Electric wins government OK to raise rates

Kyodo

The government on Tuesday approved Hokkaido Electric Power Co.'s plan to raise household electricity bills by 15.3 percent on average, with the surge in fossil fuel costs weighing on the utility's business in the absence of nuclear power generation following the 2011 Fukushima crisis

Hokkaido Electric increased bills for households by 7.7 percent on average last year. For this hike, it initially sought a 17.03 percent increase, but the industry ministry said that was too much.

Prices are expected to be marked up 12.4 percent for five months from Nov. 1 through next March and 15.3 percent starting next April. The lower markup through March is designed to ease the negative impact on households in view of high electricity demand amid the long and cold Hokkaido winter.

Hokkaido Electric will be the first among major utilities to implement a second electricity bill hike since the 2011 disasters, which has kept the country's nuclear reactors from restarting due to safety concerns. The regional utility owns three reactors at its Tomari nuclear power plant, but none have been online since the No. 3 unit was taken offline for a mandatory regular checkup in May 2012.

Hokkaido Electric claims it will lower electricity bills when it can reactivate the Tomari plant. It seeks to bring the reactors back online by March 2016, but the outlook is uncertain as they have yet to pass the Nuclear Regulation Authority's safety screenings.

Economic and fiscal policy minister Akira Amari told a news conference that if other utilities also seek to raise their rates, it should be allowed only on condition that prices be reduced once nuclear power plants go back online.

For corporate users, the regional utility plans to raise electricity bills by 20.3 percent, a move which does not require government approval, following an 11 percent increase implemented last year.

Iodine scam

October 14, 2014

Official arrested over iodine stockpile failure

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141014_23.html

Oct. 14, 2014 - Updated 08:47 UTC+2

Japanese police have arrested a former prefectural official on suspicion of forging documents to conceal not having purchased iodine tablets to prepare for a possible nuclear accident.

The suspect, Junichi Ito, handled medical and pharmaceutical affairs for the government of Niigata Prefecture in central Japan.

In April, the prefecture was found to have failed to procure more than 1.3 million iodine tablets for over a year. The tablets are said to protect the thyroid gland from radiation exposure.

The prefecture said Ito concealed the failure to make the purchase. It has filed a criminal complaint against him.

Police say Ito cut out supervisors' seals from other documents and used them to create a false purchase reports.

The prefecture quotes him as saying he forged the documents because he was afraid of reprimand.

Niigata Governor Hirohiko Izumida said the prefecture will cooperate with the police investigation and take steps to prevent a recurrence.

State secrets act approval by Cabinet too hasty

October 14, 2014

Lawyers protest state secret standards

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141014_18.html

Oct. 14, 2014 - Updated 06:01 UTC+2

Some lawyers are protesting the Cabinet decision, saying the standards do not reflect public concerns.

More than 20 protestors gathered outside the prime minister's official residence on Tuesday morning.

Among them was attorney Yuichi Kaido who said **the Cabinet approval was hasty as many issues remain unresolved in the standards.**

Public opinions sent to the government have expressed concern that information that would be problematic for the government could be designated as a state secret.

The protestors called for the public's right to know and for information to be made public.

One participant said the date for the law to go into effect should be postponed so the Diet can thoroughly debate the state secrets issue.

Asahi to set panel on nuclear disaster

October 15, 2014

Asahi Shimbun sets up panel to examine coverage of 'comfort women,' nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141015p2a00m0na008000c.html>

The Asahi Shimbun newspaper said on Oct. 14 that it has set up a committee to analyze the cause of confusion stemming from its reports on the so-called wartime "comfort women" issue, and **on the testimony of Masao Yoshida, the late chief of the disaster-hit Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.** The eight-member panel which has set a goal of "regaining trust and restoring (the company)," consists of four external experts including journalist Shoko Egawa, and four senior Asahi officials, the daily said. **The panel is set to hold its first meeting behind closed doors on Oct. 18, the Asahi said.** The Asahi says the panel will explore what the company can do to restore itself by discussing not only its editorial department but also the decision-making processes, crisis management, and corporate culture throughout the company. **Another part of the restoration process will involve receiving harsh suggestions from outside.** The Asahi has already set up two separate third-party panels of experts to examine its reports on the so-called "Yoshida testimony" and comfort women, respectively.
October 15, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

State secrets: Insufficient guidelines

October 15, 2014

Editorial: Guidelines on state secrets law insufficient

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20141015p2a00m0na004000c.html>

The Cabinet has approved operational guidelines for the state secrets protection law and a government decree that brings the law into effect on Dec. 10. Yet concerns remain over the new law's bearing on the public's right to know.

The operational standards were drafted in July, but the draft left room for administrative bodies to arbitrarily designate information as state secrets and limited the authority of the law's overseers. When the government solicited public comments, it received a large number of opinions critical of the law, including calls to abolish the legislation altogether.

Under the secrecy law, heads of administrative organs can designate state information on defense, diplomacy and other issues as "special secrets."

Since the law could be abused to cover up information that the government deems inconvenient, we have called for a system to effectively monitor and check the operation of the legislation, and prevent any inappropriate designation of secrets. But the operational guidelines that were approved on Oct. 14 have made only minor revisions to the draft, meriting no credit.

The guidelines stipulate that a new post of "independent public document control officer" will be created to head the "information security oversight office" to be set up within the Cabinet Office. However, even if the control officer encounters inappropriate designation of secrets and requests the disclosure of information and the provision of documents, ministries and agencies can decline the request if they determine that disclosure could be detrimental to national security.

In the United States, the director of the Information Security Oversight Office stands in a highly independent position with authority, and can order administrative bodies to declassify information. However, the "independent public document control officer" to be appointed in Japan wasn't granted greater power when the guidelines were revised. The officer is ranked below the position of director-general, at the councillor level. It is questionable whether a figure in this position can serve as a watchdog.

Since the post is regarded as an independent position, there has been strong opposition to the appointment of officials on loan from other administrative bodies as staff in the information security oversight office. But such views have been brushed aside in the amendment.

There have also been strong calls to improve the whistle-blowing system for public servants to report any illegal or inadequate designation of secrets. However, the guidelines state that civil servants must summarize the content of secrets in reporting any irregularities, which raises questions about the effectiveness of the system.

Furthermore, there is no remedy system for civil servants who receive unfair treatment for whistle-blowing. But there have been no amendments to the guidelines in this regard.

In addition, ministries and agencies can destroy declassified documents if 30 years or less have passed since their classification and the prime minister gives his consent. This could make it impossible to verify documents in later years.

We once again express opposition to enforcement of the law without sufficient respect for the democratic principle of disclosing state information to the public. In the meantime, it bears mentioning that the role of news organizations entrusted with fulfilling the public's right to know remains unchanged even after the law comes into effect.

At the Liberal Democratic Party's General Council meetings last week, many participants pointed out the government's lack of explanations about how to protect the public's right to know and defend freedom of the press and news gathering. Initially adoption of the draft guidelines was postponed, but they were approved at a later meeting, without addressing public concerns.

The draft guidelines should have been put to thorough debate during the Diet deliberations on the bill last year. Lawmakers are urged to exert their efforts in clarifying and reviewing the problems in the secrecy law's operational guidelines during the ongoing extraordinary session of the Diet.

October 15, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Local assemblies' call for abolition

October 15, 2014

At least 130 local assemblies call for abolition of state secrets protection law

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141015p2a00m0na012000c.html>

At least 130 prefectural and municipal assemblies across the country have adopted written statements urging the central government to scrap the state secrets protection law since it was enacted in December last year, the Mainichi Shimbun has learned.

The Mainichi compiled data based on written statements that the House of Representatives and House of Councillors have received from local assemblies. Dozens of other local bodies have called for careful administration of the law. It is rare for such a large number of local assemblies to adopt written statements over a specific law.

Five local assemblies submitted their written statements to the Diet this month, about 10 months after the law was enacted, underscoring the fact that deep-seated public distrust of the highly controversial law has not been dispelled. Three of these assemblies -- the Hokkaido prefecture town of Toyako, the Okayama Prefecture town of Kibichuo and the Tokushima Prefecture village of Sanagochi -- submitted statements, calling for the abolition of the law.

The Toride Municipal Assembly in Ibaraki Prefecture expressed strong misgivings about the law, saying in a written statement, "It tramples on the basic principles of Japan's Constitution: the sovereignty of the people, fundamental human rights and pacifism."

The Kameyama Municipal Assembly in Mie Prefecture called for abolition of the law, saying in a written statement, "It covers people's eyes and ears." The Kofu Municipal Assembly in Yamanashi Prefecture expressed its concern over the central government's operation of the law, writing that "It is feared that the scope of designated secrets could be arbitrarily expanded."

The municipal assembly in the Okinawa prefecture town of Kadena, home to the U.S. Air Force's Kadena Air Base -- the biggest air base in the Far East -- urged the central government to scrap the law because officials fear that they would not be able to obtain information on the operations of the U.S. forces and policies on military bases. The assembly wrote in its statement, "We feel concerned as we live in an area which is the most susceptible to the effects of the law. Our residents will not be able to grasp the actual situation to protect their lives and properties on their own."

No assemblies at the prefectural level have adopted statements explicitly demanding the abolition of the law, but the prefectural assemblies in Iwate, Niigata and Tottori prefectures separately adopted written opinions calling on the central government to carefully administer the law.

The Niigata Prefectural Assembly voted down a set of written opinions that called for abolition of and amendments to the law. But it subsequently adopted a written statement which said, "We strongly call on the government to give clear explanations to the people to secure sufficient understanding." An assembly member from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) said, "There is no need to abolish or amend the law." But the member went on to say, "There are opposing views among our supporters, so we couldn't simply vote down (the opinions) and leave the issue at that. We thought the assembly needed a declaration of intention in one form or another."

Such written opinions have no legal force toward the government and the Diet, but they are believed to wield a certain influence as local assemblies are allowed to submit such documents to the central government and the Diet under Article 99 of the Local Autonomy Act to have their views reflected in national politics.

At a Cabinet meeting on Oct. 14, the government decided on guidelines for classifying and declassifying state secrets under the law, together with a government decree which sets the enforcement date of the law for Dec. 10 and stipulates that 19 administrative bodies will be allowed to designate state secrets. Although the law stipulates that information falling under 23 categories in four areas -- diplomacy, defense, counterterrorism and counterespionage -- can be designated as state secrets, the operational guidelines further subdivide these into 55 items.

As for oversight functions, the post of a councillor-level "independent public document control officer" and a support unit, referred to as an "intelligence and security observation unit," will be established within the Cabinet Office. A "Cabinet maintenance and oversight committee" consisting of officials from government ministries and agencies at the vice-ministerial level will also be set up within the Cabinet Secretariat.

Cabinet approves guidelines on state secrets law

October 15, 2014

Abe Cabinet gives OK to state secrecy law guidelines

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201410150036

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The Cabinet approved guidelines on the handling of state secrets and set Dec. 10 for a controversial secrecy law to take effect amid protests and concerns that the public's right to know is being whittled away.

Under the operating standards decided on Oct. 14, state secrets fall within four broad areas: defense, foreign affairs, counterespionage and preventing terrorism.

The heads of 19 ministries and agencies, such as the National Security Council, Cabinet Secretariat, Nuclear Regulation Authority and Defense Ministry, would have the authority to designate state secrets. Civil servants and employees of private-sector companies contracted to work with the government who deliberately leak state secrets could face up to 10 years imprisonment.

A new post to be established in the Cabinet Office of "independent public document inspector" would check whether the designation of state secrets was being conducted appropriately. The inspector would serve as a liaison for whistle-blowers.

The inspector will have the authority to peruse material to be categorized as state secrets and request it be declassified if it is decided the designation was made inappropriately. However, ministers could still refuse to both submit documents to the inspector and declassify the material.

The central government solicited public comment on the operating guidelines for a one-month period until late August. A total of 23,820 opinions were submitted and that led to 27 revisions in the operating guidelines. One change made was to review the guidelines five years after they take effect.

Despite that input, protests were held in major cities after the Abe Cabinet approved the guidelines.

In Tokyo, about 60 people gathered in front of the Prime Minister's Official Residence on the evening of Oct. 14.

Aya Tanaka, a 28-year-old part-time worker who joined the protest, said, "The Cabinet is simply allowing ministers and bureaucrats to handle information as they please and ignoring the danger of not allowing citizens to decide the pros and cons of such action."

About 50 people who gathered in front of the building housing the Osaka prefectural chapter of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party carried placards with the kanji character for "anger" written in red.

The placard was created and distributed by Kimiko Nanba, a 53-year-old company employee who wanted a memorable symbol to convey her fears about the legislation.

"I will continue speaking out against the state secrets protection law," she said.

Various organizations issued statements on Oct. 14 to denounce the law.

One released in the name of Susumu Murakoshi, president of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations, called for the law to be abolished, saying it jeopardized democracy and the people's right to know.

It said the range of information subject to designation as a state secret was too wide and noted there was no legal guarantee that state secrets would ever be released. The statement said there was insufficient authority and independence of a third-party organ to oversee the designation of state secrets.

The federation had called for giving the independent public document inspector the authority to release all state secrets, but that request was rejected. That led the federation to accuse the central government of not giving sufficient consideration to a structure to prevent the arbitrary designation of state secrets.

The Japan Commercial Broadcasters Association also issued a statement that said major problems remained in key elements of the law and that the concerns of the public and media organizations had not been adequately addressed.

Faulty cameras & sense of responsibility

October 17, 2014

Shimomura criticizes Monju operator

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Oct. 17, 2014 - Updated 08:12 UTC+2

Science minister Hakubun Shimomura has criticized the operator of the Monju fast-breeder prototype reactor for its **failure to properly maintain equipment**.

It recently came to light that a number of monitoring cameras at the reactor are not working.

Shimomura told reporters on Friday that it is very regrettable that the operator, the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, **lacks a sense of responsibility**.

More than 50 cameras, or about one-third of those monitoring coolant pipes, were found to be broken when Monju was inspected in September.

Shimomura said reassuring the public about Monju's safety is the minimum requirement for restarting the experimental reactor.

He said the prototype reactor may be stopped forever if the operator's poor management continues.

The Japan Atomic Energy Agency began intensive reform of Monju's management system in October last year, following a series of problems, including inadequate inspections.

The operator initially planned to complete the reforms in one year, but recently extended the deadline by 6 months.

Monju is located on the coast of Fukui Prefecture in central Japan.

Reviewing feed-in tariffs for renewables

October 16, 2014

Gov't eyes drastic review of renewable energy feed-in system

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141016p2a00m0na015000c.html>

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has begun considering a fundamental review of the so-called feed-in tariff system which obliges utilities to purchase power generated from renewable sources at fixed prices.

The potential overhaul of the FIT scheme, introduced in July 2012, is being discussed by the New Energy Subcommittee of the ministry's Advisory Committee for Natural Resources and Energy. Renewable energy suppliers were baffled by recent decisions by Kyushu Electric Power Co. and four other utilities to stop signing new contracts to buy renewable energy from solar power suppliers in their service regions. The industry ministry has since come under pressure to deal with the problem swiftly. Meanwhile, measures to hold down power prices for regular consumers have also emerged as a major issue. The government is likely to be tested on whether it is truly serious about boosting renewable energy supplies. At the subcommittee meeting on Oct. 15, a number of committee members called for a review of the FIT system, with some of them saying, "Unless solar power generation is curbed, plans to introduce other renewable energy sources will be adversely affected," and, "To stop accepting renewable energy will undermine the credibility of the (FIT) system."

Five utilities -- Hokkaido Electric Power Co., Tohoku Electric Power Co., Shikoku Electric Power Co., Kyushu Electric Power Co. and Okinawa Electric Power Co. -- have stopped signing new renewable energy purchase contracts. As of June, the industry ministry had certified planned and completed renewable energy facilities with a combined total output of 71.78 million kilowatts -- which would mean oversupplies in the service areas of all five of the above utilities. The electric companies have explained that the excessive renewable supply could destabilize overall power supply and even cause power outage. In order to expand renewable energy supplies, measures should be taken to improve power transmission networks to allow surplus power to be supplied to other regions, store it in batteries, and curb renewable energy output, among other steps. If such measures are taken, utilities will be able to accept renewable energy even if the output of that energy is increased. In fact, Germany, Italy and Spain are even now maintaining stable local supplies by adjusting power generation and transmission throughout Europe as needed. In Germany and Italy, solar and wind power generation accounts for more than 10 percent of total electricity supply, and about 25 percent in Spain.

Nevertheless, the Japanese industry ministry and power companies failed to take measures to deal with the problem ahead of time. An industry ministry study group suggested in 2010 that battery installations and energy transmission and distribution networks must be improved if solar power output exceeds 10 million kilowatts. But the government and utilities did not take any specific action until June this year, when the renewable energy output was certain to vastly exceed 10 million kilowatts.

On the delay in taking action, the industry ministry said, "Because facilities are designed almost exclusively for solar power generation and the (cost) burden on the people could be increased in the future, we were not able to enhance power transmission lines without reviewing the system."

According to the ministry's estimates, if all the facilities certified under the FIT system by June this year were to go into operation, the cost to purchase renewable energy would amount to 2.7 trillion yen per year, forcing the utilities to put a monthly 935 yen surcharge on electricity bills for an average household. If power transmission cables were to be enhanced to expand the renewable energy supply system, the **financial burden on consumers would be increased further.**

Because of all this, a proposal was made at the subcommittee meeting on Oct. 15 that a questionnaire be conducted to **ascertain how much extra cost consumers could tolerate.** The subcommittee will also

consider placing priority on introducing low-cost renewable energy by having a bidding system to hold down purchase prices. The subcommittee also discussed the need to address the overemphasis on solar power by promoting geothermal power generation, which is far less vulnerable to weather conditions. The industry ministry is aiming to make its conclusions by the end of this year, so that it will be able to use them for discussions on purchase prices for next fiscal year. **There has, however, been little progress in the question of the future "energy mix"** -- the ratios of different energy sources in total generating capacity -- because the target for nuclear power output cannot be set until nuclear reactors are actually reactivated, a senior industry ministry official said. **The target for renewable energy output could, in other words, be affected by the ratio of nuclear power output.**

As such, some experts say that it will be difficult to promote renewable energy. At the subcommittee meeting, many panel members voiced opinions against a move to return to the policy of nuclear power dependence, with one saying: "I fear that the problems with the (electricity) system will lead to renewable energy bashing." Another commented, "Nuclear power generation costs money, too."

The decisions by the five utilities to stop signing new renewable energy contracts have caused a stir among renewable energy suppliers and local governments.

October 16, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Government looks to reassess feed-in tariff system for renewable sources of electricity

Green energy tariffs draw scrutiny

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/10/15/business/green-energy-tariffs-draw-scrutiny/#.VD7Y6BanrIU>

by Eric Johnston
Staff Writer

A committee involved with the nation's energy policy met Wednesday to discuss revisions to the 2-year-old feed-in tariff system for renewable energy.

It will also investigate a utility that recently halted renewable electricity purchases under the system by claiming it didn't have the capacity to handle the large amounts being generated.

Since the feed-in tariff system was introduced in July 2012, obliging utilities to purchase electricity generated from solar, wind, geothermal, mini-hydro and biomass sources for a fixed price over a fixed period, growth in renewable energy has been rapid.

As of April, about 10 gigawatts of renewable energy capacity has been installed and is underway. Of this, about 7 gigawatts, mostly in solar panels, was installed in fiscal 2013.

But expansion has brought problems. Last month, Kyushu Electric Power Co. announced it was suspending talks with renewable energy suppliers, except for residential solar arrays under 10 kilowatts.

The reason, the company said, was that its grid doesn't have the ability to transmit generated power from all of the approved projects if they went online, and that there was a risk of overloading the grid and creating instability in the supply.

A subcommittee of the industry ministry's Advisory Committee for Natural Resources will look into whether Kyushu Electric really can't handle more renewable electricity, and review grid capacity at the other major utilities. The committee may also allow utilities to go more than 30 days without purchasing renewable electricity, as a way of making it easier to balance supply, capacity and demand.

Under the feed-in tariff program, over 90 percent of the projects approved have been for solar projects. **But concerned about over-relying on one source, the government will look at ways to increase the number of other renewable energy projects, especially wind and geothermal.** Kyushu has one of Japan's largest concentrations of geothermal resources, and the government says it wants to prioritize easier grid connections for this power source.

The committee is expected to issue a final report by the end of this year and suggest possible new legislation.

Also to be discussed are proposals for a bid system that gives priority to approval of renewable energy projects that can provide electricity at the cheapest possible rates, and for shortening the period when feed-in tariff rates are revised from once a year to twice a year.

How to promote renewables?

October 18, 2014

Editorial: System to facilitate promotion of renewable energy needed

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20141018p2a00m0na002000c.html>

An advisory council to the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry has begun reviewing the so-called "feed-in-tariff" (FIT) scheme for renewable energy, where power companies buy electricity generated from renewable energy sources such as solar light, amid rising fears that the balance between power demand and supply could be disturbed due to utilities being flooded with offers in this regard.

Five power suppliers including Kyushu Electric Power Co. have stopped signing new contracts to buy electricity generated from renewable energy sources. However, since such sources account for only about 2 percent of total power used in the country (excluding hydroelectric power), the introduction of renewable energy should not be systematically hindered even if the FIT scheme needs to be reviewed.

Renewable energy sources play a key role in stepping up countermeasures against global warming, while decreasing the country's reliance on nuclear power. From a long-term perspective, therefore, the government should set a high target for introducing renewable energy while achieving a balance between the spread of such energy sources and the burden on consumers.

The FIT scheme was introduced in July 2012. By this past June, the total output of power generation facilities that operated using renewable energy had reached 11 million kilowatts. This was roughly 50 percent more than the amount before the introduction of the system -- thereby highlighting the FIT's effect in promoting the introduction of renewable energy sources.

The problem is that solar light constitutes an overwhelming majority of renewable energy used for power generation. Unlike wind power, solar power generators are easy to introduce insofar as such facilities do not require an environmental assessment by the national government. Power generation facilities using

renewable energy sources, with a total output of some 60 million kilowatts, are not in operation even though they have been approved by the government. A vast majority of these facilities are solar power generators.

The price at which utilities buy electric power generated from renewable energy sources under the FIT scheme is reviewed every April. Since the price charged is that which is in place when the national government approves such facilities, however, power suppliers were flooded with applications for contracts at the end of last fiscal year shortly before the price was lowered this past April.

Under the ministry's plan to revise the scheme, excessive emphasis on solar power would be reconsidered -- and the price to be charged would be that which was in place at the time of the start of operations at such power generators, rather than at the time of government approval. The ministry will also consider setting an upper limit to the burden on consumers, and introducing a market mechanism for the operators of power generation facilities.

A review of the timing for determining the purchase price and promotion of renewable energy sources other than solar lights is appropriate. However, the introduction of the market mechanism needs to be carefully and thoroughly discussed. An extra burden is placed upon consumers since the price of electric power generated from renewable energy sources is added to power charges. On the other hand, renewable energy has drawn attention as a way to revitalize local economies. Certain consideration should be given to such efforts.

If all of the approved power generation facilities using renewable energy are to be in operation, the cost of buying such electricity would amount to 2.7 trillion yen a year, according to an estimate by the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry. This would increase the extra financial burden on consumers from the current 225 yen to 935 yen per month on average. However, money paid for such electricity will eventually be passed on to regions that host power generators using renewable energy. Therefore, the promotion of renewable energy should be considered from the viewpoint of investing in Japan's future. The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry has also begun reviewing each utility's capacity to accept power generated from renewable energy. Power grids need to be reinforced across power companies' service areas to significantly increase the amount of electricity generated from renewable energy. Still, utilities can increase their capacity to accept such power by effectively and efficiently using lines that connect different utilities' power grids.

Pumped-storage power generation facilities, which are often built along with nuclear power stations, should be proactively utilized as power storage batteries to adjust the output of power generated from renewable energy sources.

Is Gov't listening to public worries?

October 15, 2014

ANALYSIS: Government fails to address public concerns about state secrets law

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201410150039

By RYOTA KYUKI/ Staff Writer

Public criticism and fears were expressed when the government took steps to listen to the voice of the people after the Diet enacted the state secrets protection law in December 2013.

However, the law's operating guidelines approved by the Abe Cabinet on Oct. 14 have done little to dispel suspicions that the government will use the legislation to conceal "inconvenient" information at the expense of the people's right to know.

The law is now scheduled to take effect in December, yet questions remain over the standards for designating state secrets while doubts persist about the oversight body's authority to check whether state secret designations will be made appropriately.

For example, the guidelines define 55 items that would be considered state secrets. However, the wording for those items is vague, such as "intelligence gathering by the Self Defense Forces" and "securing peace and security for the international community."

Although some information must certainly be designated as secret from a national security standpoint, it will ultimately be the government that decides what specifically constitutes a state secret.

And when the government is making such decisions, the public will be kept in the dark on the process and will not know what was actually designated as a state secret.

The government will appoint an "independent public document inspector" to serve in an oversight role. But the inspector will not be a third-party source. The post will be established within the Cabinet Office, raising doubts about the independence of the inspector.

The inspector's authority is also an issue. Even if the inspector asks a Cabinet minister to submit a state secret for screening, the minister can reject the request by saying the release of the information could cause significant damage to Japan's national security.

Another area of concern is that civil servants and private-sector company employees will be evaluated to determine if they are fit to handle state secrets. The evaluations will look into the psychological problems and criminal records of those individuals.

The Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology submitted a public comment criticizing those evaluations as a violation of human rights. The organization said there is no causal relationship between psychological problems and the likelihood of leaking state secrets.

Those concerns were never taken into consideration in discussions on the law's guidelines.

The government decided the state secrets protection law will go into effect on Dec. 10, keeping with the law's provision that it take effect within a year after promulgation.

The law will impose strict penalties, including prison terms, against individuals who reveal such state secrets and those who solicit such information leaks.

If the law is allowed to take effect as it now stands, there is a danger that the people's right to know and freedom of the press, two foundations of a democratic society, will be violated.

The public must continue monitoring the government on a number of fronts.

One such issue is the type of individual chosen as an independent public document inspector. The public should ask whether the inspector can remain independent of the government and whether a sufficient oversight function is in place to ensure that the people's right to know is not being violated.

Shaking up the power industry

October 21, 2014

New power industry alliances

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/10/21/editorials/new-power-industry-alliances/#.VEZNbRanp1s>

The comprehensive alliance struck recently between Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Chubu Electric Power Co. in their thermal power generation business raises expectations of a further shakeup in the power industry — likely involving companies from other sectors — ahead of the full liberalization of the retail sale of electricity in 2016.

While Tepco and Chubu Electric have their own reasons for the accord, it should be a welcome development if the tieup results in cutting electricity costs for consumers.

According to the basic agreement announced Oct. 7, the two companies will create a jointly owned firm that will integrate their liquefied natural gas (LNG) procurement to reduce fuel purchasing cost. The two firms combined buy roughly 40 million tons of LNG annually — or nearly half Japan's total imports of 88 million tons — and they hope the expanded volume will boost their power to negotiate procurement pricing with producing countries.

Through the new firm, Tepco and Chubu Electric will also seek to replace aging thermal power plants with more fuel-efficient plants as well as to increase output from coal-fired plants, which generate power at less than half the fuel costs of LNG-fueled plants. As a first example, the new firm reportedly plans to work with Electric Power Development Co., popularly known as J-Power, to build and run a latest-generation coal-fired power plant at Tepco's Yokosuka thermal power plant in Kanagawa Prefecture.

Tepco, which faces the massive cost of compensation for people affected by the March 2011 triple meltdowns at its Fukushima No.1 nuclear power plant, sees the alliance with Chubu Electric as a key pillar of its financial reconstruction. Tepco needs to improve its earnings to cover the trillions of yen in compensation, which it has been paying by borrowing from a government-backed fund. Since its nuclear power plants remain shut down in the wake of the 2011 disaster — just like other utilities — it is also imperative for Tepco to lower the cost of procuring LNG to run thermal power plants.

Chubu Electric is relatively unscathed from the shutdown of nuclear power plants, which accounted for only 15 percent of its power generation before 2011. Still, it faces the prospect of greater competition on its home turf in central Japan as a decades-old regional monopoly by major power firms is about to be fully dismantled. In 2016, the remaining restrictions on electricity sales to households will be lifted, making it possible for any power-generating entity to service customers anywhere across Japan. The alliance with Tepco will give Chubu Electric access to a power-generation source and a foothold for sales in the lucrative Tepco-serviced areas.

Moves are afoot by the major power firms to tap into demand in regions previously dominated by the others — often involving companies from other sectors such as gas, oil and general trading firms. Before reaching the accord with Chubu Electric, Tepco also explored other firms including Kansai Electric Power Co., Tokyo Gas Co., Osaka Gas Co. and JX Nippon Oil & Energy Corp. as potential partners. It is reported that Osaka Gas may later join the Tepco-Chubu Electric alliance. There is also the possibility that the firms that did not reach agreement with Tepco may explore their own alliance.

There are uncertainties as to how the Tepco-Chubu Electric alliance will evolve. Tepco is said to have urged Chubu Electric to place all of its main thermal power plants under the umbrella of the new jointly funded firm, but they eventually agreed only on the replacement of aging plants and construction of new facilities. They say integrating the operation of their thermal power plants will remain on the agenda of future discussions, and the scope of the alliance will substantially differ if they agree on such arrangements.

Given the uncertainties over reactivating its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture, which it counts on in its financial reconstruction plan, Tepco will likely need to make greater efforts to restructure its business. Other regional utilities and companies from different sectors are also eyeing the market thus far dominated by Tepco.

But from a consumer viewpoint, active realignment of the power industry, which has for decades been effectively dominated by the regional monopolies, should be a welcome development if it leads to lower electricity bills.

Arbitration on compensation

October 22, 2014

Evacuees call on TEPCO to accept settlement plans

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141022_27.html

Oct. 22, 2014 - Updated 10:57 UTC+2

Evacuees from the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident have urged the operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi plant to swiftly accept a state arbitration body's compensation proposals.

About 50 people, including evacuees who have filed for arbitration, gathered at a Diet building in Tokyo on Wednesday to press their requests.

The Center for Settlement of Fukushima Nuclear Damage Claims made proposals this year to settle claims filed by groups of residents of Namie Town and Iitate Village, both in Fukushima Prefecture.

But Tokyo Electric Power Company has rejected the proposals, saying blanket compensation without consideration for individual circumstances would not ensure equality.

Participants said they want a quick settlement as they have been forced to live away from their communities or family members for more than 3 years in the wake of the disaster.

A 67-year-old resident from Namie said evacuees suffered a variety of losses. He said compensation for their mental damage is far from sufficient and that the firm should honor the evacuees' claims.

Their lawyers said they will ask the government for a legal revision to oblige the utility to accept the arbitration center's proposals.

Indict Tepco or not?

October 22, 2014

Prosecutors set to decide whether to indict Tepco execs over nuclear disaster

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/10/22/national/crime-legal/prosecutors-set-to-decide-whether-to-indict-tepco-execs-over-nuke-disaster/#.VEezfRanp1s>

Reuters

Prosecutors must decide this week whether to charge Tokyo Electric Power Co. executives over their handling of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear disaster, in a process that could drag the company into criminal court.

The judicial review is unlikely to see Tepco executives go to prison, legal experts say, but rehashing details of the meltdowns and explosions that followed the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami will cast a harsh light on the struggling utility and will not help Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's unpopular effort to restart the nation's idled reactors.

The Tokyo District Prosecutor's Office declined last year to charge more than 30 Tepco and government officials after investigating a criminal complaint from residents, who said officials ignored the risks to the Fukushima No. 1 plant from natural disasters and failed to respond appropriately when crisis struck. But a special citizens' panel opened another legal front in July, asking prosecutors to consider charges of criminal negligence against three executives over their handling of the disaster.

Under the review system, the prosecutors must respond by Thursday.

If they again decline to take up the case, as some experts expect, the 11-member panel of unidentified citizens can order prosecutors to indict, if eight members vote in favor.

Prosecutorial Review Commissions, made up of citizen appointees, are a rarely used but high-profile feature of the legal system introduced after World War II to curb bureaucratic overreach. In 2009, they were given the power to force prosecutions.

A panel in 2011 forced the prosecution of former opposition leader Ichiro Ozawa over political funding. He was acquitted in 2012.

Tepco already faces a string of civil suits, the decades-long and massively expensive decommissioning of Fukushima No. 1 and a struggle to restart its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture. All 48 of Japan's reactors have been idle for more than a year under a safety regime that incorporated the lessons of Fukushima, where 160,000 people were forced to flee from a huge plume of radioactive material that left large areas uninhabitable for decades.

Backed by Abe's pro-nuclear administration, Kyushu Electric Power Co. recently won approval from safety regulators to restart the Sendai nuclear plant in Kagoshima Prefecture but faces opposition from some nearby communities.

Nationwide, a majority of people has consistently opposed restarting nuclear power, according to opinion polls.

The citizens' panel said Tsunehisa Katsumata, Tepco chairman at the time of the disaster, and former Executive Vice Presidents Sakae Muto and Ichiro Takekuro failed to take measures to protect Fukushima No. 1 despite warnings it faced big tsunami.

The prosecutors are unlikely to change their minds, said Shin Ushijima, an attorney and former public prosecutor.

"Prosecutors exhaust all means in their investigations and certainly would have in a special case like this, so if they were convinced they could not prosecute Katsumata and the others earlier, they will not reach a decision to indict now," he said.

"There is a 50 percent chance that some or all of the three ex-Tepco executives will be indicted and 99.9 percent chance those indicted will be found not guilty," Ushijima said.

"How can you prove one person, Katsumata for example, is liable or guilty, when such a big organization was behind such a large accident?"

Tepco faces huge compensation claims and has set aside just a fraction of the funds needed to decommission Fukushima No. 1.

A court recently ordered the utility to pay compensation to the family of a woman who killed herself after being forced from her home because of the disaster. A group of Fukushima workers is also suing the company for unpaid wages.

Green power: Review the power system

October 23, 2014

Planting a green power grid

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/10/23/editorials/planting-a-green-power-grid/#.VEjr3Banp1s>

The sudden decisions by five power companies to stop purchasing electricity from renewable energy sources under a feed-in-tariff (FIT) system have forced the government to start reviewing the system itself.

The review will include possibly introducing a tender system for green power-generating entities hoping to sell electricity to power firms and increasing the weight of wind and geothermal power in the purchase of green power.

But the government should not forget a more important thing than tinkering with the FIT system — improving the power grid and the related technological basis so that the share of green electricity will greatly increase in Japan's total power output. It also must not use the planned restart of nuclear power plants as an excuse to put a brake on the growth of renewable energy sources.

Backed by a call for greater use of green energy in the wake of the March 2011 meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the then Democratic Party of Japan administration introduced the FIT system in July 2012. The nation's major power companies are required by law to buy, in principle, all the electricity generated by solar, wind, geothermal and medium-to-small-scale hydro-power sources and biomass at fixed prices. But Okinawa Electric Power Co. stopped feed-in purchases in August and last month regional power monopolies in Kyushu, Shikoku, Tohoku and Hokkaido announced they will suspend the purchase of green electricity — a course of action made possible by a clause in the FIT law that exempts the power firms from the duty to buy green electricity if the purchase of such power poses a danger to stable supply of electricity.

Behind their move is a rush of last-minute applications by green energy-generating entities to sell electricity to the power companies before the government lowered purchase prices on April 1. As of the end of June, solar power accounted for 96 percent of green electricity approved for future sale to power companies. The power companies argue that they had to stop accepting the applications because either the anticipated oversupply of green electricity to their power grids could lead to the stoppage of their generators or wide fluctuations in the output of solar and wind power due to weather changes will make adjusting their generators extremely difficult. Both cases, it is feared, could lead to blackouts.

The power companies have failed to provide detailed information to back up their arguments. For example, they have not disclosed how much electricity their power transmission lines can send to, or receive from, other power companies; to what extent their power plants — such as thermal power plants using natural gas whose outputs are easily adjustable — can cope with fluctuations of green supplies; and how much excess electricity supplied from renewable sources could be used by pump-storage hydroelectric plants to pump up water during the day to generate power at night.

It is imperative that the power companies make public these figures and other relevant information. This will enable experts and ordinary citizens alike to determine whether the power companies are making sufficient efforts to buy electricity from renewable sources. Only then can there be a discussion of what concrete steps should be taken, including how much to increase the capacity of transmission lines and the specifications for developing more efficient batteries.

Increasing competition in the transmission and distribution of electricity will also help increase the capacity to handle green electricity supplies. The government should speed up the process of separating power transmission and distribution sections from the major power companies, originally scheduled for 2018 or later, and consider the merits of completely shielding new transmission and distribution entities from the control of power companies.

Green electricity, except large-scale hydraulic power, accounted for a mere 2.2 percent of total electricity generated in Japan in 2013. This volume is too small. Given the inherent risks involved in nuclear power generation and the ethical and environmental problems that semi-permanent storage of high-level nuclear waste will cause for future generations, it is logical that Japan should make concrete efforts to greatly increase the percentage of green energy by setting a clearly defined goals while aiming eventually for ending reliance on nuclear power.

TEPCO demands compensation back

October 23, 2014

Woman urged to repay nuke disaster compensation after she enters college outside Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141023p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) has demanded that a 21-year-old woman repay roughly 9 million yen of the 16 million yen in compensation she received over the Fukushima nuclear disaster, which left her family home in an off-limits zone, it has been learned.

TEPCO is demanding the woman return the amount she received after she entered a college outside Fukushima Prefecture and changed her residential address. The woman has resisted the demand.

"I have no prospects of being able to return home, and my psychological pain continues," she said.

TEPCO has not released concrete guidelines for compensation. It is feared that the finances of other nuclear evacuees could be thrown into disarray if TEPCO were to suddenly demand that they repay large amounts of compensation they have already received.

Under interim guidelines from the Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation, a body operating under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, people who are forced to evacuate from their homes for long periods are eligible for compensation for mental suffering.

TEPCO makes decisions on compensation based on the requests it receives.

The case of the 21-year-old woman marks the first time that TEPCO has demanded repayment of compensation from someone other than its own employees. Roughly 80,000 people are eligible for compensation for mental suffering, and it is possible the company's move could affect other evacuees who change their addresses when entering academic institutions, getting married or job transfers. The company is therefore likely to face calls to clarify its guidelines for compensation.

The family of the 21-year-old woman, who agreed to speak to the Mainichi Shimbun, said that in December 2010, when she was a third-year student at a high school in the Futaba district of Fukushima Prefecture, she was accepted into a three-year nursing college in the Kanto region. After the outbreak of

the nuclear disaster in March 2011, her family evacuated from one place to another within the prefecture. In early April that year, she started living by herself in an apartment near the college. She graduated this spring and started working at a hospital in the Kanto region.

When her family visited a TEPCO counter to discuss compensation in June this year, they explained how she had entered the college. Then in early September, a bill from TEPCO arrived. It stated that the amount she had received differed from what she was supposed to have been paid. TEPCO said that she had decided to enter the college before the nuclear accident, and that her period of evacuation ended when she changed her address to attend college.

Specifically, TEPCO demanded that the woman repay the 7.3 million yen she had received for mental suffering (covering six years and one month worth of payments at 100,000 yen per month), in addition to 480,000 yen in compensation for her evacuation from the no-go zone, and about 1.28 million yen in compensation for household effects.

The woman had sought compensation from TEPCO for household effects because she had purchased new items, not having taken anything from her home after the outbreak of the nuclear disaster. However, TEPCO asked her to repay the amount on the grounds that she had purchased the items in line with her entry into college.

The woman's family remains unhappy with TEPCO's demand.

"People from the zones where return has been deemed difficult are unable to return to their homes for a long time. She did enter college, she hasn't become financially independent, and her life as an evacuee hasn't finished. TEPCO hasn't publicly released its payment guidelines, and we can't agree with its decision," a family member said.

A representative of TEPCO's head office for Fukushima restoration told the Mainichi Shimbun, "We can't comment on individual cases, but decisions are not made on academic advancement alone. We will continue with compensation in the future while checking individual circumstances."

According to the Fukushima Prefecture Board of Education, roughly 1,000 high school students from evacuation zones graduated in the spring of 2011, as the woman did. If it turns out they decided to change their address to areas outside evacuation zones before the outbreak of the nuclear disaster, then they could face demands from the company to return their payments.

The education ministry's office on measures for compensation for nuclear damage takes the view that in general terms, if a person can't return home, then their period of evacuation does not end simply because of academic advancement. However, the nuclear damage response office within the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy under the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, has seen this as a borderline situation in determining whether or not compensation should be paid.

Earlier, when several TEPCO employees changed their address to locations outside the zones that were off-limits, the company judged that their period of evacuation had ended, and demanded that they repay compensation for mental anguish. The bill that one employee faced was in the range of millions of yen. There have been other cases in which TEPCO has cut off compensation payments. When a woman in her 30s married a man outside the evacuation zone in October 2011, TEPCO judged that the woman's livelihood had been established, and cut off her payments for mental suffering. The woman argued that her mental suffering had not ended, and filed for mediation through the central government's Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center. The Agency for Natural Resources and Energy informed TEPCO that it was not right to cut off compensation using marriage as a reason, and payments subsequently resumed.

October 23, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Investigating 3 former TEPCO chiefs

October 24, 2014

Prosecutors extend probe into ex-TEPCO chiefs

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Oct. 24, 2014 - Updated 12:21 UTC+2

Prosecutors have extended their investigation into 3 former chiefs of Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, over the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The Tokyo District Prosecutors' Office announced this on Friday to an inquest panel of randomly chosen citizens.

The office launched the probe after the panel decided in July that the 3 people, including former chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata, should face charges.

The prosecutors were due to decide this month whether to file charges.

But they say **they're unlikely to do so because interviewing former top TEPCO officials and experts takes time.**

In September last year, the prosecutors dismissed a criminal complaint filed by a citizens' group against roughly 30 former TEPCO executives, including the 3.

The investigators argued that it was difficult to predict the scale of the earthquake and tsunami that hit the plant in March 2011.

The group narrowed down its target and filed another complaint with the panel. It concluded the 3 should be indicted.

The prosecutors are to decide by early February whether to do so.

Japan ready to join international convention

October 22, 2014

Japan to ratify international convention on nuclear accident compensation pact

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201410240041

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Japan intends to ratify an international convention that sets a global uniform standard for compensating victims of nuclear accidents.

The move is in line with fears of an increasing risk of a nuclear accident abroad with developing nations accelerating their efforts to construct nuclear power plants.

The convention limits responsibility for nuclear accidents to the operator of the nuclear plant, meaning companies that manufacture nuclear plant equipment would not be liable. That provision would make it easier for Japanese manufacturers to export nuclear technology.

However, critics charge that Japan has not yet adequately assessed the reasons for the catastrophic triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in 2011 and that it is wrong to join a convention that would promote nuclear technology exports.

The Abe administration will submit a bill to the extraordinary Diet session now in progress to ratify the Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage (CSC). Currently, five nations, including the United States, have ratified the treaty, which was adopted in 1997.

However, the treaty has still not entered into force because one provision has not been met--that the total installed nuclear capacity of the ratifying nations be at least 400,000 megawatts.

If Japan ratified the convention, that provision would be cleared. The United States has been lobbying Japan to join the pact. The treaty would take effect 90 days after the Diet ratified the convention.

Convention signatory nations would share in the compensation burden when a nuclear accident occurred.

Along with the convention, the Abe Cabinet will also submit relevant legislation to allow for implementation of the convention.

Japan had not joined the convention because it placed excessive faith in the "safety myth" surrounding nuclear power plants.

The Fukushima nuclear disaster put paid to that way of thinking. Moves by developing nations in Asia and elsewhere to construct nuclear power plants were another reason for joining the convention.

The CSC requires nations to provide a minimum yen equivalent of 47 billion (\$438 million) in compensation. If the total amount of compensation required exceeds that amount, signatory nations would be **required to share part of the additional burden.**

A Foreign Ministry official said, "The convention will encourage developing nations to pass legislation related to nuclear power plants."

The additional shared amount to be contributed by each nation would be calculated based on the capacity of nuclear power generation. If Japan joined the convention, it would have to come up with about 4 billion yen to deal with a potential accident abroad. **The government plans to ask electric power companies to set aside funds annually to shore up the compensation sharing package.**

Like domestic laws in nations that have installed nuclear power plants, the CSC limits responsibility for nuclear accidents to the operator of the plants, mainly electric power or fuel companies.

For that reason, companies that manufacture nuclear plant equipment or construct nuclear plants would not be held responsible for accidents that occurred in signatory nations.

A Japanese government source said U.S. officials lobbied Japan to join the CSC because it was becoming difficult for companies in the United States to export nuclear plant equipment to developing nations until the convention took effect.

An executive with a major Japanese manufacturer said, "With it looking close to impossible to construct a new plant in Japan, we would appreciate a convention that encouraged the export of nuclear plants."

However, in August, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations issued a statement opposing ratification of the CSC on the grounds **it would create a moral hazard for manufacturers, who would likely not feel obliged to deal seriously with measures to prevent nuclear accidents.**

Mie Asaoka, a vice president with the JFBA, said: "The convention encourages developing nations to pass legislation so nuclear plants can be exported to them. Can Japan claim to have fulfilled its international responsibility for having caused the accident at Fukushima?"

(This article was written by Takashi Watanabe and Senior Staff Writer Noriyoshi Ohtsuki.)

Kansai's fears about new state secret law

October 26, 2014

Kansai's fears of new law no state secret

by Eric Johnston

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/10/26/national/politics-diplomacy/kansais-fears-of-new-law-no-state-secret/#.VE0BTRZ5B1s>

Staff Writer

With less than two months to go until the new designated state secrets law comes into force, how, exactly, it will work in practice is the subject of extensive debate and concern. **Much of the commentary focuses on how the fundamental rights of individuals will be affected.**

Municipal and prefectural governments, especially in Kansai, are also concerned about what the new law might mean for local autonomy and access to central government information, and whether that will have repercussions for their residents.

Nationwide, nearly 200 local cities and towns have passed statements condemning the new law. As of September, at least a half dozen assemblies in Kyoto, Nara and Osaka prefectures had voiced their opposition.

One of the largest bodies in Kansai to oppose the new law was Ikoma, in Nara. Ikoma is the main city in the electoral district of Internal Affairs and Communications Minister Sanae Takaichi, a close ally of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

"What, precisely, is to be designated as secret is not clear, leading to a situation of 'what will become secret is secret.' Because of this, even in cases of arrests and prosecutions that are connected to law, it won't be clear as to why the accused is being arrested or prosecuted because the lawyers won't be able to reveal the evidence in court," the city assembly said in June.

Muko, a small city in Kyoto, expressed similar concerns but added that the vague law could also be used to punish public servants who unknowingly release "secret" information, and that not only the mass media but also scholars, researchers, elected representatives, legal professionals and ordinary citizens would be unable to freely collect information under such constraints.

Taro Yamada, a House of Councilors member from Your Party, said that while police departments may be able to get information classified, prefectural governors and assemblies will not have the same privilege. This has created two concerns in Kansai.

The first has to do with **information sharing between the local and central governments.**

Kyoto and Osaka in particular host international summits and the like, which require coordination between local authorities and the Prime Minister's Office, the Foreign Ministry, the National Police Agency, and other central government organs. Communication between Kansai and national officials can

be difficult because too often local authorities are given only the minimum of information by central government officials,” said one Kyoto municipal official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

“Under the new law, the central government now has an excuse and can say, ‘Sorry, that’s a state secret’ if local officials get angry about being left out of the loop,” the official said.

The second cause of concern in Kansai has to do with nuclear power.

Fukui Prefecture’s 13 commercial reactors, including 11 operated by Kansai Electric Power Co., provide electricity to the region. But Kyoto and Osaka are also home to groups of anti-nuclear protesters who are well-organized and tenacious compared with other parts of the country.

At anti-nuclear rallies in both cities, police keep close tabs on those participating. **Under the secrets law, such demonstrations might be considered a threat to national security.** Anti-nuclear groups in Kansai and nationwide fear that official harassment will grow against anyone who speaks out against atomic power, and that the officials and their minions will then hide behind the law if and when they are sued in the Osaka or Kyoto district courts.

Additionally, though not the issue it is elsewhere, some Kansai leaders have expressed **concern about what the new law means for keeping tabs on Self-Defense Forces or U.S. military activity in the region.**

As both countries deepen cooperation under the new collective self-defense stance adopted by the Cabinet in July, there is local concern that obtaining information on U.S. military operations, one of the main areas targeted by the state secrets law, will become more difficult.

“At a military base in Kyotango, Kyoto Prefecture, the United States has installed X-band radar for tracking ballistic missiles. But what the effect of radio waves from the radar might be is unknown. Even if we ask, the government won’t provide the information under the new law,” said Ryoichi Hattori, an Osaka-based activist who opposes the secrets law.

The town of Sennan, Osaka Prefecture, near Kansai airport, has already expressed opposition to any attempt by the U.S. military to use it. Any plans by Tokyo or Washington to operate more radar installations in Kansai is sure to be met by local opposition not only from traditional anti-base activists, but also from residents whose attitude is “not in my backyard.”

But if information on plans for joint training exercises turns out to be designated a state secret, Tokyo and Washington may find that even those national politicians and political parties who back the security alliance in public may constantly urge caution when it comes to specific operational plans that run the risk of further inflaming residents, and local assemblies, in Kansai or anywhere else.

Especially if they are already angry because the plans can’t be made public.

At present, most Kansai politicians in the Liberal Democratic Party-Komeito ruling coalition and their corporate backers support the state secrets law. At the same time, the region’s traditional attitude of independence from Tokyo, combined with fierce local pride, mean that towns, cities and leaders, regardless of party ties, are less likely to simply accept excuses about national security if the information local residents want is not made available.

Kansai Perspective appears on the fourth Monday of each month, focusing on Kansai-area developments and events of national importance with a Kansai connection.

130 billion yen pretax profit for TESCO

October 25, 2014

Tepco projects ¥130 billion pretax profit for year

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/10/25/business/tepcoprojects-%C2%A5130-billion-pretax-profit-for-year/#.VEvmhRanp1s>

Kyodo

Tokyo Electric Power Co., manager of the disaster-struck Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant is expecting to log a group pretax profit of ¥130 billion for the business year through March 2015, even without restarting the giant Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant or hiking rates again, sources familiar with the matter said Friday. Tepco, as the utility is known, was effectively nationalized in the wake of the 2011 core meltdowns in Fukushima Prefecture. It is expected to post a profit in excess of ¥100 billion for the second year straight, thanks to cost-cutting efforts, a decline in crude oil prices, and reduced demand for power caused by cooler temperatures last summer, the sources said.

The last factor meant that Tepco needed to produce less electricity from thermal plants fueled by imported fossil fuels, which have soared in cost because of the Bank of Japan's weakening of yen against the dollar.

According to the utility's turnaround plan, pretax profit was initially projected to reach ¥167.7 billion this year if the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant on the coast of the Sea of Japan in Niigata Prefecture resumed operating in July.

In fiscal 2013 ended in March, Tepco posted a group net profit of ¥438.65 billion, reversing a ¥685.29 billion loss the previous year. It logged a group pretax profit of ¥101.42 billion against a loss of ¥326.96 billion the previous year.

All of Japan's 48 commercial nuclear reactors, including those at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa complex, the world's largest, are currently offline for new safety tests drafted in response to the Fukushima disaster.

Withholding minutes and refusing to disclose names

October 25, 2014

Ministry withholds minutes from nuclear accident compensation resolution meetings

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141025p2a00m0na012000c.html>

The Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry is withholding minutes from meetings held by the top decision-making panel of the Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center, which is the government-backed body handling alternative dispute resolution (ADR) for the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Moreover, the ministry has also refused to disclose all of the names of the mediating attorneys who are working out settlement proposals on behalf of the panel.

It earlier came to light that the ADR had compiled an internal document stating that the causal relationship between the Fukushima nuclear crisis and the deaths of those who evacuated from areas hit by the disaster should be set at a uniform 50 percent when calculating the amount of compensation to be paid to bereaved families.

Experts in government information disclosure have pointed out that the ministry's refusal to disclose the details of the meetings is an extremely abnormal response.

The nuclear accident ADR top decision-making body is comprised of three members: Chairman Yoshio Otani, who previously served as a judge; Isomi Suzuki, a lawyer; and Kazuhiko Yamamoto, a professor at Hitotsubashi University.

The panel has worked out comprehensive standards for compensation to victims of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. However, since the only information disclosed was the outline of standards and the date of their compilation, the Mainichi Shimbun asked the ministry for full access to the minutes of the panel's meetings under the government's freedom-of-information system in order to assess the process of working out the standards.

In response, the ministry admitted that the minutes of the panel's sessions are preserved at the center, but refused to disclose the documents. Consequently, it is not possible to verify what the three panel members said during the meetings, the themes of the sessions, the dates and places of the gatherings, or whether the meetings were actually held.

With regard to the reasons for withholding the minutes, the ministry explained that disclosure of the information would hinder the frank exchange of opinions among the panel members, compromise the panel's neutrality in making decisions, cause confusion among the public, and adversely affect the panel's execution of its duties.

The Mainichi Shimbun also asked the ministry to disclose the identities of mediating attorneys in an effort to see if they have a vital interest in Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Citing the need to protect the mediators' personal information, however, the ministry released the list of the mediators with their names and personal history blacked out.

While the Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center discloses the names of 202 mediators in its reports on specific cases that have been settled, information regarding the 80 others remains withheld.

There are six government-backed organizations that handle ADR across the country, including the Nuclear Damage Compensation Dispute Resolution Center. The five other organizations have disclosed the identities of all their mediators on their respective websites. Two of the five bodies have also disclosed minutes from meetings of their top decision-making panels on their websites, while the three others responded that they will consider disclosing such information if requested under the freedom of information system.

October 25, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

3 months-delay for ex-TEPCO chiefs' charges

October 25, 2014

3/11 charges for Tepco execs delayed by three months

Reuters, Kyodo

Prosecutors have delayed for three months a decision on whether to charge three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. for their handling of the 2011 Fukushima disaster, an official with a panel that requested the indictments said Friday.

Tokyo District Prosecutor's Office had been re-investigating the case after an independent judicial panel of citizens ruled in July that three former Tepco executives, including then-chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata, should be indicted over their handling of the world's worst nuclear disaster since the 1986 Chernobyl explosion.

Prosecutors on Friday informed the Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution of its decision to extend the probe by three months through the end of January, saying it was too difficult to reach a decision by the end-of-October deadline.

By law, prosecutors can extend investigations for up to three months.

Prosecutors decided in September last year not to indict the former Tepco executives, including Katsumata, saying it had been beyond the company's imagination to foresee the scale of the earthquake and tsunami in March 2011 that triggered the nuclear crisis.

Residents had accused more than 30 Tepco and government officials of ignoring the risks of a natural disaster and failing to respond appropriately when crisis struck.

Not a conflict of interests?

October 25, 2014

Suga downplays conflict involving new trade chief's Tepco stake

Staff Writer

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga brushed aside concerns Friday about the new trade and industry minister's 600-share stake in Tokyo Electric Power Co. and said that the government guidelines in place to protect Cabinet ministers from conflicts of interest would be followed.

Miyazawa's stake is worth about ¥200,000, Suga said. Tepco, as the beleaguered utility is known, had a market capitalization of ¥544.8 billion as of Friday afternoon. "There is no problem at all," Suga told reporters.

Miyazawa was suddenly appointed METI chief on Monday within a day of predecessor Yuko Obuchi's shock resignation. His role gives him oversight of nuclear energy policy and the rehabilitation of Tepco, which is still reeling from the core meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant in 2011.

The daily Tokyo Shimbun and other media outlets have reported that a conflict of interest might develop in the Cabinet if the minister overseeing Tepco fails to separate his personal interest in the utility from his power to oversee it.

Miyazawa's financial assets are under particular scrutiny after it was revealed Thursday that his political fund management body paid ¥18,230 to a sadomasochism sex show bar in Hiroshima in 2010.

Miyazawa said that he never visited the bar but that one of his staffers had and, for some reason, logged the expense in Miyazawa's official political funds report.

"It came right out of the blue," Miyazawa told reporters later Thursday. "I swear I didn't go there . . . I've never even heard of the bar's name."

Guidelines adopted by the Cabinet in 2001 urge ministers to refrain from trading securities, including stocks and real estate, while in office. The rules require incoming ministers to place any stocks they hold when entering office into a trust bank.

Miyazawa reportedly owned 588 shares of Tepco in 2010, when he was elected to the Upper House for the time. He bought another 12 in 2013.

Miyazawa is a former Finance Ministry official and a nephew of the late Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, a noted financial expert.

New Governor in Fukushima Prefecture

October 27, 2014

Fukushima elects new governor in first election since 2011 disasters

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/10/27/national/politics-diplomacy/ex-vice-governor-likely-win-fukushima-gubernatorial-election/#.VE4k1xZ5B1s>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – Former Fukushima Vice Gov. Masao Uchibori was elected governor in a landslide Sunday in the prefecture’s first gubernatorial campaign since the 2011 natural and nuclear disasters.

Reconstruction from the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami as well as nuclear policy were the main issues in the election involving around 1.6 million voters, but there was a lack of in-depth discussion as both ruling and opposition parties threw their support behind the 50-year-old Uchibori.

Asked Monday morning about priorities once he takes office, Uchibori said: “I want to rebuild the worst-hit parts of the evacuation zone, and then rebuild all of Fukushima (Prefecture). I’m reminding myself anew of the heavy responsibility. We must do whatever it takes to reconstruct Fukushima.”

Uchibori has declined to comment on whether he believes reactors around the rest of the country should be reactivated. Therefore the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is expected to face no challenge from him as it continues procedures to restart idled nuclear plants.

Furthermore, the ruling coalition of Abe’s Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito managed to stave off defeat — which it suffered in the Shiga gubernatorial race in July.

The focus now shifts to the governor race next month in Okinawa, where issues related to U.S. military bases are likely to dominate.

Uchibori got 490,384 votes, while runner-up Yoshihiro Kumasaka received 129,455.

Kumasaka, 62, a former mayor of Miyako, Iwate Prefecture, had the backing of the Japanese Communist Party and Shinto Kaikaku (New Renaissance Party).

Fewer than 30,000 votes went to four other candidates.

Voter turnout was 45.85 percent, up 3.43 point from the previous election but the second lowest on record.

Uchibori ran nominally as an independent but was supported by the local chapters of the LDP and Komeito as well as the opposition Democratic Party of Japan and the Social Democratic Party.

“I will put my heart and soul into the reconstruction of Fukushima,” said Uchibori, who will succeed outgoing Gov. Yuhei Sato. “I will first put my efforts into reconstructing evacuated areas and revitalizing the prefecture.”

Sato, who served two four-year terms, said he wants his successor to be “someone who can carry out my will and continue reconstruction work, and who knows the prefecture very well.”

During the campaign, Uchibori pledged to “make utmost efforts to bring recovery to Fukushima as early as possible.” He underscored his readiness to serve as governor after having supported Sato as vice governor from 2006.

Uchibori resigned from the vice governorship last month to run in the election.

Although the number of candidates was a record high for the prefecture, all of them agreed that reactors in the prefecture should be decommissioned and pledged to reconstruct the region devastated by the March 2011 disasters.

While the other contenders opposed reactivating nuclear reactors in other parts of Japan, Uchibori refrained from expressing a view on the matter, apparently in deference to the central government.

The prefecture has already demanded that the central government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. decommission the four reactors at the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear plant in addition to the six at crippled Fukushima No. 1.

The other contenders were Katsutaka Idogawa, a 68-year-old former mayor of the town of Futaba, which hosts the Fukushima No. 1 plant, Yoshitaka Ikarashi, a 36-year-old pastor, Akiko Iseki, 59, a convenience store manager, and Yoshinao Kaneko, 58, president of a construction company.

Former vice governor takes Fukushima gubernatorial election in landslide

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201410270033

October 27, 2014

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Backed by four parties in both the ruling and opposition camps, former Fukushima Vice Governor Masao Uchibori was elected governor on Oct. 26 in **a campaign where the future of the nation's nuclear policy was placed on the back burner.**

It was Fukushima Prefecture's first gubernatorial election since the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Uchibori was elected in a landslide victory over five other independent newcomers. He garnered 490,384 votes, more than three times as many as the runner-up.

With voter turnout at 45.85 percent, it was the second lowest turnout on record after the last gubernatorial election, where only 42.42 percent of eligible voters showed up at the polls.

There was little difference in the platforms of the six candidates, all of whom called for decommissioning all nuclear power plants in the prefecture. Other issues, such as the rebuilding of residents' lives and communities, failed to motivate voters as well.

Touting himself as the successor to Fukushima Governor Yuhei Sato, Uchibori, 50, the outgoing governor's deputy for eight years, campaigned on a platform of succeeding and further promoting his policies.

As a result, the stay-the-course approach earned Uchibori broad support from not only supporters of major political parties but also local municipal leaders and industry organizations.

Backing Uchibori were the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, its junior coalition partner, New Komeito, the opposition Democratic Party of Japan and the Social Democratic Party.

The Abe administration, which hopes to restart many of the nuclear reactors across Japan that were taken offline in the aftermath of the Fukushima crisis, backed Uchibori, who was supported by the opposition parties. **The administration did so in order to prevent the issue on whether to phase out nuclear power from becoming a key point of contention.**

Uchibori's opponents included Yoshihiro Kumasaka, 62, a doctor who was supported by the Japanese Communist Party and the New Renaissance Party. He campaigned on abandoning nuclear power in and outside the prefecture. Also opposing Uchibori was Katsutaka Idogawa, 68, the former mayor of Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture. Neither were able to garner wide support.

The world's attention is now on the new governor who has a mountain of issues to tackle related to the nuclear disaster in order to pave the way for the prefecture's recovery.

US and Russia join forces against nuke safety

U.S. Said to Join Russia in Blocking Nuclear Safety Moves

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-10-23/u-s-said-to-join-russia-in-blocking-nuclear-safety-moves.html>

By Jonathan Tirone Oct 23, 2014 2:57 PM GMT+0200

Photographer: Koji Sasahara/Pool via Bloomberg

The U.S. and Russia are joining forces to block a European plan to raise the protection of nuclear reactors against natural disasters after the meltdowns at Japan's Fukushima Dai-Ichi power plant, diplomats say. Envoys from both countries are trying to derail a Swiss-led initiative that would force nuclear operators to invest more on safety, undermining attempts to harmonize global safety regulation, according to eight European and U.S. diplomats who attended meetings in Vienna last week. All asked not to be named in line with rules kept by the Convention on Nuclear Safety, the legal body overseeing the talks.

Even as relations between Russia and the U.S. have sunk to a post-Cold War low over the crisis in Ukraine, the two powers have come together to press their shared interest in resisting more stringent safety guidelines, said the diplomats. The U.S. is the world's biggest nuclear-power generator, while Russia exports more reactors than anyone else.

"Switzerland, as the initiator of the proposal, will continue to collaborate with all delegations and do everything to find a solution that is acceptable to all of us," Georg Schwarz, deputy director general of the Swiss nuclear-safety regulator, ENSI, said in an e-mailed reply to questions.

Nuclear Secrecy

The U.S.-Russia collaboration reflects a nuclear-safety convention whose secrecy is laid bare in documents obtained by Bloomberg News under a Freedom of Information Act request.

It also underscores the **high stakes for an industry trying to bounce back after the Fukushima accident**. European attempts to impose higher safety standards would make nuclear power more costly just as plant operators come under price pressure from cheaper natural gas.

Atomic Power Looking Better and Worse

Prompted by the March 2011 Fukushima incident, European regulators are seeking to rewrite international standards to ensure nuclear operators not only prevent accidents but mitigate consequences if they occur, by installing costly new structures built to survive natural disasters. The meltdown caused by a tsunami forced 160,000 people to flee radioactive contamination and led to the shutdown of all of Japan's nuclear plants.

The European attempt became public in April during the previous Convention on Nuclear Safety meeting in Vienna. Switzerland consulted with engineers, regulators and diplomats from more than 50 countries before proposing the new rules. The stricter requirements were in line with a European Union directive issued three months later that required nuclear operators to bolster infrastructure at existing plants.

Less Stringent

U.S. regulators aren't requiring the same stringent modifications, according to Edwin Lyman of the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Union of Concerned Scientists, an advocacy group. European utilities pay as much as five times more to fit out plants to withstand earthquakes and floods as a result, he said.

Electricite de France SA is spending about 10 billion euros (\$13 billion) on additional safety features for its 59 reactors, according to its regulator, the Autorite de Surete Nucleaire. U.S. utilities will spend about \$3 billion on portable generators and cooling reserves for about 100 reactors, FirstEnergy Corp. (FE) President Pete Sena said in July 31 testimony to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

'Hardened Core'

French costs are higher because operators have to build a "hardened core" around their reactors that will be able to contain fallout if an accident occurs, its regulatory chief, Jean-Christophe Niel, said in July testimony to the NRC in Rockville, Maryland. Engineers are designing reinforced bunkers for back-up power and installing emergency cooling systems to contain a meltdown. The country is also reinforcing the concrete bases of its oldest reactors and creating elite teams of emergency responders.

At last week's meeting, convened at the International Atomic Energy Agency's headquarters, Russian envoy Oleg Postnikov offered praise for his American counterpart, Eliot Kang, after the U.S. argued against the European initiative, people who attended the meeting said. U.S. officials confirmed that their delegation fell into an uneasy alliance with Russia.

The U.S. State Department declined to comment on the record. Russian diplomats accredited to the IAEA didn't respond to written requests and phone calls seeking comment.

'Shocking' Secrecy

Created in response to the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear reactor meltdown in Ukraine, the convention has struggled to broaden safety standards. The group's own secrecy has often undermined its intents. One former French envoy, Jean-Pierre Clausner, said that the opacity of the organization was "shocking," according to the documents obtained under the Freedom of Information request.

"The whole process needs to be reviewed and significant changes should be introduced if the contracting parties are willing to maintain the usefulness of the convention," Clausner wrote in 2005, the first year that the body allowed notes taken from its meeting to be preserved.

While nuclear meltdowns are considered cross-border incidents because of the radioactive fallout that can result, no international authority exists to compel countries to adopt safety standards. Instead, regulators from around the world routinely review each other's practices to figure out which works best. Laggards face peer criticism that can make them look bad in forums like the convention.

Falsified Data

At the convention's 2008 meeting -- the last before Fukushima -- Japan was criticized by peers for being slow to overhaul a reporting system that had been caught using "falsified inspection data," the documents show. Participants also urged Japan, then the world's third-largest nuclear-power generator, to review how safe its reactors were against earthquakes.

Countries like China and India, where companies are building new reactors to cover growing electricity demand, have given some support to the European initiative, according to the diplomats. The safety-upgrade costs to new reactors aren't as burdensome as retrofitting existing infrastructure, they said. The U.S. said that the Europeans bushwhacked their delegation earlier this year by calling a vote to consider the safety amendment. **The country's nuclear industry would suffer if the European measure were to be adopted because it would create an international perception that the U.S. took safety less seriously.**

"The nuclear industry in the U.S. is under great pressure from lower natural gas prices," said Lyman from Vienna, where he is attending an IAEA meeting. "At the same time, the potential for capital upgrades to deal with post-Fukushima requirements was a worry that it could push them over the edge."

Argentina's IAEA envoy, Rafael Mariano Grossi, will convene the next safety meeting Feb. 9 to 13, when countries will decide on the Swiss measure.

The biggest challenge for the U.S. and Russia may not be convincing enough countries to vote against the measure, according to an official who organized last week's talks. Their real test, he said, will be to come up with something better.

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Don't move out evacuation zone to study

October 28, 2014

TEPCO guidelines say evacuees entering college not eligible for compensation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141028p2a00m0na017000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) has set in-house standards for compensation that require evacuees who have moved out of evacuation zones to attend university or college to repay some of the compensation they have already received, the Mainichi Shimbun has learned.

A TEPCO document obtained by the Mainichi Shimbun says that if a tenant agreement between an evacuee and a landlord had been signed before the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011, it is considered that the decision to move was made before the disaster, and that their evacuation was over after they moved into the new place. TEPCO is believed to use the guidelines when interviewing evacuees about requests for compensation.

According to the Fukushima Prefectural Board of Education and other concerned parties, however, there are no universities or two-year colleges in areas that have been designated as evacuation zones, where residents are entitled to 100,000 yen in compensation monthly for their mental distress. It means that under the TEPCO standard, all evacuees who moved out of evacuation zones to enter university or college, regardless of the location of the institutions, will be subject to TEPCO's demand for repayment.

While TEPCO has not disclosed how many people are subject to such a rule, the prefectural education board said there were some 1,000 students in off-limits zones who graduated from high school in the spring of 2011.

A 21-year-old woman from a difficult-to-return zone, who is being urged to return some 9 million yen to TEPCO, was accepted into a three-year nursing college in the Kanto region in December 2010. She signed a rental contract for an apartment near the school in January 2011 and moved there in the beginning of April. In June this year, TEPCO requested the woman's family to send a copy of the rental contract to TEPCO's head office in Tokyo, and sent back a note in September with the amount of repayment the woman needs to pay, claiming that she ended her evacuation when she moved into the apartment.

A representative of TEPCO's head office for Fukushima restoration told the Mainichi Shimbun, "We make decisions on compensation after checking individual circumstances," but added that the company cannot release payment guidelines.

Attorney Naoto Sasayama, who takes part in nuclear disaster compensation claims, said, "As disaster compensation is funded by the government, operation transparency and fair payment guidelines are indispensable. If TEPCO demands evacuees repay some of the compensation, the company needs to disclose the payment standards."

October 28, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Promises

October 28, 2014

Industry minister says he will sell off TEPCO shares when term ends

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141028p2g00m0dm060000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Japan's new industry minister Yoichi Miyazawa said Tuesday he intends to sell off shares of Tokyo Electric Power Co. he possesses when he ends his term, as the opposition camp increases pressure on the minister over a series of scandals.

Miyazawa, who took office just a week ago, has come under fire following the revelation he holds 600 shares in TEPCO, the operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, raising questions about the independence of the minister in charge of overseeing the power sector.

"After my term ends, I would like to dispose of all TEPCO shares I possess, and donate all the money to contribute to the revival of Fukushima," Miyazawa told a session of the House of Councillors Committee on Economy, Trade and Industry.

Under the guidelines for ministers adopted by the Cabinet in 2001, ministers are supposed to refrain from stock trading while in office. Miyazawa said he has already entrusted the TEPCO shares to a bank.

Miyazawa also said at a press conference that he will visit the crippled Fukushima plant this Saturday.

Miyazawa became industry minister Oct. 21 after his predecessor Yuko Obuchi stepped down over a money scandal less than two months after she assumed the post.

In just a week in office, Miyazawa has come under fire as his fund management body was found to have booked an outlay at a bar featuring S&M performances as expenses related to political activities, and the political party chapter he headed when he was a lower house member has received from a foreign-owned firm donations banned under the political funds control law.

TEPCO's profits

November 1, 2014

Tepco posts solid first-half profit sans reactors, rate hikes

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/11/01/business/corporate-business/tepco-posts-solid-first-half-profit-sans-reactors-rate-hikes/#.VFYo-sl5B1s>

AFP-JIJI

The operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant posted a solid first-half pretax profit Friday, despite not restarting any of its idled reactors or hiking electricity rates.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Tepco) refrained from making full-year projections, saying it is difficult to do so while its workhorse nuclear plant remains offline following the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Tepco, which was effectively nationalized in the wake of the crisis, said it chalked up a group pretax profit of ¥242.8 billion (\$2.23 billion) in the April-September half, up 71.4 percent from a year earlier. It attributed the solid result to postponed construction of power plants and cuts in manpower and materials costs.

Its revenue rose 3.7 percent to ¥3.334 trillion despite a decline in electricity sales caused by cooler summer temperatures.

Tepco was forecast to book a pretax profit of ¥130 billion for the full year, topping ¥100 billion for a second straight year, Kyodo News said last week.

In the year to March 2014, Tepco posted a pretax profit of ¥101.42 billion against a loss of ¥326.96 billion the previous year.

Hokkaido Electric's 12% price hike

November 2, 2014

Hokkaido Electric hikes prices 12%, joining nation's most expensive utilities

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/11/02/business/hokkaido-electric-jacks-household-electricity-prices-by-12/#.VFYpKsl5B1s>

JJI

SAPPORO – Hokkaido Electric Power Co. raised prices for households by an average of 12.43 percent on Saturday, the first of the nation's major utilities to carry out a second full rate hike since March 2011.

Hokkaido Electric obtained government approval to raise so-called small-lot power charges by 15.33 percent on average starting in November, but will keep the hike to 12.43 percent until the end of March 2015 as a one-off measure to soften the blow to households.

Hokkaido used to be among the regions with the lowest electricity charges in Japan, but the utility's charges are now among the highest, nearly on a par with Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Okinawa Electric Power Co.

Power rates for large-lot users, mainly businesses, rose by an average of 16.48 percent starting Saturday and will last through the end of March 2015. The full rate hike of 20.32 percent will then take force in April.

The full-fledged rate change is different from the monthly power rate reviews, or adjustments, often conducted to reflect changes in oil and natural gas prices and do not require government permission to execute.

In November, the monthly power rate for a standard household is projected to reach ¥8,198, incorporating the impact of the monthly review, up ¥856 from the previous month. Without the temporary measure, the cost would be ¥8,380.

The power industry is facing expanded costs for procuring fossil fuels for thermal power generation because all nuclear power plants remain suspended in the wake of the March 2011 meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 power station.

Struggling Japan Atomic Power co makes secret donations

November 2, 2014

Cash-strapped nuclear power company secretly donates 1.54 billion yen to city

November 02, 2014

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Japan Atomic Power Co., struggling financially while its nuclear reactors remain offline, still donated 1.54 billion yen (\$13.7 million) to a city government and asked that the funds be kept secret, officials said Nov. 1.

The money used for the donations came from fees paid by other power companies, who are under contract to buy electricity from Japan Atomic Power.

Japan Atomic Power has not produced any electricity from its three nuclear reactors since they were shut down following the March 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. **The company's requests for secrecy came after criticism arose over why it was still receiving money from the industry for nonexistent electricity.**

The city government of Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, which hosts Japan Atomic Power's two-reactor Tsuruga nuclear plant, started receiving donations from the company in 2009, mainly for use in road construction. The city had listed the donations, totaling 440 million yen, on official documents and shown them to the city assembly until March 2012.

At the end of March 2013, Japan Atomic Power donated 850 million yen to Tsuruga city. On May 31 that year, it asked the city not to list the donation on official documents.

The Tokyo-based company also donated 670 million yen in December 2013 and 19 million yen in March 2014. Again, Japan Atomic Power requested secrecy from the city government.

The city complied with the requests.

"We judged that it is not necessary (for the city government) to describe our donations on the official documents," said an official at Japan Atomic Power.

The Tsuruga government said the city has generally followed donors' requests that their names not appear on official documents.

Harumi Kondaiji, a Tsuruga city assemblywoman, said such nondisclosure was unacceptable.

"It is unforgivable for the city government not to show its citizens where the financial sources of its public works projects come from," she said.

Japan Atomic Power, which specializes in nuclear power generation, was set up in 1957 with capital mainly from major electric power companies. Aside from the Tsuruga plant, the company operates one reactor at its Tokai No. 2 nuclear power plant in Ibaraki Prefecture.

Five power companies, including Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Kansai Electric Power Co., are currently under contract to pay more than 100 billion yen a year in total as "basic fees" for electricity generated by Japan Atomic Power.

The central government in May 2012 started studying TEPCO's request to raise its electricity charges and began similar examinations in December that year on a rate-hike request from Kansai Electric.

During the process, members of an advisory council to the industry minister criticized Japan Atomic Power for receiving more than 100 billion yen from the five electric power companies despite being unable to generate any electricity to sell.

But the basic fees to Japan Atomic Power have continued even though its reactors--its only source of revenue--have remained shut down. Those fees, in turn, were used for the company's donations to Tsuruga city.

Household and corporate customers of TEPCO and Kansai Electric were eventually forced to pay higher electricity charges.

The industry ministry now prohibits electric power companies from including donations to local governments that host nuclear plants as part of their costs when they calculate electricity charges.

Japan Atomic Power has told the Tsuruga city government that it will stop providing donations starting in 2015.

The company has applied to the Nuclear Regulation Authority for safety screening to resume operations at the Tokai No. 2 nuclear plant. But concerns have arisen about the age of the reactor--35 years--and the damage to the plant caused by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

In addition, the NRA concluded in May 2013 that an active fault runs below the No. 2 reactor of the company's Tsuruga nuclear power plant, putting in doubt any early restart of the plant.

Japan Atomic Power's management situation is so serious that it is receiving debt guarantees from the electric power industry.

"The company probably wants to conceal the fact that it is making donations (to Tsuruga city) despite its serious financial situation," said a high-ranking official of the city government.

(This article was written by Hideki Muroya and Satoshi Otani.)

Changes ahead on feed-in tariff system

November 3, 2014

METI to overhaul rules on feed-in tariff program

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/11/03/business/meti-to-overhaul-rules-on-feed-in-tariff-program/#.VFdSe8l5B1s>

JJI

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry intends to **eliminate companies from the feed-in tariff system that have promised to sell electricity but have no plans to generate renewable energy themselves**, sources say.

At an experts' meeting to be held Wednesday, METI will suggest proceeding with detailed discussions on the matter, the sources said Sunday.

Under the feed-in tariff program, power suppliers that use renewable energy sign contracts with major power companies after being certified by the central government.

The program allows smaller power suppliers to obtain informal agreements from purchasers before signing contracts, providing them with a degree of security so they can begin raising funds and building facilities.

But **some companies obtain government certification under the program with the intention of selling facility sites for profit, instead of carrying through with building power generation facilities themselves**.

Canceling informal electricity purchase agreements will cause trouble, a senior METI official said. The ministry will thus aim to set clear criteria for the cancellation of electricity purchases that major power companies have already agreed to, the sources said.

Since electricity purchase prices are set when would-be suppliers apply to major power companies for contracts, they tend not to begin power generation immediately, choosing to instead wait until technological advances help lower equipment costs such as for solar panels, boosting their profit margin. To fix that problem, METI is considering having purchase prices set when would-be power suppliers conclude contracts with major power utilities as well as lowering rates under the program, the sources said.

40 NGOs demand revision of latest UNSCEAR report

October 29, 2014

<http://hrn.or.jp/eng/news/2014/10/29/japanese-civil-society-and-that-from-7-other-countries-request-the-reports-of-the-united-nations-scientific-committee-on-fukushima-to-be-revised/>

Japanese civil society and that from 7 other countries request the reports of the United Nations Scientific Committee on Fukushima to be revised

Joint Statement

Civil Society groups request revision of the recent United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) Report: “Levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the nuclear accident after the 2011 Great East-Japan Earthquake and tsunami.”

Human Rights Now, along with 40 civil society organizations from Japan, USA, Tunisia, Azerbaijan, Netherlands, Germany, France, and Ireland has issued a statement requesting UNSCEAR, and the General Assembly Fourth Committee to revise the report and its finding from a human rights perspective. Please find the actual statement from below.

PDF version is available here: Letter to UNSCEAR2014

Date: 24 October 2014

**To: Members of the Fourth Committee of the UN General Assembly 69th Session,
Members of UNSCEAR, and**

Members of the UN General Assembly:

Re: Civil Society groups request revision of the recent United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) Report: “Levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the nuclear accident after the 2011 Great East-Japan Earthquake and tsunami.”

The 2011 Fukushima disaster made UN oversight of the adverse effects of ionizing radiation an issue of utmost global importance. The goals and criteria of oversight should be the protection and promotion of the human right to health and well-being, which encompasses an environment as free from exposure to man-made ionizing radiation as possible. We, the undersigned, urge the 4th Committee to examine critically both the scientific conclusions in the UNSCEAR report and the scientific evidence omitted from the report.

Physicians from 19 national affiliates of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), including Physicians for Social Responsibility (USA) and IPPNW Germany, have authored/issued/published a Critique of the UNSCEAR report which calls into question the presumptions and data used by UNSCEAR, and the consequent interpretations and conclusions. This Critique demonstrates how UNSCEAR systematically underestimates and downplays the health effects of the Fukushima disaster.

We appreciate the significant efforts made by UNSCEAR committee members to evaluate the extensive and complex data concerning the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe. However, their conclusion that there is “no discernable effect”, now or in the future, defies common sense and undermines the credibility of UNSCEAR. The Critique notes that based on the UNSCEAR report itself, it can be expected that about 1,000 excess cases of thyroid cancer and between 4,300 and 16,800 other excess cancer cases would occur in Japan due to Fukushima radioactive fallout. We believe that these are very discernable effects for the individuals, families and communities experiencing these cancers, as well as those individuals who will experience other form(s) of radiation induced illness.

Furthermore, the conclusion by UNSCEAR of 'no discernible health effect' is misleading the Japanese government to not implement countermeasures for individuals to avoid additional exposure and to have thorough monitoring of health effects, thereby causing serious human rights violations.

This catastrophe was not a singular event that has come to an end, but rather it is an unfolding event with an unknown endpoint. Radioactive elements continue to leak into the biosphere and individuals continue to be exposed to ionizing radiation because they live in contaminated areas, consume contaminated food and water and inhale contaminated air. Additionally, most of the health effects from Fukushima will take decades or generations to be expressed. Thus the UNSCEAR report at hand should be considered a preliminary or initial assessment of the health effects of Fukushima. Ongoing and improved monitoring and updating of the assessment is required for a long time to come. The 2014 UNSCEAR report is a beginning, not an end.

We ask that the Fourth Committee take two actions regarding the UNSCEAR report:

1) Return the report to UNSCEAR for revision based on the Critique, taking into consideration the points of concern raised in the Critique, and that UNSCEAR broaden the composition of the committee to include as full-fledged members scientists who are critical of nuclear activities.

2) We also ask that the Fourth Committee urge the General Assembly to pass a new resolution reframing the 1955 UNSCEAR founding mandate to ensure that the UNSCEAR's primary scientific mission is to promote and protect public health and the right to health of the most vulnerable individuals. The Precautionary Principle should be employed to address the short-term and long-term effects of ionizing radiation upon present and future generations as well as the environment. Likewise, the Precautionary Principle should be employed when determining exposure, cleanup and decontamination regulations and activities after a nuclear disaster, educational measures to minimize and mitigate the risk of individual exposure, and the long-term monitoring of contaminated sites. A new UN mandate is critical for UNSCEAR Committee members to be able to fully utilize their expertise for the purpose of protecting the lives and health of the global community.

This request is supported by the following organizations:

Physicians for Social Responsibility, USA

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War – Germany, Germany

Human Rights Now, Tokyo, Japan

Peace Boat – US, USA

Niji to midori no kai, Japan

Greens Fukushima, Japan

Workers' Executive Committee For Anti-nuclear Power Movements, Japan

Kai Fukushima Downwind, Japan

The Nature Conservation of Fukushima, Japan

Friends of the Earth Japan, Japan

Showa Shell Labour Union, Japan

Chernobyl Health Survey and Health-care Support for the Victims – Japan Women's Network, Japan

Nuclear Disaster Information Center, Japan

Japan International Volunteer Center, Japan

Campaign for Nuclear-free Japan, Japan

Fukushima Network for Denuclearization, Japan

Hairo Action Fukushima, Japan

Fukushima Women Against Nukes, Japan

People in Fukushima-NPP 30km area, Japan

Refugee Living with Fukushima in Niigata Prefecture, Japan
Shinshu 3.11 Network, Japan
National Network of Parents to Protect Children from Radiation, Japan
The Civil Forum on Nuclear Radiation Damages (CFNRD), Japan
Takagi School, Japan
AEEFG – Association de l'Education Environnementale pour les Futures Generations, Tunisia
NGO of "Ecolife", Azerbaijan
Women in Europe for a Common Future International, Netherlands
Women in Europe for a Common Future, Germany
Women in Europe for a Common Future, France
Irish Doctors' Environmental Association (IDEA), Ireland
Nuclear Information and Resource Service, USA
Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, USA
Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, New York, USA
Nukewatch/The Progressive Foundation, USA
Nuclear Watch New Mexico, USA
Georgia WAND – Women's Actions for New Directions, USA
Physicians for Social Responsibility – Kansas City, USA
Gray Panthers, USA
Center for Safe Energy, USA
Nuclear Energy Information Service, USA
[Responses to this request may be directed to:
Physicians for Social Responsibility USA
Alfred Meyer, Board Member
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Japan to build nukes in Wales

November 5, 2014

Wales minister says nuclear power remains a good investment

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/11/05/business/wales-minister-says-nuclear-power-remains-good-investment/#.VFtTh8l5B1u>

by Kazuaki Nagata

Staff Writer

While the nation debates the wisdom of restarting its nuclear power plants, the energy source remains central to some nations' investments for tomorrow. The process to construct a new two-reactor facility in Wales has been going as planned, the British province's economy minister said.

There's a confidence that the plant will be delivered, that it will work well, and that it will do good for the local community in terms of employment opportunities," said Edwina Hart, economy minister of the

National Assembly for Wales. She was speaking to The Japan Times last week during a working visit to Japan.

Horizon Nuclear Power, which is wholly owned by Hitachi Ltd., plans to build two advanced boiling water reactors on Anglesey Island.

Known as the Wylfa Newydd project, **the program is currently at the community consultation phase.** This involves soliciting opinions of local residents and authorities.

“People need to understand what things look like, how they look and everything,” said Hart.

“This type of engagement is very important,” she said.

When it comes to safety, prime responsibility lies with the operator. The U.K. government oversees the industry and the role of the Welsh Assembly is to get local companies involved in the supply chain and to provide a skilled workforce, she said.

Horizon says the community consultation is a pre-application process. It plans to submit an application for a development consent order in 2017, with completion and operation of the reactors anticipated in the mid-2020s.

“It’s a very long process. This is the issue. But the point is that it is a process that is proceeding as we would expect,” Hart said.

The firm says construction will create up to 8,500 jobs, while operation of the plant will require 900 to 1,000 new jobs.

Hart also visited Japan last year on a trade mission and tried to encourage Japanese companies to invest in Wales.

It apparently paid off, as she said Friday that Calby Inc., Japan’s biggest snack maker, had picked Wales as the location of its first investment in Europe.

The new facility will be a site for manufacturing and distribution, as well as research and development. Wales hosted 50 Japanese firms as of 2012, including Sony and Toyota.

Another target for Wales is Japanese tourists.

For the past few years, Japanese visitors to the U.K. have numbered 220,000 to 245,000 annually.

They “tend to fly into Heathrow (airport), go into London, nip to the Lake District, the Cotswolds and up to Scotland, and go back down to Heathrow. So, we wanted them to make that journey further west into Wales. We do think there is a market and potential there,” said Hart, adding that she has met people in the travel industry and asked what appeals to Japanese tourists.

She said Wales offers a wide range of attractions, such as gardens, castles and coastal sites.

As for Scotland’s independence referendum in September, Hart said she was watching with interest because “what the Scots do affects all of us in terms of our respected devolution settlements.”

She said opinion polls show there is little support for independence in Wales, but people want to see further powers devolved to Wales from the U.K. government.

For instance, the Welsh government does not have power over railways and energy, she said.

Hart said while the Welsh government supported Scotland’s continued membership of the U.K., the independence movement has triggered discussion of devolution settlements across the U.K.

"Drastic reform" needed

November 6, 2014

As I See It: Total picture needed for future electric power system

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20141106p2a00m0na005000c.html>

Five utilities including Kyushu Electric Power Co. have suspended signing new contracts to buy power generated with renewable energy, such as solar power and wind power, under a system in which major electricity suppliers are required to buy such power at a fixed price. This is because these firms were not fully prepared to accept renewable energy, highlighting the inadequacy of the government's institutional program.

The government, which is now reviewing the system, should proactively and patiently work on drastic reform of the electric power generation and supply system.

The system was launched in July 2012 largely out of reflection of the crisis at the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant that broke out in March 2011. The spread of renewable energy is effective in preventing global warming and power generation using such energy sources has a low risk of accidents. Since businesses that use renewable energy to generate electricity do not have their own power grids, the government requires major power companies to purchase power generated by designated businesses using renewable energy for up to 20 years.

The system is modeled after one in Germany that is an advanced country in terms of the use of renewable energy. However, the five utilities stopped signing new contracts to purchase power generated with renewable energy on the grounds that the amount of such power is likely to exceed their capacity. No wonder the system, which Japan introduced by imitating one in Europe despite power companies not being prepared to accept such power, hit a snag.

To ensure a stable power supply, a demand-supply balance that is perfect must be achieved at all times, according to industry sources. If the supply of power surpasses or dips below demand, it would destabilize the frequency and voltage, which could trigger a power blackout.

However, most renewable energy that utilities are supposed to buy is solar power, which is unstable because the generated amount of such power depends largely on weather conditions. Such being the case, the amount of power could surpass demand on a sunny day, which could cause power outages.

Surplus power should be sold to other utilities that have enough capacity to accept electricity. However, it is technically impossible under the current system. **The capacity of power cables connecting power grids owned by different utilities is limited.** Therefore, solar power and electricity generated with other renewable energy sources cannot be supplied to these cables in principle because the generating amount cannot be predicted. This is because **major power companies have enjoyed regional monopolies and seldom supply surplus power to other firms or receive such electricity from other companies, while the government approved such monopolies.**

The service area of Tokyo Electric Power Co. fell seriously short of power following the Fukushima No. 1 plant accident, highlighting the need for power interchange between electric power companies. The government has finally begun to reform the system and set up an organization that will play a leading role in controlling the power interchange next spring. However, the establishment of a broad power interchange system will come later.

A senior official of the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry admitted that many officials knew that the current system under which power companies are required to buy power generated with renewable energy at a fixed price would be deadlocked sooner or later. **Numerous solar power generation companies were set up one after another for the sole purpose of making profits, contributing to the confusion.**

Three years have already passed since the law regulating the power purchase system came into force. Nevertheless, the government failed to take any action while being aware of problems with the system, nor did it set a numerical target for expanding the use of renewable energy for power generation. **It highlights the irresponsibility of the government while the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is enthusiastic about restarting nuclear power stations.**

The Fukushima Prefectural Government, which regards the spread of renewable energy as the pillar of its disaster recovery efforts, has solicited solar power generation companies to set up power stations in the prefecture. Therefore, an official of the prefectural government expressed concern that the five major utilities' suspension of signing new contracts to purchase renewable energy could adversely affect the prefecture's recovery plans.

Japan lags behind many other countries in the introduction of renewable energy. According to the International Energy Agency, the ratio of renewable energy to the total power generation amount is high among European countries -- 20.9 percent in Germany and 26.4 percent in Spain. The figure comes to 6.2 percent in the United States, but **in Japan it is a mere 2.2 percent. The ratio has doubled from the pre-nuclear disaster period, but still remains low.** Therefore, Japan needs a system under which utilities are required to buy renewable energy at a fixed price.

Japan should learn from European countries' efforts to expand the use of renewable energy. The power grids of European countries are connected with each other by cables with sufficient capacity, allowing these countries to supply surplus electricity generated with renewable energy to others within the region. European countries are introducing a system to predict the amount of power that can be generated with renewable energy based on meteorological observations and a device to automatically limit the amount of power generated with such energy sources if the supply of electricity is likely to reach a surplus.

The costs of establishing such systems pose a challenge. A study group within the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry estimates that it will cost 4 to 6 trillion yen to improve power grids owned by utilities to prevent blackouts if the amount of solar power is increased to 53 million kilowatts -- almost equal to power generated by nuclear plants before the outbreak of the Fukushima crisis -- by 2030. The costs of buying renewable energy are added to utility fees consumers pay. As such, if power grids are reinforced, it will further increase the financial burden on consumers. This is one of the reasons why the government has not reviewed the system under which utilities must buy renewable energy at a fixed price.

However, **power companies are expected to spend a combined amount of over 2 trillion yen on safety measures in preparation to reactivate idled nuclear plants. If utilities are prepared to pay such a huge amount of money, they should trim the financial burden of renewable energy on consumers.**

In the German electric power system, top priority is placed on the use of renewable energy while thermal power is used to make up for fluctuations in generation amounts at power stations using renewable energy.

In contrast, Japan puts priority on nuclear and thermal power while pushing renewable energy to the sidelines. In reviewing the system, it is necessary to rectify Japan's excessive reliance on solar energy among various renewable energy sources. However, efforts to spread renewable energy sources must not be dampened. **The government and the electric power industry should present a total picture of the future of Japan's electric power generation and supply system in which renewable energy will play a key role.**

(By Masahiro Nakai, Tokyo Economic News Department)

November 06, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Sendai restart & uranium prices

November 8, 2014

Uranium mining stocks jump as Japan clears way to reactors restart

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/11/08/business/uranium-mining-stocks-jump-as-japan-clears-way-to-reactors-restart/#.VF-le8l5B1s>

Bloomberg

VANCOUVER – Uranium prices and producers' shares soared after Japan cleared the way for restart of the first of the nuclear reactors shut after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Cameco Corp., Canada's largest uranium producer, increased 11 percent, the biggest gain since August 2010. Denison Mines Corp. climbed 20 percent and explorer Fission Uranium Corp. rose 18 percent in Toronto.

Kyushu Electric Power Co. on Friday received final local approval to resume power generation at its Sendai nuclear plant in Kagoshima Prefecture. All reactors in Japan have been shut since the March 2011 meltdowns crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

"We have been waiting for this moment for a long time," David Sadowski, a Vancouver-based analyst at Raymond James Financial Inc., wrote Friday in a note to clients. "Restarts in Japan will reduce the threat that Japan's utilities will dump their uranium inventories into the market."

Sendai's two reactors are in position to be the first in Japan to resume operations under more stringent safety rules set by the Nuclear Regulation Authority, the industry watchdog. Officials in Satsumasendai, which hosts the Sendai plant, last month voted in favor of allowing restart. Final reviews of construction and safety rules must still be completed.

The Solactive Global Uranium Total Return Index, which tracks 21 companies in the uranium mining industry, rose the most since December 2008. The index is still down 80 percent from its highest closing price in 2011.

The price of U3O8, a tradable form of uranium, rose 4.3 percent to \$39.50 a pound on Friday, the biggest gain since March 2011, data compiled by Bloomberg show. The metal traded as high as \$73 in January 2011.

"We are hearing that several utilities are in the market looking for supply," Sadowski said.

Minamata group says safety takes back seat again

November 9, 2014

Minamata disease group opposes restart of Sendai nuclear plant

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201411090008>

By YASUSHI SAITO/ Staff Writer

MINAMATA, Kumamoto Prefecture--Minamata disease victims and supporters have joined the protest against the restart of nuclear reactors in Kumamoto Prefecture, saying **safety again is taking a back seat in the drive for economic growth.**

“If they miss the danger of nuclear plants because of economic priorities, they have not learned the lessons from Minamata disease,” said Koichiro Matsunaga, who heads the group “Stop restarting nuclear plants Minamata.”

Formed in September by eight members, including three Minamata disease patients, the group plans to collaborate with local organizations to oppose the resumption of operations at the Sendai nuclear power plant in Satsuma-Sendai, Kagoshima Prefecture.

Kagoshima Governor Yuichiro Ito on Nov. 7 approved the plant’s restart, the first such green light under stricter safety standards that were established following the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011.

The city of Minamata is about 40 kilometers from the plant at the shortest distance.

Minamata disease, a sometimes fatal neurological disorder that causes numbness and vision problems, was officially recognized as a health hazard 58 years ago. Caused by consumption of marine products contaminated by mercury discharged into the sea by a chemical factory, **the disease remains a negative symbol of Japan’s period of high economic growth.**

Matsunaga said he sees similarities between the Sendai plant’s restart and Minamata disease.

“While human lives should take priority, the priority has been placed on corporate profits,” Matsunaga said. “(The government) has not learned lessons from Minamata and Fukushima.

Matsunaga, 51, visited Iitate in Fukushima Prefecture in February 2013. Many residents of the mountain village, whose center is about 40 km from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, remain in evacuation because of the high levels of radiation around their homes.

Matsunaga said that when he saw the Iitate village office, the vacant houses in the central area and temporary housing, he thought: “Residents cannot return home even if they wanted to.

“The Fukushima nuclear power plant has been tormenting people who were born and brought up in this village. There is no guarantee that Minamata can avoid the same fate.”

He cited two problems with restarting the reactors at the Sendai plant: inadequate evacuation plans in the event of a disaster and a lack of trust in the government.

Matsunaga noted that the central government said it would take responsibility for the resumption of operations at the nuclear plant.

“But it did not take responsibility for Minamata disease, either,” Matsunaga said.

The mayor of Satsuma-Sendai and the city assembly approved the reactor restarts earlier, on Oct. 28.

Matsunaga’s group urged the Minamata assembly to adopt a written statement opposing the reactor restarts, but the assembly rejected it.

“Despite Minamata disease, a public hazard, economic priorities always come first,” said Kenji Nagamoto, a 55-year-old Minamata disease patient. “I am disappointed we were not understood.”

Minamata city plans to accept 6,645 evacuees from Izumi, Kagoshima Prefecture, if a serious accident occurs at the Sendai nuclear plant.

“With evacuation plans insufficient, to what extent can the central government assure the people’s security?” Matsunaga asked.

Minamata Mayor Hiroshi Nishida on Nov. 8 also expressed concerns about the aftermath of a potential nuclear accident.

“We hope the central government will give a sufficient explanation to eliminate the anxieties of Minamata citizens who will accept evacuees, as well as resolve the problem responsibly and with sincerity,” Nishida said in a statement.

Another Minamata-based group involved in possible evacuation procedures asked the Kagoshima governor in May to oppose the resumption of the plant. The group’s view was not reflected in his decision.

"If a serious accident occurs, Minamata will also be subjected to evacuation," said Takafumi Nagano, head of the group. "I feel angry that Kagoshima Prefecture made the judgment (to resume operations) alone." Nagano also said the central government's assurances cannot be trusted. "Industry minister Yoichi Miyazawa said he will stand at the forefront to assume responsibility. But I cannot believe what he said when containment of the Fukushima plant accident is still not evident," Nagano said. "**They only seem to be rushing to restart** operations of the (Sendai) plant."

Evacuees won't have to pay back compensation

November 11, 2014

TEPCO to refrain from taking legal action over repayment of nuclear compensation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141111p2a00m0na010000c.html>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) has decided it will not take legal action over its desire for the repayment of some compensation paid to evacuees of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant after the Mainichi Shimbun reported on a case of an evacuee who had been asked by the company to pay back some of the compensation she had already received.

TEPCO demanded a 21-year-old woman whose family home was located in a difficult-to-return zone -- an area within 20 kilometers of the nuclear plant -- pay back some 9 million yen because she had moved out of the evacuation zone to go to a college outside of Fukushima Prefecture. The woman was told by the utility in September that her evacuation ended when she moved out of the family home in April 2011 because she had decided to enter a college outside of Fukushima before the disaster.

After the Mainichi Shimbun reported on the story in October, evacuees in a similar situation consulted with the nuclear damage response office of the Natural Resources and Energy Agency that supervises nuclear disaster compensation issues. As a result, the office moved to check with TEPCO on its compensation guidelines.

According to the nuclear damage response office, TEPCO concluded that it will not proceed with cases further when evacuees have already received compensation, that it will not take legal action against evacuees who are subject to requests for compensation repayment and that it will not offset the amount of compensation without the consent of evacuees. TEPCO has notified the woman and other subjects for compensation repayment about the company's decision.

Despite confusion and criticism about its policies, TEPCO is still reluctant to release its in-house compensation guidelines for defining the end of evacuation.

November 11, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Govt releases more post-accident transcripts

November 12, 2014

More post-nuclear accident interviews released

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141112_40.html

Nov. 12, 2014 - Updated 13:19 UTC+1

Japan's government has released more transcripts of interviews with people connected to the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The government on Wednesday disclosed interviews with 56 of 772 government and Tokyo Electric Power Company officials. The transcripts follow 19 testimonies published in September.

Among the newly released interviews is one with Manabu Terata, an advisor to then-Prime Minister Naoto Kan.

Terata recalled the day after the accident, when he visited the troubled plant with Kan.

Terata said he believed that Kan felt compelled to talk in person with the people working at the site.

Terata said he thought this action was in keeping with the prime minister's character. But Terata noted he was also worried about what impact Kan's visit would have during the unprecedented disaster.

He added he would be lying if he said he wasn't afraid at the time.

Terata also said Japan had placed too much faith in the safety of its nuclear power plants. He said the country surely knew about the dangers of nuclear power but paid far less heed to the risks than other countries.

The interviews released in September included those with former plant manager Masao Yoshida and former Prime Minister Kan.

Asahi will return to basic principles of journalism

November 13, 2014

Asahi will return to basic principle of news reporting

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201411130039

By YOICHI NISHIMURA/ Executive Editor, The Asahi Shimbun

The Press and Human Rights Committee (PRC) has issued a report that said regarding Asahi Shimbun coverage "there were deficiencies in using imagination to think about the perspective of readers as well as in the stance of seeking fair and accurate reporting." That is a serious point that goes to the fundamentals of a media organization.

We are keenly aware of the responsibility we must bear for causing serious errors.

The Asahi Shimbun sincerely accepts those views, and I would like to extend my deepest apology once again to everyone, beginning with those who were and are working at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which is operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co.

Coverage of the "Yoshida testimony" was conducted as part of our investigative reporting efforts. The main focus was to transmit just how difficult it was to respond to a severe accident at a nuclear plant. However, the first article in that coverage had at its core that "90 percent of workers withdrew in violation of the plant manager's order." For that reason, a mistaken perception was spread both in Japan and abroad.

Accurate and fair articles are the lifeline of news reporting. We cannot make a new departure without acknowledging an error as an error.

That is the thinking behind our decision made on Sept. 11 to retract the articles and to publish today the full text of the views of the PRC.

We can only close in on the truth by humbly facing the facts and accumulating those facts one by one. Facts must be separated from commentary, and imagination must be utilized in thinking about how our readers and those who are the subject of our news-gathering will feel.

We are now in the process of making efforts to deliver articles on a daily basis by returning once again to that basic principle of news-gathering and reporting.

The PRC pointed out that although many doubts were raised about the headlines and contents of the articles from within the Asahi, no revisions were made. That deficiency in sharing of information should never have occurred.

We will strive for thoroughness in mutual criticism and checking so that various voices from within the Asahi can be transmitted to those involved in the editing process.

The PRC also pointed to a misplaced sense of overconfidence as well as a lack of humility. It also touched upon the Asahi's nature to not reflect on the opinions, criticism and doubts from people outside the company as well as a lack of awareness about crisis management within the upper echelons of the company regarding the response after the matter came to light.

We have already begun various measures, such as dialogue meetings with our readers. After also considering the forthcoming results of the examination by another third-party committee into such issues as the Asahi coverage of the "comfort women" issue and the decision to hold off publication of a column by the journalist Akira Ikegami, we would like to compile as soon as possible a rehabilitation plan for the Asahi while carefully listening to the voices of those outside the company and creating a structure that will make use of such voices in producing our newspaper.

The report from the PRC valued the Asahi's obtaining the Yoshida testimony and calling for the central government to release the results of the questioning as well as shedding light on the problems that existed in dealing with the accident.

At the same time, we also received a proposal about investigative reporting that suggests it should move in a direction in which it is conducted "in a more systematic manner." **We are resolved to further strengthen our investigative reporting, which is an essential role of journalism, in order to dig up hidden facts through our independent news-gathering without relying on announcements by the authorities.**

Investigative reporting will not be possible without the trust in the Asahi by all of you. I pledge that all Asahi employees will make every effort to regain that trust.

By YOICHI NISHIMURA/ Executive Editor, The Asahi Shimbun

Panel finds Asahi report on Fukushima plant as having 'major errors'

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141113p2g00m0dm038000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- A panel appointed by The Asahi Shimbun to review its reporting concluded on Wednesday that the newspaper's May scoop on testimony by the late chief of the disaster-hit Fukushima nuclear plant contained "major errors," endorsing the daily's retraction of the report earlier.

The major Japanese daily issued an apology to workers of Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima Daiichi power plant in Fukushima Prefecture and other people, and said it will take disciplinary action against those responsible for the report within this month.

Based on the then classified testimony by Masao Yoshida, who was heading the plant when the six-reactor facility was crippled by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, the newspaper reported in a May 20 scoop that 90 percent of workers had withdrawn from the damaged plant by violating his order for them to stay put.

But on Sept. 11, the newspaper retracted the report after concluding that it misinterpreted the plant chief's testimony, which had been compiled for a government panel examining the Fukushima meltdowns, noting that the testimony showed Yoshida had not seen the workers' action as a violation of his order. The daily's Press and Human Rights Committee, consisting of a university professor, a former Supreme Court justice and a former executive of public broadcaster NHK, said "no fact existed to make the evaluation that workers were 'violating plant manager order'" and that no news gathering was pursued to corroborate such an evaluation.

The panel criticized the report for lacking Yoshida's comment in the same testimony that he had felt after all that the workers were right about deciding to move to another nuclear power plant nearby that had escaped severe damage.

The omission amounted to a failure on the part of the newspaper, whose mission is to provide readers with fair and accurate information, it said.

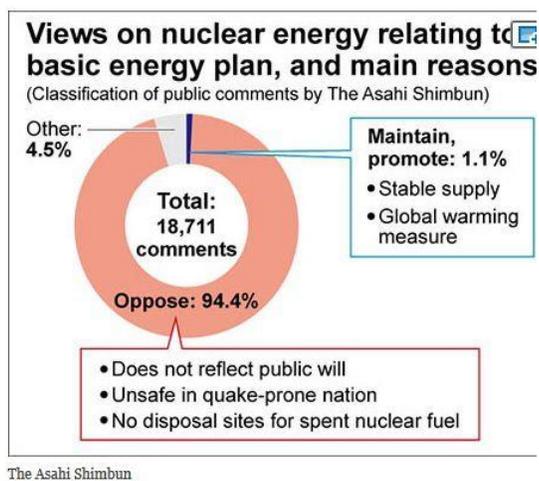
The panel also said the report contained a conjecture by the writer who wrote it, and that only two reporters had read the testimony just before the report was published.

As to the newspaper's failure to respond to growing criticism and questions raised about the report in the following weeks and months, the panel said a "lack of a sense of crisis" led to no proper or immediate response and resulted in a loss of trust in the newspaper.

Tadakazu Kimura, president of The Asahi Shimbun, suggested at a press conference in September that he would resign from the post to take responsibility for the scandal. He has since indicated that he would announce his resignation in the middle of this month.

Yoshida's 400-page testimony was reflected in the final panel report compiled in July 2012 along with testimonies from more than 770 others. Yoshida died of esophageal cancer in July 2013 at age 58.

Listening to the public?



November 12, 2014

Energy plan overlooked flat-out opposition to nuclear power, analysis shows

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201411120044>

By ATSUSHI KOMORI/ Senior Staff Writer

The government's compilation of its basic energy plan ignored an overwhelming call from the public to move away from nuclear energy, according to an analysis by The Asahi Shimbun.

More than 90 percent of the comments submitted to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry in response to the government's proposed plan were against nuclear power, the analysis showed.

Yet nuclear energy was described as an "important base-load electricity source" in the plan approved by the Abe Cabinet in April.

The Asahi received a total of 18,711 comments from the ministry after submitting an information disclosure request.

Among them, 17,665, or 94.4 percent of the total, expressed opposition to restarting operations at nuclear power plants or called for decommissioning them.

Only 213 comments, or 1.1 percent, were in favor of maintaining or further promoting nuclear energy.

In about 833 cases, or 4.5 percent, it was difficult to judge what position was being taken. These comments were classified as "other."

Among the comments calling for a move away from nuclear power generation, the major reasons were "the draft (of the plan) does not reflect the public will," and "there are no disposal sites for spent nuclear fuel."

Among the comments in favor of nuclear energy, the main reasons given were the need for a stable electricity supply and the need for nuclear energy to deal with global warming.

The ministry disclosed 2,109 of the comments in May, with the remainder made available to the Asahi.

The industry ministry presented its draft of the energy plan on Dec. 6, 2013. Over the next month, it received public comments through fax or e-mail.

In February 2014, the ministry disclosed the main opinions it collected but did not classify them according to whether they were in favor of or opposed to nuclear energy.

Explaining why such a classification was not made, one ministry official said: "The opinion of an organization and that of an individual count as one comment. So we organized (the comments) not based on numbers but rather on their content."

Understandably, it may be difficult to compile an accurate count of the opinions because the names attached to the comments were deleted for privacy reasons. Some individuals apparently sent in the same comment more than once. Several dozen faxes had similar wording in an opinion calling for a move away from nuclear power generation.

In 2012, when the Democratic Party of Japan held the reins of government, it called for a national debate on what rate of power generation nuclear energy should account for in 2030.

About 89,000 public comments were received, with about 90 percent of them in favor of a move away from nuclear energy.

Bus companies' battle for compensation

November 15, 2014

Bus companies face uphill battle over nuclear disaster compensation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141115p2a00m0na006000c.html>

A group of charter bus companies must submit documentary proof for each cancellation attributed to the Fukushima nuclear crisis to receive compensation for profits lost due to the disaster, the companies have been told by the nuclear damage claim dispute resolution center.

Sixteen charter bus companies in Tokyo and Kanagawa Prefecture filed an out-of-court alternative dispute resolution (ADR) claim with the government-backed dispute resolution center. Each of the companies received numerous reservation cancellations following the March 2011 Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdowns, with some seeing their profits plunge more than 50 percent.

The companies submitted the group compensation claim in October 2012. Their claim compared operating profits for a one-year period following the nuclear accident against the average profit for the several years prior -- demanding the difference between the two figures.

During the first scheduled hearing in December 2012, the mediating lawyer from the center who was responsible for drawing up the settlement proposal told the bus companies that they had to submit documents specifying how they knew that the nuclear accident had been the reason for each individual reservation cancellation. One of the 16 companies succeeded in preparing the documentation as it had asked their clients the reason for each cancellation, but the other 15 were unable to comply with this requirement.

The bus companies emphasized that the demand for them to prepare such documentation was "too severe." Meanwhile, the center pressured the 15 firms on numerous occasions to drop their compensation claim.

During a subsequent meeting held in December 2013, the center produced a settlement proposal for the single firm that had complied with the documentation requirement, while telling the other 15 companies that they were being dropped from any further negotiations.

Calling the decision unjust, two of the bus companies have resubmitted their claim -- while several other firms among the 15 are presently preparing to do likewise.

According to the guidelines for the scope and amount of compensation that were established by the Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation, which oversees the center, there are only 10 prefectures nationwide -- including Fukushima Prefecture -- where companies in the tourist industry are eligible for compensation for domestic reservation cancellations.

In the 10 designated prefectures, the guidelines specify that it is sufficient to submit documentation such as financial statements that prove a discrepancy in total sales before and after the nuclear disaster.

Compensation would then be calculated based on consideration of past profits.

Apparently because the 16 companies submitting the group compensation claim are not based in the 10 designated prefectures, however, they were required to submit additional documentation.

Center representatives declined a request for an interview, saying that they were "unable to discuss individual cases."

One major bus company reported that reservation cancellations numbered around 10,000 in 2011 alone. A company insider commented, "It was not appropriate for us to be asking our clients (at that time) whether or not the nuclear accident was the reason for the cancellations." The firm added that the center's attitude in requiring the companies to submit the additional documentation was "exceedingly cruel."

"Many bus companies are not on an equal footing with tour companies," commented Isamu Mitsuhashi, president of the Japan Academic Society of Tourism and professor of tourism at Shumei University.

"Particularly in the case of small bus companies, determining the reason for reservation cancellations would be a difficult undertaking.

"What the center is asking these companies to do is not realistic," Professor Mitsuhashi added. "Tourist-related firms are the first to suffer the impact of disasters. The center should take the situation of these companies into serious consideration when processing their claims."

November 15, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Taxing offline reactors?

November 14, 2014

Shimane Prefecture to tax idled nuclear reactors

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/11/14/national/shimane-prefecture-to-tax-idled-nuclear-reactors/#.VGct3Ml5B1s>

JJI

MATSUE, SHIMANE PREF. – The Shimane Prefectural Government said Friday that it plans to introduce a new tax on nuclear reactors based on their output capacities.

Revenue from the tax is estimated to total ¥3 billion for five years from next April, regardless of whether the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at Chugoku Electric Power Co.'s Shimane nuclear power station remain offline, according to the prefectural government.

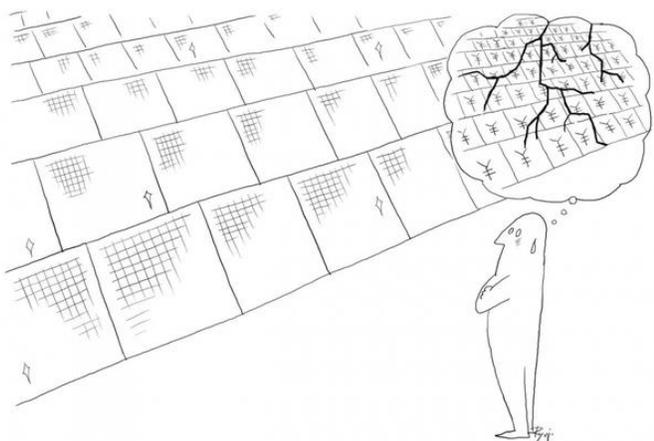
Since both reactors were halted in fiscal 2011, the prefecture has had no revenue from the existing nuclear fuel tax that is imposed at a rate of 13 percent on the value of nuclear fuel used in the reactors.

The Shimane government will submit to the prefectural assembly an ordinance proposal later this month that calls for lowering the fuel tax rate to 8.5 percent while collecting a tax of ¥41,100 per kilowatt in reactor capacity every three months.

As the new tax is roughly equal to an 8.5 percent nuclear fuel tax, the effective tax rate on the reactors will rise to 17 percent, prefectural officials said.

Using revenue from the new tax, the prefectural government is considering creating a new subsidy program for nuclear disaster response covering the city of Matsue, which hosts the Shimane nuclear plant, and three other municipalities within 30 kilometers of the plant.

Japan & green energy



A losing bet on green energy

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/11/25/commentary/japan-commentary/a-losing-bet-on-green-energy/#.VHSXIM15B1s>

“What if our company goes bankrupt?” shouted an official of a company seeking to generate electric power with solar photovoltaics at a meeting on Oct. 3 at which Kyushu Electric Power Co. explained its decision to suspend receiving applications for sale of electricity from renewable energy sources to the power firm. Under a scheme known as feed-in tariffs (FIT) that the government instituted in 2011, power utilities are required to purchase at fixed prices electric power generated by other entities by using renewable energy sources. But the scheme has proved to be unworkable as Kyushu Electric’s action was followed by Tohoku, Shikoku, Okinawa and Hokkaido Electric Power companies.

The utilities’ actions have dealt a serious blow to entities planning to build solar power generating facilities and manufacturers of solar panels. Moreover, entities that have already entered into contract with the utilities for green power sales also fear that the deals might prove unworkable.

When the Diet passed the law to create the FIT scheme, the lawmakers failed to learn from the experiences of Germany, where a similar scheme introduced earlier only was causing heavy burdens on both households and businesses. The most ardent proponent of FIT at the time was then Prime Minister Naoto Kan, who was so enthused about spread of green energy that he made the Diet’s passage of the FIT legislation a condition for his resignation.

The current trouble “could have been prevented even after the introduction of the system, had the purchase prices of electricity generated through renewable energy sources been kept at reasonable levels,” comments a newspaper reporter who specializes in energy issues.

Kazuhiro Ueta, a Kyoto University economics professor who argues that Japan should free itself from nuclear power and that a broader use of renewable energy sources is key to solving energy problems, served as head of a committee responsible for determining the prices and duration for the purchase by power companies of electricity generated through renewable energy sources. Ueta set the purchase price for electricity from solar panels at ¥42 per kilowatt hour for the initial year of 2012. He contended that by 2030, electricity coming from renewable energy sources should account for 20 percent of the nation’s total electricity. But that price was very high compared with the ¥30 per kilowatt hour that was being contemplated by those who were thinking of entering into the solar power generating business. The high purchase price quickly caused bubbles of solar panel installation plans.

Ueta insisted that Japan can’t hope to attain a broad use of green energy unless suppliers of such energy are given favorable treatment for the first three years. He said that this would not place a financial burden on citizens because the purchase price will be lowered commensurate with technological progress. His words now sound like a joke as the scheme has hit a snag halfway through the third year of its existence.

During the past two years, the per kilowatt-hour purchase price of electricity from solar panels was lowered to ¥36 and further to ¥32. But the utilities were flooded with applications from those seeking to sell them electricity from solar panels since the prices of solar panels also fell. As of April, there were solar power facilities with a combined capacity of 71 million kilowatts nationwide. This staggering number came as a surprise even for a high official of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which is in charge of the FIT system.

The sudden action on the part of the utilities to suspend acceptance of power-sale applications under FIT has hit the market hard. A company in Miyagi Prefecture had bought property adjacent to its stocking yard in preparation for building a giant solar power generating facility. Its executive says, “We bought the land

because we thought that it would have been cheaper than paying rents for the next 20 years. But our project has come to naught.”

In Kyushu, there was a boom of building houses equipped with solar panels that can generate more than 10 kilowatts — the upper limit for ordinary households. Their major selling point was that excess power generated by the panels could be sold to Kyushu Electric Power, thus generating money to pay back housing loans. Following the utility’s change of course, many troubles are said to have surfaced with customers’ refusal to accept such houses or demand for canceling the contracts.

An example of a large corporation hard hit by the latest change on the part of the power utilities is found in Sanix, Inc., whose stock is listed on the First Section of the Tokyo Stock Exchange. The main line of business for this Fukuoka-based company is termite extermination. Participation in the FIT scheme was to serve as a shot in the arm for Sanix, whose balance sheets had remained in the red for nine consecutive years before returning to black in March 2012. In the 12 months through last March, the company reported a record ¥84.2 billion in sales and an operating profit of ¥4.5 billion.

But Sanix started facing financial problems after Kyushu Electric Power stopped receiving new applications for electricity sales under the FIT scheme. Sanix is said to have been forced to ask banks for new loans and have fallen into arrears in its payments to other companies, while its stock price, which exceeded ¥1,600 in May, has fallen to a third of that level. Sanix has thus been pushed into an inferno as the banks that know its past history are reluctant to provide new loans, according to an official of a business research company.

Those who made exorbitant profits in the bubbles created by the FIT scheme were not limited to corporations selling and installing solar panels. Leasing companies made contracts for solar panels throughout the country to the point of forming a bubble.

But should a company like Sanix falter, disasters would fall on those leasing companies because they can only claim ownership of the solar power generating facilities. If the landowners of the property on which such facilities were installed demand that the land be returned to its original condition, leasing companies would have no other choice but to dispose of the facilities.

In the case of solar panels with an expected power-sale period of 20 years, many of the leasing contracts were made valid for an unusually long period of 15 years on the assumption that the purchase by power companies of electricity generated by the solar panels is guaranteed and that the market values of the panels are unlikely to depreciate much.

But with the recent change of attitude by the utilities, there has emerged an oversupply of solar panels on the market. There is also a risk of the market values of the panels being pushed down further because no one has confirmed that they will last 20 years.

Uncertainties confronting leasing companies have been aggravated as they themselves have started entering into the solar power generation business on their own. A high-ranking official of a major leasing firm says that Orix Corp., the leader in the leasing business, has committed to solar power projects in a scale exceeding ¥200 billion while other major leasing firms each have committed in a scale of about ¥100 billion. Although an official in charge of credit control of a certain leasing company warned about the risk, the top management did not listen.

A high-ranking executive of a leading leasing company has been quoted as saying at a board meeting, “We will no longer be here when any problem arises.” His statement is irresponsible but he apparently does not notice the imminent dangers.

The about-face by the utilities has shocked many of those who jumped at the solar power business. And there is no prospect at all for the situation to turn better.

This is an abridged translation of an article from the November issue of Sentaku, a monthly magazine covering political, social and economic issues.

Antinuclear candidates wanted!

November 23, 2014

LDP incumbents look to have electoral lock on nation's nuclear heartland

Staff Writer

OSAKA – Political decisions over the fate of Fukui's aging reactors have long been in the hands of powerful pro-nuclear Diet members who represent the prefecture.

The Dec. 14 poll is not expected to change that, although it will be the first in which only two Fukui Lower House members are up for re-election. The loss of one seat stems from electoral district reforms that went into effect last year. Currently, the prefecture has three districts.

The No. 1 district, which mostly encompasses the city of Fukui in the north of the prefecture, is represented by Tomomi Inada, a right-wing Liberal Democratic Party policy chief and close ideological confidant of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

The No. 2 district includes the inland town of Ono on the eastern flank of the prefecture, as well as municipalities just north of the city of Fukui on the border with Ishikawa. It's represented by Taku Yamamoto, also of the LDP and the husband of internal affairs minister Sanae Takaichi, another close right-wing Abe confidant.

Fukui No. 3 is the nuclear power district. It includes the towns of Tsuruga, home to two reactors, one of which is 44 years old; Mihama, which hosts three reactors, two of them over 40 years old; Oi, where there are four reactors, two in excess of 35 years old; and Akahama, two of whose four reactors are, or soon will be, 40 years old. The No. 3 district is represented by the LDP's Tsuyoshi Takagi, who appears to be less of an ideologue than Inada, although he once lent his support to a film denying the occurrence of the Rape of Nanking.

But more importantly for local pro-nuclear voters and Kansai Electric Power Co., which operates the above reactors, Takagi has always been a fierce supporter of atomic energy and played an influential Diet role in getting two of the Oi reactors restarted in 2012 despite nationwide opposition. Those units were shut down for inspection last year.

For the coming election, however, Fukui will have only two districts. The first is a nonnuclear zone, incorporating the city of Fukui and the towns in the north. The other covers the middle and southern part of the prefecture, where all of the nuclear plants are located, near the borders of Shiga and Kyoto prefectures.

The LDP has been weighing a plan to field Inada in the first district, Takagi in the second, and Yamamoto as a proportional representation candidate. As of late last week, discussions were ongoing.

At the moment, none of the opposition parties has announced any candidates. In the 2012 Lower House election, Takagi won the No. 3 district by nearly 50,000 votes against his Democratic Party of Japan rival, who ran on a mildly anti-nuclear platform. How Takagi will fare under the revised districts is uncertain.

But unless strong anti-nuclear candidates emerge in the coming days, it appears Takagi, Inada and Yamamoto will continue to represent Fukui in Diet deliberations over the prefecture's old atomic plants for years to come.

Don't forget state secrets law

November 26, 2014

Don't forget secrecy law, reactor restarts, DPJ's Kaieda urges voters

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/11/26/national/politics-diplomacy/dont-forget-secrecy-law-reactor-restarts-dpjs-kaieda-urges-voters/#.VHX2Lcl5Cot>

Jiji

Banri Kaieda, head of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan, is determined to prevent the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and its coalition partner, Komeito, from returning to the Lower House with a combined majority.

"I want voters to judge from what (Prime Minister Shinzo) Abe and his LDP have done for the two years since they returned to power," Kaieda said in an interview on Tuesday.

The government's economic policies, dubbed "Abenomics," will be a big campaign issue. But Kaieda said **voters should also cast judgment on the state secrecy law** and the Cabinet's decision to allow Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defense.

Furthermore, he said, **the Abe administration has been promoting energy policies including a reliance on nuclear power "as if nothing happened on March 11, 2011."** That was the date of the magnitude-9.0 earthquake and tsunami which triggered the triple meltdown at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 power plant, a nuclear disaster which is still resonating 3½ years later.

On the economic front, the opposition leader said that unlike Abenomics his party focuses on middle-income people, reinforcing nursing and medical services and stepping up support for small- and medium-sized businesses in order to achieve growth in the medium to long term.

On the issue of collective self-defense, Kaieda said the DPJ wants to keep national security exclusively defensive.

"We will never allow Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defense as envisaged by Abe, because cases cited by Abe where the Self-Defense Forces can fight for another country indicate the possibility of the scope of self-defense expanding limitlessly," he said.

Kaieda offered the view that there could be a realignment of opposition forces after the Dec. 14 poll, saying the Diet should be divided by two political forces: one led by the LDP and the other by the DPJ. But he also said his party will not pursue consolidating the opposition camp right after the poll.

Kaieda said the DPJ has so far reduced the number of candidates it will field in the Lower House election to between 170 and 180, because the party wants to leave room for election cooperation with other parties.

Pass on the cost of decommissioning

November 27, 2014

Gov't eyes system for power firms to tack reactor decommissioning costs to power bills

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141127p2a00m0na014000c.html>

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has started to consider introducing a system in which major power companies can tack costs of decommissioning their nuclear reactors onto power bills for consumers even after the full liberalization of electricity retailing fees scheduled for 2018 to 2020, it has been learned.

An idea has emerged that major power companies pass the costs of decommissioning their nuclear reactors onto the usage fees for those companies that are to transmit and distribute electricity produced by the utilities to households and business establishments after the power generation business is separated from power transmission and distribution operations. The industry ministry intends to pave the way for the major utilities to decommission their nuclear reactors early by letting them recover decommissioning expenses without being affected by price competition that is expected to emerge after the deregulation of the electric power industry.

The major power companies that have nuclear plants have been posting the costs of decommissioning their reactors every fiscal year in installments and tacking the costs onto power bills. In July 2013, the government decided to limit the life of nuclear reactors to 40 years in principle. Thus, the power companies, which had planned to operate their reactors beyond 40 years, are forced to decommission their ageing reactors earlier than planned and move up the schedule for posting the decommissioning costs. Under such circumstances, the power companies could incur huge losses.

The industry ministry estimates that if seven reactors are decommissioned in July 2016 after 40 years in operation, there will be a loss of about 21 billion yen for each reactor. Those power companies, whose finances are deteriorating due to a delay in restarting their reactors, are cautious about posting huge losses, raising concerns that the decommissioning of reactors might not go smoothly. For this reason, the ministry plans to allow the power companies to post costs of nuclear facilities, including decommissioning expenses, in installments over multiple business years so as to prevent their finances from deteriorating quickly.

The ministry is rushing to consider a new system because electricity fees will be fully liberalized around 2018 to 2020 and the current rate system in which power companies are allowed to tack decommissioning costs onto utility bills will be scrapped accordingly. If decommissioning costs are to be tacked onto power bills only from major utility companies after the full liberalization of the electricity retailing market in 2016, emerging start-up electricity retail companies will have advantages in setting electricity fees. If that is the case, the major power companies will lose their customers, making it difficult for them to recover decommissioning costs. The industry ministry will help the major power companies to decommission their reactors as originally planned by resolving such concerns.

November 27, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Will nuclear emergencies be classified?

November 28, 2014

Concerns simmer over access to nuclear info as enforcement of secrets law nears

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141128p2a00m0na016000c.html>

On March 25, 2011, two weeks after the Great East Japan Earthquake and the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis, a senior government official showed Minamisoma Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai a map. "I'd never seen anything like it," Sakurai says, adding that he still remembers how shocked and angry he became as the information hit him. It was a map of radiation levels around the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. And though he was responsible for the safety of a city just up the coast from the power station, it was the first time he'd been told that the neighboring town of Namie and village of Iitate -- both at least partially outside the 30-kilometer evacuation zone around the plant -- were badly contaminated. The southern section of Minamisoma was inside the zone, and many residents there had evacuated -- some of them to areas this bureaucrat was now telling him were highly radioactive.

"Vital information like this needs to be given to the people who live here," Sakurai snapped at the official. The March 2011 earthquake and consequent nuclear disaster were, for Japan, part of the same emergency. When the triple earthquake-tsunami-meltdown disaster struck, the Japanese government deployed over 100,000 Self-Defense Forces personnel, while the United States also came to the rescue with a fleet of about 20 U.S. Navy vessels (including an aircraft carrier), some 160 aircraft and more than 20,000 troops in the massive Operation Tomodachi. This vast mobilization got help to most of the disaster survivors. The Japanese government shared data on radiation distribution from its System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information (SPEEDI) with the U.S. military on March 14, three days after the triple-meltdown at the Fukushima plant. **The data, however, was kept from the Japanese people until March 23**, inviting a storm of criticism that the government had needlessly exposed people to radiation. On Dec. 10, four days before the House of Representatives election, the special state secrets protection law will go into effect. The law prescribes a prison term of up to 10 years for those who spill designated secrets in four categories: defense, diplomacy, counterespionage, and counterterrorism.

In fact, none of Japan's political parties -- including the largest ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) -- had ever publicly promised to implement a secrets law in the past. The idea initially popped up during Shinzo Abe's first term as prime minister in 2007. That year, Japan and the U.S. signed an intelligence-sharing pact, and Japan effectively promised its powerful ally that it would prepare a law to protect secret information.

A secrets bill remained under consideration during the subsequent Fukuda and Aso administrations, and was interrupted by the 2009 election that brought the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) to power. The Cabinet of the last DPJ Prime Minister Yasuhiko Noda began preparing a bill, but it never reached the Diet. In 2012 came the second Abe Cabinet, which set to work on a bill that was submitted to the Diet in October 2013.

During the intense debate on the special state secrets bill, discussion turned to what effect it would have on nuclear power. Masako Mori, the minister in charge of shepherding the legislation into law, and other government figures stressed that information on nuclear disasters would not be classified as state secrets by any means. **Nuclear reactors, however, could be a terrorist target, and as such, there's no guarantee that information about nuclear plants vital to the safety of the Japanese people won't be classified.**

The fact is the government quickly ended up lagging behind events in the Fukushima nuclear disaster, and both Fukushima's prefectural and municipal leaders and many of their citizens are deeply distrustful of the special states secrets law. The Fukushima Prefectural Assembly voted unanimously in October last year to submit a letter to the national government demanding the bill be handled carefully. At a public hearing on the bill held by the House of Representatives in the city of Fukushima in November last year, all five locals who spoke said they were worried about it.

One of those five was Tamotsu Baba, mayor of Namie, who said, "The main principle here is not the protection of secrets, but the release of information" to the people. At a public address a short time earlier, Baba had stated that SPEEDI and other information "was hidden from us. They (the central government) told us that they didn't know how accurate the information was, and that they kept it under wraps to prevent a panic. Well, human lives are far more important than all that. This is a basic issue that comes even before any discussion about whether such information would be classified secret" under the new law.

Just a day after the public hearing in Fukushima, the special state secrets protection bill was railroaded through the special lower house committee considering it, and then whisked through the House of Councillors after only a week of debate.

The Act on Access to Information Held by Administrative Organs, which governs the release of government documents to the public, came into force in 2001. In 2011, the then DPJ-led administration submitted revisions to this act to the Diet that would reduce the discretion that government organs had over what to release and what to keep locked up; make access to documents free of charge; and effectively shorten the waiting period for information access requests to three weeks. The bill, however, died before it could become law.

On the possibility that information on nuclear accidents and "nuclear emergencies" could be kept secret, Sakurai says, "I'm worried about that. We'd be in trouble if that ever happened."

November 28, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Baverstock on UNSCEAR report: does not qualify as "scientific"

December 1, 2014

British researcher blasts U.N. report on Fukushima cancer risk as unscientific

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201412010036>

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

A British scientist who studied the health effects of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster panned a United Nations report that virtually dismissed the possibility of higher cancer rates caused by the 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis.

Keith Baverstock, 73, made the comments during a visit to Tokyo at the invitation of a citizens group related to the Fukushima disaster.

In response to questions from The Asahi Shimbun, Baverstock said a report released in April by the U.N. Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) was "not qualified to be called 'scientific'" because it **lacked transparency and independent verification**. He added that the committee should be disbanded.

The U.N. report said any increase in overall cancer rates among residents of Fukushima Prefecture due to fallout from the accident was unlikely.

However, Baverstock, former head of the radiation-protection program at the World Health Organization's Regional Office for Europe, said **radiation levels shown in the report were enough to cause a spike in cancer rates.**

For example, the report said nearly 10,000 workers at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant were exposed to radiation levels exceeding 10 millisieverts over about 18 months following the outbreak of the crisis in March 2011.

Baverstock said such an exposure level was enough to cause an increase in cancer among about 50 of the workers.

After studying the health effects from the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, Baverstock was the first to point out an increase in thyroid cancer among residents of areas hit by radioactive fallout.

He also questioned UNSCEAR's neutrality, given that members are nominated by nations that have a vested interest in nuclear power. He noted that such nations provide funds to the committee.

Baverstock also suggested a conflict of interest, as committee members are not required to disclose their history working in the nuclear industry or sign pledges stating that no conflict of interest exists in evaluating radiation risks.

Baverstock said that when he was working for the WHO, he felt constant pressure from the International Atomic Energy Agency, a major promoter of nuclear power. He also questioned why it took more than three years for UNSCEAR to release its Fukushima report.

Referring to what he called inside information, Baverstock raised the possibility that the delay was caused by criticism about the report's conclusion and the influence of other U.N. agencies, such as the IAEA.

Nuclear Hotseat

November 21, 2014

NUCLEAR HOTSEAT

<http://www.nuclearhotseat.com/2200/> (last 2/3 of the programme)

INTERVIEW:

Arnie Gundersen of Fairewinds Energy Education (Fairewinds.com), Nuclear Hotseat's favorite nuclear engineer, gives a concise, clear interpretation of **what's behind TEPCO's recent announcements** regarding water radiation levels, the removal of fuel rods from the fuel pool at Unit 4, and the hole in the roof of Unit 1; **manipulation of Japanese doctors** to eliminate evidence of radiation-related diseases in Fukushima's survivors; and **an elegantly brilliant way to deprive the nuclear industry of its peak energy profits,** thus hastening its demise.

Tanigaki: Nuke restart "necessary"

December 2, 2014

LDP bigwig Tanigaki stresses benefits of 'Abenomics,' says nuke power 'necessary'

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141202p2a00m0na030000c.html>

The 12-day campaign period for the Dec. 14 House of Representatives election has officially kicked off.

The Mainichi Shimbun recently talked to leaders of Japan's political parties on their basic policies and will

carry a series of special articles based on their interviews during the campaign period. Below is an outline of comments from ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Secretary-General Sadakazu Tanigaki.

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Our party has been pushing Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's key economic policies, dubbed "Abenomics," to stop decade-long deflation and create a positive growth cycle. Since the LDP returned to power, jobs have been created for some 1 million people. The ratio of job offers to job seekers has improved in all 47 prefectures of the country, and the average wage growth topped 2 percent at annual labor-management negotiations this past spring. Many companies have enjoyed record-high profits. We are promoting Abenomics as the only way towards economic recovery.

Some say this election does not have a cause, but Prime Minister Abe decided to postpone the sales tax increase from the current 8 percent to 10 percent, which would have a significant impact on Japan's economy and fiscal policies. Therefore, it's right for a prime minister to seek consent from the public as policies will not be carried out as planned. I take this matter very personally as I was the LDP president at the time of the three-party agreement among the LDP, Komeito and Democratic Party of Japan on the tax hike.

Stable supply of energy is also an important issue. We have to mull over what would be the "best mix" (of power sources). We have not changed our goal to reduce Japan's dependence on nuclear power while seeking the possibility of renewable energy, but such a goal cannot be achieved right away. **It is necessary to restart nuclear power plants that have passed safety checkups while we work to win support from local residents.**

On national security, our predecessors had paid special attention not to be a threat to neighboring nations since the end of the war. Some countries, however, want Japan to do what is possible to protect regional peace and security. We look to establish a seamless security system while reinterpreting the Constitution to exercise the right to collective self-defense.

Voters tell us they want a stable government. Winning a combined majority (with Komeito) is a must; the challenge is how to win additional seats. Our goal is to have all LDP official candidates and party-backed candidates to win seats. (Interview by Tetsuya Kageyama, Political News Department)

December 02, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

100th year of power transfer between Fukushima and Tokyo

December 3, 2014

Power lines connecting Fukushima and Tokyo mark centennial

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201412030053

By TOSHIHIDE UEDA/ Senior Staff Writer

AIZU-WAKAMATSU, Fukushima Prefecture--With over 300 transmission towers originally erected still in use, the direct transfer of electric power generated in Fukushima Prefecture to Tokyo entered its 100th year of operation on Dec. 3.

The power lines, known as the Inawashiro Kyu-Kansen (old main line of Inawashiro), were built in 1914 by Inawashiro Suiryoku Denki (Inawashiro hydropower), an electric power company that operated during the Meiji (1868-1912) and Taisho (1912-1926) eras.

The utility built the power lines after it established the Inawashiro No. 1 power plant, a hydroelectricity station in Aizu-wakamatsu, Fukushima Prefecture, just north of Lake Inawashiroko. The lines sent electricity generated at the power plant to the Tabata substation in northern Tokyo.

According to Tokyo Electric Power Co., which acquired the Inawashiro Kyu-Kansen after World War II, the entire route connecting the power plant and the substation extended for 225 kilometers and transmitted a total of 115,000 volts, which made it the longest and most powerful system in Japan at the time.

Today, all that remains of the original Inawashiro Kyu-Kansen structures are 335 pylons stretching 89 km that connect the western bank of Lake Inawashiroko with the Nasuno substation in Nasu-Shiobara, Tochigi Prefecture, before the line extends to Tokyo.

Under the guidance of American and British technical advisers, Japanese technicians originally erected 443 transmission towers in this segment of the route. The steel pylons were imported from the United States, and the 335 towers still standing are stamped with markings of Andrew Carnegie's steel company. Over time, a number of hydroelectric plants, thermal power stations and nuclear reactors were built within Fukushima Prefecture, generating 24 million kilowatts in total.

The residents of Fukushima Prefecture only use about 2 million kilowatts, so the majority of the prefecture's power facilities continue to produce electricity mainly for the Tokyo metropolitan area.

"For the past 100 years, the power lines within the prefecture have not actually belonged to its residents," said an official of the prefectural government.

Keith Baverstock on UNSCEAR report (2)

www.iwanami.co.jp/kagaku/Kagaku_201410_Baverstock.pdf

2013 UNSCEAR Report on Fukushima:

a critical appraisal

Keith Baverstock

Department of Environmental Science, University of Eastern Finland, Kuopio Campus, Finland

What's happening to the debate on nukes?

December 7, 2014 Debating nuclear energy

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/12/03/editorials/debating-nuclear-energy/#.VH8aJcl5Cos>

Nuclear energy remains a divisive issue more than three years after the March 2011 triple meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's administration has reversed its predecessor's policy of seeking a phaseout of nuclear power and is pushing to restart nuclear reactors that have been idled in the wake of the 2011 disaster, even as media surveys show a majority of the public remains opposed to reactivating the plants.

The Dec. 14 Lower House election provides voters with a chance to have their say in the nation's energy policy, which not only affects their everyday lives but will have broad long-term social and economic repercussions. The candidates and their parties in the race are urged to clarify their positions and voters should not hesitate to make their voices heard.

The administration's energy policy sounds self-contradictory. Abe pledges to reduce the nation's energy dependency on nuclear power "as much as possible" — without setting specific targets or a timetable — through energy-saving efforts and introduction of renewable energy. But his government's basic energy plan adopted in April — the first since the Fukushima disaster — calls nuclear power an "important baseload source" of the nation's electricity supply. The prime minister is also leading efforts to promote the sale of Japan's nuclear power technology overseas.

While the same plan calls for maximum efforts in the three years from 2013 to increase Japan's supply of renewable energy, the administration has begun reviewing the feed-in tariff system — introduced in 2012 to promote renewable energy — after power companies stopped buying solar power under the system on the grounds that increased purchase of such energy could disrupt the stability of the power supply. At the same time it is pursuing the liberalization of a power industry long dominated by regional monopolies, the administration is reportedly weighing measures to help the utilities maintain their nuclear power plants after they're exposed to greater price competition through the deregulation. Which direction the administration is headed in its policy on nuclear energy remains unclear.

Today, all of the nation's 48 nuclear power reactors remain offline. Power companies have applied for the Nuclear Regulation Authority's screening of their plans to restart 20 of them — under the safety standards updated in the wake of the 2011 disaster — and Kyushu Electric Power Co. has cleared the NRA screening and obtained local governments' nod to restart the Nos. 1 and 2 reactors at its Sendai nuclear power plant in Kagoshima Prefecture.

The Liberal Democratic Party, which promised in the 2012 election to "seek to establish a socio-economic structure that does not need to rely on nuclear power," says this time that it will push for reactivating plants that have been approved by the NRA under what Abe once touted as the world's most stringent safety regulations.

The power firms seek to restart the idled reactors as they face the heavy cost of imported fuel to increase output at thermal power plants to compensate for the shutdown of nuclear power plants. Restarting a single nuclear reactor will save them an estimated ¥10 billion to ¥15 billion a month in fuel expenses. Abe has argued that the nation is losing trillions of yen each year because of the added fuel imports, whose cost has also been exacerbated by the yen's fall against the dollar. The business sector also decries the higher cost of electricity and calls for the restart of nuclear reactors.

The process is being pushed forward while more than 120,000 people in Fukushima remain displaced from their homes due to radiation fallout from the 2011 meltdowns at the No. 1 plant and as Tepco continues to struggle in its bid to clean up the mess. The blind faith in the safety of nuclear power has been shattered by the Fukushima disaster, and the much-touted cost advantage of nuclear energy over other sources appear to be in doubt.

The administration has not provided convincing answers to various key questions posed over nuclear power, including the doubts over its policy of seeking a nuclear fuel cycle or the pending issue of permanent disposal of highly radioactive nuclear waste. The opinions expressed in media polls show that a large part of the public is still not convinced of the safety of nuclear energy.

When the DPJ-led government decided in 2012 to seek phasing out nuclear power in Japan by the 2030s, it took the unusual step of sounding out popular opinion on the issue through surveys and public gatherings. After taking power from the DPJ two years ago, **the Abe administration reverted to the old**

ways of discussing nuclear energy issues in a closed circuit of interested groups and reversed the nuclear phaseout policy without setting a clear direction on what role nuclear power should play in the nation's long-term energy plan.

Japan's energy policy also shapes its actions on climate change, because the energy sector accounts for a major portion of the nation's emissions of global warming gases such as carbon dioxide. The government came under international criticism last year when it replaced its plan for cuts to emissions by 2020, because its new "tentative" plan represented a net increase in emissions from the Kyoto Protocol base year of 1990. Officials said the plan was the best they could offer while the future of idled nuclear power plants remains uncertain.

Japan's carbon emissions have in fact increased as the nation relied more on thermal power output after the Fukushima meltdowns. But the uncertainty over nuclear power, which does not emit carbon dioxide in power generation, should not be used as an excuse for inaction on efforts to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases. Nor should Japan's climate policy rely on nuclear energy, since it would be unrealistic to expect a return to the condition before 2011, when nuclear energy accounted for 30 percent of the nation's electricity supply. **Lawmakers and parties need to lay out energy plans that include measures to reduce emissions.**

Kepeco mulling second price hike

December 7, 2014

Kepeco plans second price hike for households, companies next spring

JJI

OSAKA – Kansai Electric Power Co. is considering an additional electricity rate hike of more than 10 percent for households next spring, it was learned Saturday.

The company will file an application for approval by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry as early as this month, informed sources said.

It also plans to raise its electricity rates for corporate customers, for which ministry approval is not required.

The rate hikes under consideration are designed to prevent further deterioration of earnings amid uncertainty over when the nuclear reactors owned by the company will be able to be brought back online under the stricter safety standards that were adopted after the March 2011 meltdowns crippled Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 plant and displaced thousands of people.

If the application is approved, Kansai Electric will be the second power utility after Hokkaido Electric Power Co. to raise electricity rates for a second time since the nuclear crisis began.

In spring 2013, Kansai Electric raised prices by 9.75 percent for households and 17.26 percent for corporate users.

But its earnings have since fallen because the utility has been unable to gain regulatory approval to reactivate reactors 3 and 4 at the Oi nuclear plant and units 3 and 4 at its Takahama nuclear plant, both in Fukui Prefecture.

The margins of the last rate hikes were based on the assumption that the reactors would be restarted soon.

“We can’t avoid raising rates if it is hard for our company to survive without it,” President Makoto Yagi said last month.

The company is expected to suffer a loss for the fourth straight year for fiscal 2014 ending March 31. Kansai Electric aims to stop posting losses by raising rates from the beginning of fiscal 2015 starting April 1.

The company apparently believes it will be able to mollify customers if it promises to lower the rates once the reactors are restarted.

Increased fuel costs force KEPCO to mull household electricity hike of 10 percent

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/business/AJ201412070027>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Amid its failure to restart idled nuclear reactors, Kansai Electric Power Co. is considering raising household electricity rates again by around 10 percent due to the increased fuel costs for thermal power generation, the second such hike in two years.

The utility plans to apply for industry ministry approval to increase the utility tariff by year-end at the earliest.

If the ministry gives the green light, household electricity rates can be increased next spring, depending on how KEPCO proceeds with the tariff hike procedures.

The company is also considering raising the rate for corporate electricity customers at a percentage higher than the hike for household customers.

KEPCO raised the household electricity rate by an average of 9.75 percent in May 2013. The increase was calculated under the scenario that the utility’s four idled nuclear reactors would be restarted after the summer of 2013.

But the company has been unable to receive clearance to restart its reactors so far. The increased fuel costs for thermal power generation has kept KEPCO operating in the red since its reactors were shut down in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster. The utility is likely to register a loss for the fourth consecutive year in fiscal 2014, which ends March 2015.

The utility said it may be able to reduce electricity rates once it can restart some of its idled reactors at the Takahama and Oi nuclear power plants in Fukui Prefecture.

Among the regional utilities, Hokkaido Electric Power Co. raised household electricity rates by an average of 15.33 percent in November. Tokyo Electric Power Co., the embattled operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, currently has no plans to increase the utility tariff.

Protests against state secrecy law continue

December 8, 2014

Overseas work, study seen as negative point for anyone handling state secrets

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/12/08/national/overseas-work-study-seen-negative-point-anyone-handling-state-secrets/#.VIXfec15Cos>

Kyodo

The Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office has warned government offices before the new state secrecy law takes effect Wednesday that people who have studied or worked abroad have a higher risk of leaking secrets.

According to the 2011 documents obtained at the request of Kyodo News, the Cabinet Secretariat, the office that will supervise the controversial law with tougher penalties for leaking state secrets, pointed to the need to check educational and employment records in examining which public servants are deemed eligible to handle sensitive information.

Under the secrecy law, which was enacted in December last year, civil servants and others who leak sensitive information on foreign policy, defense, counterterrorism and counterespionage face up to 10 years in prison.

The legislation has drawn criticism over the possibility of arbitrary classification of state secrets that will undermine the people's right to information.

The government plans to screen those who may be given access to state secrets, including public servants and defense industry workers.

Their background, links to spying or terrorism, mental condition, criminal records, drug use, drinking habits and debts will be checked. Only those who are believed to have no risk of leaking secrets will be approved to handle classified information.

Those being vetted will be asked about their educational history from high school and employment record over the past 10 years.

The documents presented by the intelligence and research office at a meeting with other government bodies in November 2011 state that the experience of attending schools overseas or foreign schools in Japan as well as working abroad or working for foreign companies "could be an opportunity to nurture a special feeling about foreign countries."

The papers said **such people "tend to be influenced by" approaches from foreign countries and there is a "risk" that they "prioritize the benefits of foreign countries and voluntarily leak secrets."**

The office of the Cabinet Secretariat said that academic and employment backgrounds are just "one of the check points" and will not solely decide who is deemed capable of dealing with classified information.

The office said the view of overseas experience was presented as part of a free exchange of opinions with other government entities to create an effective system to control state secrets.

Masahiro Usaki, a professor at Dokkyo Law School who is familiar with the secrecy law, said that **"the government has been encouraging young people to go abroad amid the trend of globalization. So it doesn't make sense that it will now judge (overseas experience) as a negative factor."**

"From the viewpoint of the right to privacy, research (on people's background) should be minimum,"

Usaki added, adding that checking only final educational status would be sufficient. He also said the period of 10 years covering past employment records is too long.

December 7, 2014

Protesters vow to continue fight to scrap controversial secrecy law

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141207p2a00m0na007000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Protesters against a controversial secrecy law that was enacted exactly a year ago vowed Saturday to continue their fight to have it scrapped, amid concern the legislation undermines the public's right to know.

With the law that will toughen penalties on leakers of state secrets set to take effect Wednesday, about 1,600 people gathered in Tokyo's Hibiya Park and later marched in the Ginza district, while around 700 demonstrators took to the streets of Nagoya.

Lawyer Yuichi Kaido, an organizer of the Tokyo rally, said civic groups must remain vigilant as the secrecy law enters into force to ensure activities continue to be monitored at military bases and nuclear power plants in Japan.

"We will not cower and will keep fighting for the abolition of the law," Kaido said.

The law provides for imprisonment of up to 10 years for leaking information related to defense, foreign policy, counterespionage and counterterrorism that is deemed to cause considerable damage to Japan's national security.

Shinji Suzuki, a 22-year-old university student who joined the protest, said he is worried that only a small number of young people took part. "I'd like to tell my friends what I experienced at an occasion like this and continue the opposition movement," he said.

In Nagoya, Takahiko Ido, 68, said he will not give up on seeking the repeal of the legislation. "We should not make society dark by allowing the suppression of people's right to know and freedom of speech," he said.

Mami Nonogaki, 53, said the secrecy law should be discussed as a major issue in the upcoming Dec. 14 House of Representatives election.

In Hiroshima, lawyer Hajime Kawaguchi told a rally that when he requested the disclosure of information related to the Self-Defense Forces' activities, only documents with sections blacked out were released.

"When the law takes effect, even these documents cannot be released, making it impossible for us to verify" the SDF's activities, he said. "It will be a dangerous situation because irresponsible decisions can be made with regard to SDF dispatches overseas."

In Fukuoka, lawyer Akiko Maruyama pointed out that Japanese embassies could limit the disclosure of information concerning public safety in conflict areas, citing diplomatic confidentiality. "The overseas activities (of Japanese civic groups) may be scaled down," she said.

State secrets law causes protests and outrage

December 10, 2014

ANALYSIS: Secrecy law in force after scant effort to alleviate public concerns

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201412100059

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

After the Abe administration sought public opinion about the state secrets protection law, concerns, complaints and outrage poured in.

Some feared authorities would abuse their power to conceal inconvenient information. Others cited potential invasions of privacy. And one common complaint from the people was that they had no idea what specific information could land them in prison.

But if Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his government have done anything to alleviate those concerns in the year since the law was enacted, those measures must have been kept secret from the public. About the only noticeable change is the inclusion in operating guidelines that "the right to know will be respected." Amid public protests and persistent concerns about the future of Japan's democracy, the state secrets protection law went into effect on Dec. 10.

Now, people who leak state secrets in four broad areas--defense, foreign affairs, counterespionage and preventing terrorism--face stiffer punishments.

Civil servants and employees of private-sector companies contracted by the government could be imprisoned for up to 10 years for leaking state secrets. The maximum prison term for journalists and even citizens is five years if they are convicted of encouraging “in an inappropriate manner” those handling such secrets to leak the documents.

The vague standards used in designating state secrets in 55 areas were cited as a big problem with the law. Those areas include “training and military exercises by the Self-Defense Forces” and “protection of the lives and bodies of the public.”

Documents can be designated as state secrets for up to 60 years, but the period can be further extended for encrypted information.

Another sticking point was the weakness of the oversight function in checking if state secrets are being designated appropriately.

An individual who served as a prosecutor is expected to fill the post of “independent public document inspector” set up under the Cabinet Office.

The leaders of administrative bodies can designate state secrets. But the inspector will not have the authority to force the administrative bodies to submit information related to such designations.

The public raised an obvious question: How can an inspector decide if state secret designations are being conducted in an appropriate manner if the inspector lacks access to such information?

An association of psychiatrists raised concerns about another aspect of the law: the mandatory evaluations for all people who handle state secrets. The evaluations will look into the criminal records, psychological problems, drinking habits and loan situation of those individuals. In addition, the names, nationalities and addresses of family members and those living with the individuals will be checked. The association said looking into the psychological background of individuals could constitute an invasion of privacy and other rights.

The law was enacted last year through the support of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and junior coalition partner Komeito.

Abe has effectively asked the public to trust the government to do the right thing. He emphasized the law is needed to protect Japan and its people.

However, his LDP and Komeito have not touched upon the law in their campaign platforms for the Dec. 14 Lower House election.

The opposition Democratic Party of Japan has pointed to the insufficient oversight of the state secret designation process by the Diet and other bodies.

The Japanese Communist Party and Social Democratic Party have called for abolishing the law. (Ryota Kyuki contributed to this article.)

Protest statements issued as state secrets law takes effect

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201412100049

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Organizations representing journalists, legal experts and the entertainment industry issued statements calling for the abolishment of the state secrets protection law that they say will trample on the people’s right to know.

The law, which took effect Dec. 10 and carries prison terms for people involved in leaking secret information, has also been the target of public protests.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has said the law is needed to protect national security and interests. However, critics say the vaguely worded law leaves open the definition of what specifically constitutes a state secret and also lacks proper oversight to prevent abuse from authorities.

The Japan Congress of Journalists' statement issued on Dec. 9 said the law would "cover the people's eyes, ears and mouth and usurp their freedom of the press and speech."

The statement listed a number of problems with the law: the range of documents classified as state secrets could expand without limit; the government can continually extend the period a document is classified as a state secret; and journalists and human rights activists could be punished under the law.

The Japan Civil Liberties Union, consisting of lawyers and legal scholars, issued a statement on Dec. 8 protesting the law because "it inappropriately restricts citizens' right to know."

Under the law, the heads of administrative bodies effectively designate what they think should be state secrets. The union's statement said the law lacks sufficient functions to ensure that such information is appropriate for classification as a state secret. The statement also criticized the law's stipulation that citizens can be punished if they abet in the leaking of state secrets.

A group of individuals connected with the movie industry, including directors Yoji Yamada and Isao Takahata, also issued a statement Dec. 9 calling for the law's annulment.

"Rather than a society where state secrets expand in number, we hope for a Japan in which the spirit of democracy can thrive through information disclosure," the statement said.

The statement also touched upon the history of the movie industry before and during World War II when the government forced the production of movies that supported Japan's war effort.

The statement was made "from a strong feeling of creating a society that never again goes to war and to never again be complicit in the production of movies that stir up war sentiment."

Others in the entertainment business, including musicians and actors such as Sayuri Yoshinaga, joined the group.

The Japan Federation of Commercial Broadcast Workers' Unions issued a statement on Dec. 10 that calls for abolishing the law because of concerns it could lead to major barriers to reporting. The statement described the law as "an anachronistic attempt at press control."

State secrecy law takes effect amid protests, concerns over press freedom

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/12/10/national/japans-secrecy-law-takes-effect-amid-concern-arbitrary-info-withholding-lack-oversight/#.VIg4WXt1AW4>

Kyodo, Bloomberg

Japan's controversial state secrets law came into effect Wednesday as hundreds of demonstrators took to the streets, saying the measure undermines the public's right to know and demanding that it be scrapped. More than 300 protesters, including roughly 100 journalists, gathered in front of the prime minister's office in Tokyo's Chiyoda Ward, chanting slogans like "We oppose the secrecy law for going to war" and "Information belongs to citizens."

"We've seen more and more pressure on media organizations that are critical of the administration," said Seigo Arasaki, who heads the Japan Federation of Newspaper Workers Unions, known as Shimbun Roren. "We will monitor how the law will be applied, and raise questions,"

Under the law that cleared the Diet in December 2013, the heads of 19 government ministries and agencies can now designate as state secrets information deemed to be sensitive in the areas of diplomacy, defense, counterterrorism and counterespionage.

A recent Kyodo News survey covering the 19 government offices showed the number of state secrets will likely be around 460,000.

Civil servants or others who leak the secrets will face up to 10 years in prison, and those who instigate leaks, including journalists, will be subject to a prison term of up to five years.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who established the National Security Council to speed up decision-making on diplomacy and defense, has said the law will help Japan to promote exchanges of sensitive information with other countries and forge closer ties with them.

State secrets are defined in 55 categories, including information about the development of submarines, aircraft, weapons and ammunition. Intelligence and images obtained via radio waves and satellites and provided by foreign governments and international organizations could be withheld from the public.

The initial five-year-designation period for a state secret can be extended for up to 30 years. But state secrets can be classified for a maximum 60 years if approved by the Cabinet for security reasons.

The law takes effect just as Abe appears to be seeking greater influence over the nation's media, according to Koichi Nakano, a professor of political science at Sophia University in Tokyo.

The LDP sent a letter to Japan's five biggest broadcasters last month to demand "neutral" reporting on the election. Abe told reporters on Dec. 1 he didn't order the party to send the letter, though he hoped the election would be covered "fairly and impartially."

The Japanese Federation of Bar Associations said on its website the new act opens the door to the government arbitrarily designating secrets.

"The definition of secret is very vague, and people, including myself, are wary of misuse," said Kaori Hayashi, a professor at Tokyo University's Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies.

The Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association said in a Dec. 8 statement the maximum sentence for leaks was too harsh and could damage reporting activities and the public's "right to know." Criticism has also been directed at the absence of an independent watchdog, as oversight entities will be placed under government control.

To ease such public concerns, the Cabinet approved guidelines on the handling of state secrets, pledging that it will keep "the minimum amount of information as secrets for the shortest period of time possible" as the public's right to know should be "greatly respected" in a democratic society.

"We will make sure that the people's right to know will not be hurt," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said on Tuesday.

It has been revealed, meanwhile, that the Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office, which holds jurisdiction over the secrecy law, had warned government offices in 2011 that people who have studied or worked abroad have a higher risk of leaking state secrets.

Under the secrecy law, security clearance is required for officials to handle state secrets, and the government will set up hotlines so officials can report suspicions about arbitrary classification or declassification of state secrets.

The prime minister is also required to make an annual report to the Diet on the designation, safeguarding and disclosure of state secrets.

After the passage of the secrecy bill last year, Japan fell six places to 59th out of 180 nations in Reporters Without Borders' 2014 World Press Freedom Index, below such nations as Serbia and Botswana.

"Investigative journalism, public interest and the confidentiality of journalists' sources are all being sacrificed by legislators bent on ensuring that their country's image is spared embarrassing revelations," the group said.

State secrets law - Independent supervisor?

December 11, 2014

News Navigator: What is the position created for supervision of the state secrecy law?

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20141211p2a00m0na011000c.html>

A new independent post at the deputy vice-ministerial level has been established for managing public documents as the controversial Act on the Specially Designated Secrets came into effect on Dec. 10. The Mainichi Shimbun answers some common questions readers may have about the new position.

Question: What is this new administrative position all about?

Answer: It's an independent position at the Cabinet Office for managing public documents, called independent public records management secretary. "Special state secrets" will be designated from a certain area of information, but what becomes secret and what doesn't cannot always be clear-cut. Government agencies may hide information they don't want to disclose. Such an issue was brought up at a Diet session last fall, and right before the enactment of the state secrets protection bill, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said the government would set up in-house watchdog organizations.

One of the supervisory bodies, the Information Security Oversight Division, made up of 20 staff members, was set up at the Cabinet Office, and the post of public records management secretary was established as the supervisor for the division.

Q: What are the roles of the secretary for managing public documents?

A: The appointed person is in charge of making sure that special state secrets do not include information that should not be kept secret. The Information Security Oversight Division will receive summary lists on state secrets from ministries and agencies to check, and the public records secretary will have the authority to request classified documents, demand declassification and conduct on-site investigations at ministries and agencies if necessary.

In addition, each ministry and agency will report to the secretary on the number of classified and declassified documents once a year. The public records secretary can investigate ministries and agencies in response to whistle-blowing.

Q: What are some concerns about the function of the information oversight system?

A: Questions remain about whether the public records secretary will have the opportunity to conduct investigations. The summary lists will have data such as the designation date and the designation term of state secrets, but will not include contents of classified documents. Furthermore, even if the secretary demands ministries and agencies present documents, they may refuse to comply if they decide that such information may pose a major threat to national security.

Q: Who was appointed to the new post?

A: A 52-year-old bureaucrat from the Justice Ministry has been assigned as the first public records management secretary. Experts believe that the person who is appointed to the secretary position is best not to return to their ministry or agency to maintain job independence. Some sources in the judicial circles have voiced concerns about the appointment, however, as the bureaucrat still have some time until his retirement age, and he might hold back his authority against the Justice Ministry or investigative agencies. (Answers by Ken Aoshima, Tokyo City News Department)

December 11, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Why should Japanese pay for corporate negligence?



December 10, 2014

Question of negligence hangs over nuclear firms in U.S. case over Fukushima fallout

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2014/12/10/voices/question-negligence-hangs-nuclear-firms-u-s-case-fukushima-fallout/#.Vli973t1AW4>

Dear Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Yoichi Miyazawa,

As you may be aware, a federal judge in the U.S. recently ruled that a class-action lawsuit filed by about 200 U.S. Navy sailors can proceed against Tokyo Electric Power Co. and other defendants they blame for a variety of ailments caused by radiation exposure following the nuclear reactor meltdowns at Fukushima No. 1.

The sailors allege that Tepco knowingly and negligently gave false and misleading information concerning the true condition of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant to the public, including the U.S. military. They further allege that Tepco knew the sailors on board the USS Ronald Reagan would be exposed to unsafe levels of radiation because Tepco was aware three nuclear reactors at the site had already melted down.

In this connection, the lawsuit notes that on Dec. 14, 2013, Naoto Kan, Japan's prime minister at the time of the disaster, told a gathering of journalists regarding the first meltdown: "People think it was March 12 but the first meltdown occurred five hours after the earthquake."

The sailors in question were participating in Operation Tomodachi, providing humanitarian relief in response to the Japanese government's calls for assistance. In accordance with the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, **these sailors literally risked their lives to aid and protect the people of Japan.**

The sailors accuse Tepco of negligence, failure to warn of the dangers, and design defects in the construction and installation of the reactors, among a total of nine claims for damages. To date, the sailors have experienced such illnesses as leukemia, ulcers, brain cancer, brain tumors, testicular cancer, dysfunctional uterine bleeding, thyroid illnesses, stomach ailments and a host of other complaints unusual in such young adults.

One of the major questions to be decided by the lawsuit is **who will pay for the military members' ongoing and possibly lifelong medical treatment. In addition to addressing specific illnesses, funding will be required for future medical monitoring for themselves and their children,**

including monitoring for possible radiation-induced genetic mutations. Some of the radiological particles inhaled by these service personnel have long half-lives, from six to 50 or even 100 years. Needless to say, the Japanese government has a wealth of information about what actually happened, and when, at Fukushima No. 1. Thus it would seem legally as well as morally appropriate for the government to share its Fukushima-related knowledge with the Federal Court in the Southern District of California. This could be done, for example, in the form of an amicus curiae brief — that is, a brief submitted by someone not a party to a case who nevertheless possesses relevant information that may assist the court. My first question to you, Minister Miyazawa, is: Are you and the Japanese government willing to submit such a brief?

It is significant that the builders of the Fukushima No. 1 reactors — General Electric, EBASCO, Toshiba and Hitachi — are also defendants. This is because the reactors for Units 1, 2 and 6 were supplied by General Electric, those for Units 3 and 5 by Toshiba, and Unit 4 by Hitachi. General Electric, however, designed all six reactors, and the architectural plans were done by EBASCO.

In particular, GE knew decades ago that the design of its Mark I reactors installed at Fukushima No. 1 was faulty. Thirty-five years ago, Dale G. Bridenbaugh and two of his colleagues at General Electric resigned from their jobs after becoming convinced that the Mark I's design was so flawed it could lead to a devastating accident. They publicly testified before the U.S. Congress on the inability of the Mark I to handle the immense pressures that would result if the reactor lost cooling power.

Their concerns proved all too accurate at Fukushima No. 1, a disaster that has yet to end given the continued massive radioactive contamination of the ocean.

In light of this, Minister Miyazawa, I end this message with one final question: Why hasn't the Japanese government, like the American sailors, filed its own lawsuits against these same companies to determine their legal liability? In other words, **why are the Japanese people being forced to pay for the possibly negligent actions of some of the world's largest corporations?**

BRIAN VICTORIA

Yellow Springs, Ohio

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Lingering doubts about state secrets law

December 11, 2014

Worries about secrets law linger

Top officials reiterate that the state secrets law, which took effect this week a year after it was enacted, will not infringe on the people's right to know. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who defied widespread public protests last year against ramming the legislation through the Diet, says the law is aimed at dealing with "terrorists and spies" and "basically has nothing to do with people at large."

Such a statement by the prime minister appears to illustrate how the Abe administration turns a deaf ear to lingering public concerns about the controversial law, which mandates prison sentences of up to 10 years for government officials and defense industry employees who leak information designated as state secrets, sentences of up to five years for those who conspire to leak or instigate the leaking of such information and sentences of up to 10 years for those who obtain designated secrets through illicit means.

Whether the law infringes on the people's right to know depends on whether the process of designating government information — considered public property in a democracy — as secrets is appropriate and whether there is a valid safeguard in place to stop government officials from improperly classifying secrets at their discretion. The law clearly fails to meet these criteria, due primarily to the absence of independent third-party oversight.

The law enables the heads of 19 government ministries and agencies to designate sensitive information in the fields of diplomacy, defense, counterterrorism and counterespionage as state secrets for up to 30 years. The classification period can be extended to 60 years with the Cabinet's approval if the extension is deemed necessary for security reasons. Certain secrets in seven categories, such as information that could compromise Japan's position in dealing with foreign governments and international organizations, can remain classified even longer as exceptions.

The Abe administration has explained that Japan needs the law to tighten control of government secrets for it to be able to exchange sensitive information with the United States and other governments. Along with the enactment of the secrets law, the National Security Council was established to serve as the nation's command center in foreign and defense policy. It will share security information with Japan's allies.

It is natural for any government to have a mechanism for protecting information that pertains to national security. Problems arise when the system leaves room for abuse by those who handle the secrets.

Criticism abounds that the law's definition of the information that can be designated as secret is so vague and wide-ranging that it allows government officials to use their discretion to withhold inconvenient or damaging information that the public should know. The law also fails to provide for penalties against officials who improperly designate information as secret.

It must also be ensured that the information will be made open for public scrutiny once it no longer merits classification. But under the law, the government can extend the classification period merely through an internal decision.

Members of the Abe administration say that in setting the rules for implementing the law, mechanisms for ensuring the system's appropriate use and banning the classification of government information for cover-up purposes have been established. A supervisory committee of vice minister level bureaucrats from each ministry, to be headed by the chief Cabinet secretary, is being set up at the Cabinet secretariat. And on Wednesday, a Justice Ministry bureaucrat was tapped to head a new panel at the Cabinet Office to oversee the classification process.

Neither body, however, has the power to enforce the declassification of secrets, and their existence does not change the fact that the designation of secrets by government officials will be monitored only by fellow officials. Independent third parties remain excluded from verifying if the government's information classifications are appropriate. It is also unclear whether enough manpower will exist to properly check each part of the estimated 460,000 potential state secrets.

The text of the law calls for "consideration" for the people's right to know and freedom of the press. Going into the campaign for Sunday's Lower House election, Abe declared that he will quit as prime minister if instances arise of media activities being suppressed by the law. But the law does not prevent members of the press or civic groups from becoming targets of punishment for "instigating" leaks of designated secrets by government officials. Officials handling designated secrets will be punished for leaking the information — regardless of who receives the information.

The law's rules of implementation require such officials to report to their superiors when they are urged by others — likely including journalists or civic group members — to disclose the classified information.

The protection of people who blow the whistle on wrongful designations of secrets is also insufficient. The law provides for creating hot lines for government officials who suspect an inappropriate classification has taken place, but these officials are prohibited from disclosing the information itself. They are allowed only to summarize the secret parts, and they could be charged with "leaking" the information if their summaries are judged to have included crucial or a large amount of information. It's as if the system is intended to discourage officials from revealing wrongful acts.

As the law finally takes effect a year after it was enacted, most of the concerns that many people had about the legislation remain unaddressed. The implementation of the law needs to be constantly monitored, and the public should apply pressure on the government to correct its deficiencies, or to abolish it.

The secrecy issue is not just about terrorists and spies; it also concerns the people's right to know what their government is doing.

December 9, 2014

Even bureaucrats question the need for secrecy law

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141209p2a00m0na013000c.html>

A controversial secrecy law to toughen penalties on leakers of state secrets is set to take effect on Dec. 10, but even government bureaucrats have been raising questions about the need for such legislation.

One bureaucrat said, "I wonder if we need that in the first place?" At a time when the government was considering whether to draft secrecy legislation, the Cabinet Legislation Bureau pointed out that the "need (for the law) is small." Even some government bureaucrats are saying, "It is hard to handle specified secrets."

"Concerns have been raised over whether everything will be designated as a specified secret, but that's impossible," said a senior government official. The official added, "Specified secrets will be strictly managed and there will be restrictions on people who can handle them. If such secrets are increased excessively, we cannot get our work done."

Under the National Public Safety Commission's rules, specified secret documents must be kept in strictly controlled storage sites, restrictions must be placed on people in charge of handling them and on reading places for such documents, and such items must be put in double envelopes when being transferred, among other detailed instructions for handling them. Other government ministries and agencies will apparently adopt similar rules.

Government ministries and agencies have had "top secrets" and "secrets" defined by detailed in-house rules, which will remain effective even after the secrecy law takes effect. The aforementioned senior government official said, "I believe that many pieces of information that cannot be disclosed will be handled as secrets the same way as before."

Yukiko Miki, head of the nonprofit organization Access-Info Clearinghouse Japan, said, "As whether to designate information as secrets and declassify them is decided at the discretion of each ministry or agency except for specified secrets, they could be disposed of and remain as secrets. It is necessary to work out rules for such secrets."

According to documents the Cabinet Information Research Office disclosed in response to an information disclosure request from the Mainichi Shimbun, the Cabinet Legislation Bureau said in September 2011 in reference to a preliminary draft of state secrets protection legislation prepared by the Cabinet Information Research Office, "It seems to be weak in legislative facts." Legislative facts refer to facts that show clear reasons for the need for specific legislation.

The Self-Defense Forces Act was revised in 2001 to punish Self-Defense Forces personnel and others with a prison term of up to five years for leaking defense secrets. But the act has been applied to only one case

so far. In that particular case, an Air Self-Defense Force colonel was suspected of leaking information, but his indictment was subsequently suspended. Based on that case, the Cabinet Legislation Bureau insisted that it was difficult to provide a basis for toughening penalties through new legislation.

Those government bureaucrats and politicians who are engaged in collecting information on foreign and security policies say that the state secrets protection law will make it easier for them to obtain information from foreign intelligence agencies. Kaoru Yosano, who had served as chief Cabinet secretary during Shinzo Abe's first stint as prime minister, told the Mainichi Shimbun, "Do we need this law today when nothing to threaten Japan's security is taking place? When I was chief Cabinet secretary, I did not hear about such legislation."

The Nuclear Regulation Authority decided as of Dec. 8 not to designate any information it held as specified secrets as it said it had no information that would meet conditions for being classified as such.

The Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association submitted a written statement to Justice Minister Yoko Kamikawa on Dec. 8, calling on the government to properly administer the state secrets protection law. The association said in the statement, "It is hard to say that the government has fully dispelled concerns that the law could inhibit the people's right to know and the freedom of reporting and news gathering."

The Japan P.E.N. Club also issued a statement on Dec. 8, raising an alarm over the secrecy law, the government's decision to allow Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defense and the government's policy of promoting nuclear power.

December 09, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Abe keen to boost nuclear energy

December 15, 2014

With election over, Abe ready to boost reactor restarts

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/12/15/national/abe-set-boost-efforts-revive-nuclear-power-election/#.VJBeWnt1Cic>

Kyodo

With the Liberal Democratic Party's sweeping election victory Sunday, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is expected to increase his efforts to revive nuclear power despite persistent public opposition.

Although polls show that most people are against restarting reactors idled following the 2011 Fukushima crisis, Abe has continued to promote nuclear as a key source of energy, arguing its use is necessary to maintain stable and cheap electricity in resource-poor Japan.

Abe hopes early next year to restart two reactors at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s nuclear plant in Satumasendai, Kagoshima Prefecture, which in September became the first to meet tighter, post-Fukushima safety regulations.

Another two reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama power station in Fukui Prefecture, currently in the final phase of the Nuclear Regulation Authority's screening process, could also go back online within 2015.

However, as restarting nuclear plants did not take center stage in the election, partly because Abe avoided focusing on the contentious issue, critics say the LDP's victory cannot be taken as a vote of confidence regarding this issue.

In a rare mention during the campaign, Abe delivered a speech in Kagoshima Prefecture last Thursday arguing that nuclear power is necessary to protect jobs.

Local leaders in Kagoshima have already given the green light to restarting the power plant, but residents doubt that sufficient discussions have been held.

"I feel frustrated that there was no debate on the nuclear issue" during the election, a 44-year-old company employee who did not want to give his name said after voting.

With the election already in its rear view mirror, the LDP faces the task of deciding the nation's long-term energy policy, another issue Abe was reluctant to discuss during the campaign.

The process of deciding the country's energy mix, including the percentages of electricity to be generated by nuclear power and renewable sources, could be further delayed amid uncertainty over how many reactors will resume operations down the road, while Komeito, the coalition's junior member, has pledged to completely phase out nuclear power in the future.

Kepeco eyeing second price rise

December 17, 2014

Citing idled nuclear reactors, Kansai Electric eyes another price hike

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201412170043>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

With all of its reactors offline, Kansai Electric Power Co. is moving to raise household electricity rates **for the second time** after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster to cover higher fuel costs from thermal power generation.

The utility said Dec. 17 it will apply to the industry ministry for approval to raise the household electricity rate in April after it decides on the extent of increase.

"It is a tough decision, but we have no other choice," Kansai Electric President Makoto Yagi told a news conference.

The company is expected to post a fourth consecutive loss for the year ending next March. Before the Fukushima disaster, the utility depended on nuclear power for 45 percent of the electricity it generated.

The company will also increase the rate for corporate users in April, a move that does not require government approval.

If the ministry approves the hike, Kansai Electric will be the second regional power company to increase electricity rates twice since the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Kansai Electric raised its household electricity rate in May 2013 for the first time in 33 years by an average of 9.75 percent. The increase was calculated based on the assumption that the utility's four idled nuclear reactors would be restarted after summer 2013.

Although the Nuclear Regulation Authority gave provisional safety clearance on Dec. 17 to two reactors at the company's Takahama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture, the utility decided the rate hike was necessary because of the slow progress in restarting all four reactors.

In November, Hokkaido Electric Power Co. raised household electricity rates by an average of 15.33 percent, its second rate increase since the disaster.

TEPCO: More cost cuts

Tepco's net income set to rise 19%

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/12/17/business/corporate-business/tepcos-net-income-set-rise-19/#.VJGgVf-cJA>

Bloomberg

Tokyo Electric Power Co. said net income will rise 19 percent this fiscal year and that **it will put off an increase in electricity rates in favor of more cost cuts.**

The country's biggest electricity utility is projecting net income of ¥521 billion (\$4.4 billion) from ¥438.6 billion last year. It said it will reduce costs by ¥873 billion, **including job cuts**, in the fiscal year ending March 31, according to a statement on Wednesday.

Tepco and other power companies are under pressure to reduce overheads as all of the nation's 48 reactors have been shut following the Fukushima atomic disaster more than 3½ years ago. That's forced them to import more oil, gas and coal for other power plants, causing a surge in fuel bills.

The government estimates regional power companies paid ¥3.6 trillion (\$30.7 billion) more in fuel costs in fiscal 2013 compared with fiscal 2010 before Fukushima.

Even as the country's nuclear regulator is gradually approving tougher safety standards on some reactors, Tepco's units are not yet among them. The company is the operator of the crippled Fukushima plant.

Tepco had expected to restart two reactors at its Kashiwazaki Kariwa nuclear plant, the world's biggest, as early as July this year in the turnaround plan released in January. That's since been pushed back to July next year or later.

Restarting the Kashiwazaki plant is "essential" for the company's business, according to the statement. **Tepco, which serves 29 million customers in Tokyo and surrounding areas, raised electricity rates for households by about 8.5 percent in September 2012.**

Who will pay the costs of decommissioning?

December 17, 2014

Power rates to reflect decommissioning costs even after deregulation

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201412170064>

By TOMOYOSHI OTSU/ Staff Writer

Regional utilities will be allowed to pass on costs to consumers for decommissioning nuclear power plants even after the retail sale of electricity to households is liberalized in 2016, according to sources.

The move proposed by the industry ministry reflects concerns that it could be difficult for the utilities to raise funds for decommissioning work if the liberalization produces fierce competition among electricity suppliers, the sources said.

However, the ministry could find itself being criticized for giving favorable treatment to regional electric power companies that have nuclear power plants even though its intention is to make decommissioning go smoothly, the sources added.

Costs for decommissioning nuclear power plants are already added to electricity bills. This is set to continue because liberalization of the market in 2016 will ramp up competition among electricity suppliers, and this could make it difficult for the major electric power companies to generate sufficient profits to carry out decommissioning work.

Companies that will spin off from the major electric power companies between 2018 and 2020 to specialize in transmitting electricity will collect costs for decommissioning work.

These companies, which will still be under the umbrellas of the regional utilities, will add decommissioning costs to electric cable use fees paid by electricity sales companies, which collect electricity bills from individual households.

While the ministry wants all electricity sales companies to shoulder the burden of costs for decommissioning, some of the new firms may decide to specialize in sales of electricity from renewable energy sources to consumers who are opposed to nuclear power generation.

In that event, those companies would sharply oppose being required to bear some of costs for decommissioning work.

To get round the problem, the ministry may decide that only firms selling electricity from nuclear power plants will shoulder the burden.

In the case of a midsized reactor that can generate 800 megawatts of electricity, the costs for decommissioning range from 44 billion yen to 62 billion yen (\$377 million to \$532 million). The costs include plant dismantlement and radioactive waste disposal.

Evacuees file new suit against TEPCO

December 19, 2014

Nuclear disaster evacuees sue TEPCO

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Dec. 19, 2014 - Updated 11:49 UTC+1

People who were evacuated from **Minami-soma** City in northeastern Japan have sued Tokyo Electric Power Company. Damages of more than 6.8 billion yen, or 57 million dollars, are sought for being forced to leave their hometown due to the 2011 nuclear accident.

The city in Fukushima Prefecture is located about 20 kilometers from the damaged plant.

On Friday, 340 residents of the city's Odaka district filed suit with the Tokyo District Court against TEPCO. The entire district is designated as a no-entry zone and residents still must live elsewhere three years and nine months after the accident.

The damages the evacuees are demanding include a doubling of the monthly evacuation compensation per capita of around 1,700 dollars and about 84,000 dollars per head for destruction of the basis for living conditions.

They claim they have been deprived of their ancestral land and history and that residents' bonds have been totally severed.

Isao Enei, who heads the plaintiffs' group, told reporters that the nuclear accident has deprived them of their hometowns, prevented family gatherings, and undermined even their lives. He also said evacuees are under greater stress.

TEPCO said in a statement that the utility will deal with the suit in earnest after hearing the plaintiffs' claims in court.

Possible forgery of official documents

December 19, 2014

TEPCO staff probed over document forgeries

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141219p2a00m0na018000c.html>

Three branches of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) carried out cable construction work without permission from authorities, sparking a police investigation into possible forgery of official documents. TEPCO announced on Dec. 18 that its branches in the Saitama Prefecture city of Kasukabe, the Kanagawa Prefecture city of Kawasaki and the Shizuoka Prefecture city of Mishima conducted **11 construction jobs including burial and installation of electric cables between July last year and September this year without permission from the national and local governments.**

The utility said three male employees in their 20s through their 50s falsified application documents and permissions for occupancy of public roads. The three were responsible for making these applications, and apparently fabricated the documents for in-house use. Saitama Prefectural Police and other law enforcers are questioning those concerned on suspicion of possible falsification of official documents and sealed private documents.

According to TEPCO, the accused employees fabricated the documents by using permission numbers issued for separate construction projects that had already been completed. The irregularities were uncovered after local governments reported to TEPCO that they had confirmed unauthorized construction work was under way.

TEPCO denied the possibility of any systematic involvement in the cases, saying, "We believe the irregularities were committed by the respective employees in their attempts to prevent a delay in their work schedule." The unauthorized work took place on public roads and at parks in the Saitama Prefecture city of Saitama, the Ibaraki Prefecture town of Goka, Kawasaki's Kawasaki Ward, and the Shizuoka Prefecture city of Numazu.

TEPCO slapped the employee in his 20s at the Kasukabe branch with a five-day suspension and reprimanded his three supervisors. The company is planning to punish the other accused employees at the Kawasaki and Mishima branches.

The utility will also investigate whether there were any similar irregularities at its 45 branches, which carried out a total of some 78,000 works over the one-year period up to November this year.

"We deeply apologize for the trouble we have caused. We will work to prevent a recurrence," commented a TEPCO representative.

December 19, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Surrounding municipalities have "legitimate concerns"

December 22, 2014

A broader say in reactor restarts

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/12/22/editorials/a-broader-say-in-reactor-restarts/>

The Abe administration is pushing to restart idled nuclear power plants that have cleared safety screening by the Nuclear Regulation Authority, pending the consent of local municipalities. But the definition of "local" and whose consent is required remains a question that must be addressed as Kansai Electric Power Co. moves to bring its Takahama Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture back online. **This case will test whether the government and power companies are ready to listen to the safety concerns of people who could be affected by a nuclear disaster.**

The NRA said last week that safety measures taken by Kansai Electric at reactors Nos. 3 and 4 of the Takahama plant against potential natural disaster hazards and severe accidents meet the regulations tightened in the wake of the March 2011 triple meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The NRA's draft assessment — likely to be formalized a month later after soliciting public comments — and some additional procedures will allow the utility firm to go ahead with reactivating the two reactors once it obtains "local" consent.

The plant is located in the Fukui Prefecture town of Takahama. But within 30 km of the plant also lie parts of Kyoto and Shiga prefectures. Since the Fukushima nuclear disaster demonstrated that radiation fallout from a severe accident can affect a wide range of areas, the government has required municipalities within 30 km of a nuclear power plant to prepare evacuation plans for their residents.

The governors of Kyoto and Shiga say the restart of the Takahama plant is unacceptable unless Kansai Electric agrees to conclude agreements with them to give them a say in the safety of the plant's operation.

Power companies have so far concluded such agreements with the prefectures and municipalities that host their nuclear power plants. Based on such agreements, they have sought the approval of the local government hosting the facility in the process of restarting plants that had been put offline. Kansai Electric has an agreement on the Takahama plant with Fukui Prefecture and the Takahama municipal government. But given the serious consequences of the Fukushima disaster, **a growing number of local governments near nuclear power plants also demand that they have a say in their operations.**

Power companies are reluctant to extend the number of local governments with which they need to consult before resuming the operation of their offline nuclear power plants. Prefectures and municipalities that host plants receive national government grants; their economies often rely heavily on the plants in terms of tax revenue and related businesses. **Bringing other prefectures and municipalities in surrounding areas into the mix would undoubtedly complicate matters for the power firms.**

While pushing for the restart of idled reactors, the Abe administration takes no clear position on which local governments should be involved in the approval process. When the NRA earlier gave the safety

clearance for restarting Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai nuclear power plant, the administration left the question up to Kagoshima Prefecture, where the plant is located.

Kagoshima Gov. Yuichiro Ito said the approvals of the prefecture and the host city Satsumasendai were sufficient, dismissing the safety concerns of municipalities and the residents also within 30 km of the plant. The Abe administration apparently hopes this scenario will repeat itself in the process of reactivating other idled plants.

Kyoto and Shiga prefectures have a valid point. Their residents would certainly be affected in case of a severe accident at the Takahama plant. While some 55,000 people in Fukui live within 30 km of the plant, the number of Kyoto Prefecture residents within the zone is 128,000. Part of the Kyoto Prefecture city of Maizuru lies within 5 km of the Takahama plant. It would be irrational for the government and Kansai Electric to ignore the legitimate concerns of the surrounding municipalities and their residents.

One way to silence local resistance

December 22, 2014

Abe administration may up local subsidies to get reactors back online

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/12/22/national/abe-administration-may-up-local-subsidies-to-get-reactors-back-online/#.VJlMIf-cJA>

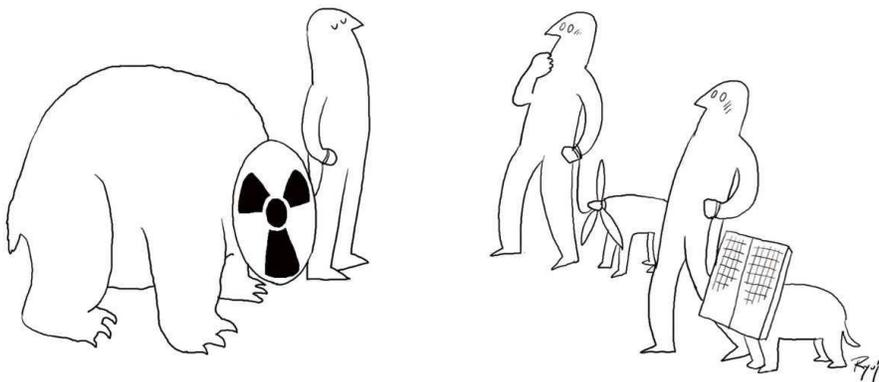
Kyodo

The Abe administration is considering boosting the subsidies that municipalities receive for hosting live nuclear plants in a bid to overcome local resistance to reactor restarts, sources said Monday.

The government is currently paying the cash even though all 48 of the nation's reactors remain offline. The new policy would be a departure from uniform disbursement. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is expected to present the idea during an expert panel meeting Wednesday with the goal of putting it into practice in fiscal 2016, the sources said.

The subsidies system dates from 1974. It was designed to promote the construction of power plants — both nuclear and conventional. It involves the central government taxing utilities based on their sales of electricity and distributing that to local governments.

Nukes "low in both safety and economic efficiency"



December 22, 2014

Real costs of nuclear power

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2014/12/22/commentary/japan-commentary/real-costs-nuclear-power/#.VJhdL_-cJA

Public opinion in Japan is split down the middle over whether the government should permit power companies to restart idled nuclear power plants.

At issue is which should be given priority — plant safety or economic efficiency.

Since new safety standards were introduced following the disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, the Sendai nuclear power plant in Kagoshima Prefecture of Kyushu Electric Power Co. has become the first of 13 nuclear power plants nationwide undergoing screening by the Nuclear Regulation Authority to get the go-ahead for restart after consent was given by Gov. Yuichiro Ito on Nov. 7.

Ito told reporters that the restart is unavoidable in view of prevailing circumstances. Without doubt, one of those circumstances is the fees that consumers have to pay for electricity.

Indeed, after learning of Ito's decision, one government official expressed his hope that the restart of the Sendai plant will serve to reduce reliance on costly thermal power generation and put an end to a series of rate hikes adopted by power companies in the aftermath of the stoppage of their nuclear power plants.

But will things turn out that way?

Recently a fact has surfaced that contradicts the myth of low power generating costs by nuclear power.

More surprisingly, the fact originated from the power industry itself.

At a press conference in September, Makoto Yagi, chairman of the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan (FEPC), who also heads Kansai Electric Power Co., said that in order for private corporations to be able to operate nuclear power plants, it is essential that all costs are recovered without fail. For that purpose, he added, his industry would like to seek assistance from the public sector.

The FEPC is particularly anxious for introduction of the "Contract for Difference" (CfD) scheme. The CfD system has already been introduced in Britain. It is similar to the feed-in tariffs (FIT) scheme in Japan under which power companies are required to purchase electricity generated by renewable energy sources at fixed prices.

But there is a difference between the FIT scheme and the CfD scheme. Under the CfD system for nuclear power, the standard price of electricity would be determined by taking into consideration not only the normal cost of power generation but also the future costs of disposing of spent nuclear fuel and decommissioning reactors.

The difference between the actual power rates and this standard price would be collected from consumers and diverted to the utilities.

An official of the Ministry of Economics, Trade and Industry says this system is fair because in the event of the standard price becoming lower than the actual power rates, the utilities would pay the difference to consumers.

Until now, both the power industry and the government have been emphasizing the "low costs" of generating electricity with nuclear power.

If what they have been saying is true, theoretically consumers should be able to expect that their electricity bills, which have gone up after thermal power generation assumed greater proportions, to come down with the restart of nuclear power stations, whose costs for power generation have been touted as low. But a surprising fact has come to the fore.

It's the news that the standard CfD price envisaged for the Hinkley Point nuclear power plant in England, being expanded by Electricite de France, a French utility company, for completion in 2023, would be equivalent to ¥15.7 per kilowatt-hour, which would lead to doubling the prevailing power rate. According to a journalist specializing in the power industry, that price is ¥0.4 higher than the price at which Japanese power companies are required to purchase electricity generated by wind power under the current FIT scheme, and only ¥1 cheaper than the FIT price for electricity from solar power generation. Moreover, he says, the standard price for the Hinkley Point plant is guaranteed for 35 years, which is longer than the period set for purchase of power generated by renewable energy sources. This means that the financial burden on consumers will become greater.

Even business circles in Japan, which have longed for an expansion of nuclear power generation, are opposed to the introduction of the CfD scheme. A high-ranking official of a major manufacturing company has said that restarting nuclear power plants will have no merit if it leads to higher electricity prices, and that if the CfD system is adopted his company will have no choice but to drastically increase power generation on its own.

In a statement issued in May 2014, Japan's three major business organizations — the Japan Business Federation, the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Japan Association of Corporate Executives — said restarting nuclear power plants should be accelerated because the incremental fuel cost burdens resulting from reliance on thermal power instead of nuclear power had already reached ¥3.6 trillion annually.

At the same time, however, the three bodies called for a thorough review of the FIT system under which utilities have to buy power generated by renewable energy sources at fixed prices. The scheme had brought the total amount of money paid by the utilities to about ¥650 billion during the third year of the system's implementation.

They also warned that the burdens on ordinary citizens would continue to rise rapidly and the heavy burden would stay for a long period of time.

A research fellow at a think tank well versed in energy issues says that if the CfD formula is applied to existing nuclear power plants, the annual payout by the power companies will exceed ¥3 trillion, which is about the same as the current incremental costs arising from the use of alternative fuels.

If that happens, he says, the utilities won't have to lower power rates for consumers after restarting nuclear stations and will have a good excuse for maintaining the present high electricity rates.

Should this be the case, the restart of nuclear power plants will not lead to lowering of the power rates as ardently hoped for by business circles, and this in turn will create a major conflict among them as to whether those power plants should be retained.

The new development means that the FEPC has virtually admitted that it is extremely costly to run nuclear power plants if the expenses needed for disposal of spent nuclear fuel and decommissioning of reactors are taken into account; therefore, the power rates should be set higher.

The think tank researcher says, "We are beginning to see the true costs of nuclear power generation."

The aforementioned executive of the manufacturing firm accuses the utilities of claiming at first that nuclear power generation will ensure an inexpensive and stable supply of electricity but then reversing the position by admitting that costs turned out to be much higher.

A high-ranking official of an electric power company counters that the utilities have supplied power inexpensively based on a tacit understanding that the costs of decommissioning reactors would be borne by the government and that, therefore, it is utterly unreasonable now to be told to bear such costs on their own by setting aside large sums of money as reserves.

Behind this statement is a history of the government taking the initiative in building nuclear power plants from the national security point of view — making sure that Japan can meet its own energy needs and asserting implicitly that it could produce nuclear weapons.

The utility executive has confided that even though his company insisted it had such a large capacity that it would not need nuclear power plants, it was forced by the government to build them in line with the national policy.

Power companies have become increasingly distrustful of the government after Tepco was placed under state control and given additional responsibilities, including shouldering more than ¥1 trillion in costs for decommissioning reactors in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. They fear that they might someday face the same fate.

A business magazine editor who is well informed about FEPC says that if a utility is to bear the costs of reactor decommissioning and spent fuel disposal, the money necessary for those purposes will have to come from the CfD scheme. The federation is of the view that, absent such an arrangement, nuclear power plants would lead to power companies' bankruptcy, according to the editor.

Whether decommissioning is financed by the government with taxpayer money or by higher power rates under the CfD system, the ultimate burden would fall on ordinary citizens.

It is no longer a choice between safety and economic efficiency of nuclear power plants. It is clearly unreasonable to rely on nuclear power generation that the utilities themselves have admitted is low in both safety and economic efficiency.

It is high time that all citizens overcame the emotional confrontation between the proponents and opponents of nuclear power generation and faced the reality.

This is an abridged translation of an article from the December issue of Sentaku, a monthly magazine covering political, social and economic scenes.

Too expensive to keep them running



December 24, 2014

Utilities to announce scrapping of 5 old reactors

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Dec. 24, 2014 - Updated 00:16 UTC+1

<image: C:\Users\Odile\AppData\Local\Temp\msohtmlclip1\01\clip_image001.jpg>

Several Japanese nuclear power plant operators are expected to consider announcing plans to scrap reactors that are about 40 years old.

The operators are making the move as the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is set to file an interim report on Wednesday on steps that would make it easier to scrap aging reactors.

The report will include an expansion of the special accounting measures for decommissioning work.

New regulations for nuclear plants introduced last year set the lifespan for reactors at 40 years. Extending their lifespan will require special inspections.

Four operators are considering announcing by next March that they will scrap 5 reactors.

Three of them are in Fukui Prefecture. One is operated by the Japan Atomic Power Company and 2 are run by Kansai Electric Power Company.

A fourth is operated by Chugoku Electric Power Company in Shimane Prefecture and the fifth one is run by Kyushu Electric Power Company in Saga Prefecture.

These reactors have a relatively small output. The utilities apparently think it will not be cost-effective to spend huge amounts on the safety measures needed to keep them running.

Kansai Electric Power Company has 2 other reactors that have been in operation for 39 to 40 years. Their output is large and the utility has started a special inspection to extend their lifespan.

Kansai: New rate hike

December 24, 2014

Kansai Electric applies for fresh utilities rate hike

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141224p2g00m0bu048000c.html>

OSAKA (Kyodo) -- Kansai Electric Power Co. applied Wednesday with the government for a fresh electricity rate hike, seeking to increase bills for households by 10.23 percent on average from April amid higher fossil fuel costs after its nuclear reactors were idled.

The utility, which had relied heavily on atomic power generation before the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident, last raised household bills in May 2013. It also plans to increase bills for corporate customers and factories, for which it does not require government approval, by 13.93 percent.

The industry ministry will discuss whether the hike proposed by Kansai Electric, which serves the Kansai region in western Japan, is reasonable before deciding whether to approve the move.

The margin of the markup could still be trimmed in the course of scrutiny by the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry. At the proposed rate, the electricity bill for an average household is projected to increase by 744 yen per month to 8,355 yen.

All of Japan's 48 commercial nuclear reactors were gradually taken offline following the nuclear meltdowns in March 2011, which heightened concerns over nuclear power. At least four of them, including two Kansai Electric units, may go back online next year, but the outlook for most of the other reactors remains uncertain.

Kansai Electric is expected to record a group net loss in fiscal 2014 through March for the fourth straight year. The company expects to post 126 billion yen in its latest loss and a consolidated operating loss of 100 billion yen, on sales of 3.44 trillion yen, according to its full-year earnings projection released Wednesday.

President Makoto Yagi said last week the firm is expected to remain in the red in fiscal 2015 without an electricity markup.

But since the last rate hike, Kansai Electric's electricity power sales have been on the wane as large-lot customers have switched to independent power suppliers that offer lower electricity rates.

More info on 3/11 released

December 25, 2014

Govt. releases more accounts of Fukushima disaster

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141226_03.html

Dec. 25, 2014 - Updated 21:08 UTC+1

The Japanese government has released more interview accounts of the 2011 nuclear accident.

772 interviews were conducted in 2011 and 2012 by a government committee that investigated the disaster.

The testimonies came mainly from government officials and staff from Tokyo Electric Power Company, which operates the crippled Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Some testimonies including those from then prime minister Naoto Kan, and then plant chief Masao Yoshida have already been released.

An additional 127 were made public on Thursday after receiving consent from interviewees.

Among those newly released is one from a worker at Tokyo Electric headquarters. He analyzed conditions inside the reactors in early April 2011 when the effects of the disaster began to unfold.

The official said he thought the upper half of the nuclear fuel rods at the No.1 reactor core must have completely melted. Cooling water was covering only the lower half of the rods.

But the employee added he remembered his company refrained from using the word "meltdown" in news briefings as much as possible. He said he heard TEPCO feared that a misunderstanding could occur as there was no exact definition for the term.

Nuclear fuel melted at the No.1, 2 and 3 reactors. But Tokyo Electric admitted the possibility of meltdowns only in May 2011.

Lack of communication, late evacuation orders

December 26, 2014

Fukushima ex-governor slams government for tardy radiation evacuation orders

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/12/26/national/fukushima-ex-governor-slams-government-tardy-radiation-evacuation-orders/#.VJ0isP-cJA>

JJI

Former Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato had criticized the central government for failing to issue evacuation orders in a timely manner in March 2011 after the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant suffered three reactor core meltdowns and spewed radioactive fallout, according to records disclosed Thursday.

The central government at first did not provide any information about the meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the records quoted Sato as saying.

"Because we received various information from local communities, I decided to issue an evacuation order," Sato said.

The prefectural government issued an evacuation order on its own to people living within 2 km of the plant soon after the disaster started.

"An evacuation order from the central government came afterward," the records quoted Sato as saying.

The records were taken by a government panel that interviewed many people, including Sato, as part of its investigation into the nuclear debacle.

Sato also said that Tepco should have released its estimate about the possibility of the plant being hit by huge tsunami based on evidence left by a massive earthquake that struck in 869, according to the records. This is the third time that the government has disclosed records about the investigative panel's interviews.

The newly disclosed records include interviews with senior industry ministry officials and officials at affected municipalities as well as employees of nuclear plant maker Hitachi Ltd.

December 25, 2014

Lack of communication in Fukushima disaster

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20141226_11.html
Dec. 26, 2014 - Updated 04:49 UTC+1

Newly released testimony points to a failure to share key information during the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in March 2011.

The Japanese government on Thursday released another set of accounts of the disaster, containing testimony from government officials and staff at Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, who dealt with the disaster.

The accounts reveal that not all workers and officials knew that an emergency cooling system for the No.1 reactor had been manually shut down following the earthquake and tsunami.

Fuel rods at the No.1 reactor melted down later that day and a hydrogen explosion the next day damaged the reactor further.

In one account, a member of the TEPCO task force said he didn't know that the cooling system was unable to work due to a loss of power. He added that before the arrival of the tsunami, he was only informed by the shift head at the No.1 reactor that the team was trying to adjust the internal pressure of the reactor by using the cooling system.

Workers at the No.1 reactor later confirmed that the cooling system was off and they tried to turn it on by opening a valve. They failed to open the valve and closed it again.

The task force official said it was true that he had been informed the workers opened the valve and turned on the cooling system.

But he said there is no record that the valve was later closed, and he does not remember receiving information from the shift head about closing the valve.

Nuclear fuel also subsequently melted at the No.2 and No.3 reactors.

Some experts say the delayed response to the problems at the No.1 reactor worsened the situation at the plant.

More information disclosed about 3:11 (2)

December 26, 2014

127 more 'secret' interviews on Fukushima crisis disclosed

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201412260050>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The central government on Dec. 25 released dozens more closed-door accounts by people closely connected to the Fukushima nuclear disaster in response to a public outcry about secrecy.

The latest batch involves accounts by 127 officials, workers at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and other parties caught up in the crisis triggered by the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

They include accounts by former Fukushima Governor Yuhei Sato, Toshitsuna Watanabe, the mayor of Fukushima Prefecture's Okuma town, and Eiji Hiraoka, vice director-general of the now-dissolved Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency.

It brings to 202, the number of records released to date.

Bowing to calls for greater openness on the issue, the Abe administration in September made public its records of remarks by 19 people, including the late Masao Yoshida, who was the manager of the nuclear facility at the onset of the disaster, and Naoto Kan, the prime minister at the time.

It followed up with records of interviews with an additional 56 people in November.

A government investigation committee held closed-door questioning sessions with about 770 related officials and others in connection with the accident.

Records for Sato, governor of a prefecture with a population of 2 million, show that local officials had to make decisions under extreme pressure.

According to Sato's remarks, although the central government declared a state of nuclear emergency after the earthquake, the prefecture was given few details about what was happening.

For this reason, **Sato and his subordinates tried to glean details by watching television.**

"Everyone had their eyes glued to the TV (to learn what was happening at the disaster site)," the governor said in his hearing.

At 8:50 p.m. on March 11, Sato issued an evacuation order for residents within a 2-kilometer radius of the Fukushima plant.

Although a separate report by the national investigation committee reveals data on the likely spread of radioactive substances was e-mailed to the prefectural government from March 12, Sato admitted that the information was not shared with a sufficient number of people.

He blamed that on the confusion that prevailed at the time.

As the situation deteriorated day by day, Fukushima residents were ordered by the central government to flee farther away from the power plant. Some residents apparently were advised by local municipalities to flee in the direction in which contaminated materials were predicted to spread.

During the interview with the investigation committee, Sato cited the case of a resident who tried nine times to flee to safety. He said it reflected "the very reality of nuclear disaster evacuation."

Employees of Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the Fukushima plant, were also among the 127 interviewees.

A group manager at the facility said an iron door connecting two buildings buckled in the disaster, cutting off access and making it difficult to restore the power supply.

According to the employee's testimony, TEPCO officials were instructed to take shelter at the nearby Fukushima No. 2 plant on March 15 but later asked to return.

"Although team leaders and other veteran workers returned (to the No. 1 plant), the number of workers there halved (after the temporary evacuation)," the group manager said during the interview.

Another TEPCO employee involved in safety assessments testified that the official believed the upper portion of nuclear fuel had melted at the No. 1 reactor, resulting in some dropping to the bottom of the reactor.

This was the situation as of April 10, although TEPCO did not acknowledge then that a meltdown had occurred.

The Abe administration has been working since June to make public interview records on the Fukushima crisis, but only after gaining the consent of those interviewed.

The government originally planned to complete the disclosure process by the end of the year. But TEPCO executives and others have not agreed to have their statements made public. For this reason, the government has decided to continue working on the project next year.

End of compensation to businesses by Feb 2016?

December 27, 2014

Ministry, TEPCO seek to end compensation for Fukushima businesses in Feb. 2016

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20141227p2a00m0na007000c.html>

The government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) have proposed to Fukushima Prefecture's commerce and industry federation a plan to end nuclear disaster compensation for businesses in February 2016, it has been learned.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and TEPCO presented the plan to the Fukushima Federation of Societies of Commerce and Industry on Dec. 25. The ministry and the utility told the federation that they plan to end compensation payments to all businesses, **except for those in the agricultural, forestry and fisheries sectors**, in February 2016. Ministry and utility officials explained that they would map out future policies after hearing claims from business owners.

The federation's secretary-general, Hideki Endo, however, criticized the proposal.

"Fukushima business owners face different situations depending on their evacuation statuses and their business categories," he said. "While we understand the need to draw the line somewhere, we cannot accept the end of compensation payments within a year and a few months from now when the nuclear disaster has still not been brought to a conclusion and there are no prospects that harmful rumors will end in the foreseeable future."

Self-employed residents affected by the nuclear disaster, as well as mid- and small-businesses in 11 municipalities located within evacuation zones are eligible to receive compensation.

It was earlier decided that businesses eligible for compensation payments would receive the payments until February 2015 regardless of their business conditions. The compensation payments for those

outside of the evacuation zones whose businesses had suffered from harmful rumors were to continue without a particular deadline, according to the level of damage.

As the compensation policy from March 2015 onward for businesses not in the agricultural, forestry or fisheries industries remained unclear, the Fukushima Prefectural Government and other related parties had been urging the economy ministry and TEPCO to outline a policy direction at an early stage. Compensation guidelines compiled by the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry's Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation in December 2013 said that **it is reasonable to end compensation payments to business owners when they are able to operate their businesses in pre-disaster conditions.**

According to TEPCO, from September 2011, when the nuclear disaster compensation program began accepting applications, to November 2014, a total of 1.694 trillion yen had been paid as business compensation and compensation for damage caused by harmful rumors, including to businesses in the agricultural, forestry and fisheries industries.

An executive of local inspection firm Tohoku Ekkususen, which is based in the town of Namie, whose residents remain evacuated, says the company will have to close down if its compensation payments are withdrawn. Before the disaster, the company employed some 100 workers. It set up a temporary office in the city of Fukushima after the 2011 disaster, but as a result of evacuation, less than 20 employees remained. Its profit has dropped to one-tenth of pre-disaster levels, as there are no more orders for nuclear plant-related jobs.

"We doubt that our business will be back in shape by February 2016. **TEPCO and the economy ministry need to consider individual cases,**" the company executive said.

December 27, 2014(Mainichi Japan)

Special advisor to TEPCO

Press Releases 2014

http://www.tepco.co.jp/en/press/corp-com/release/2014/1246826_5892.html

Press Release (Dec 26, 2014)

Appointment of a special advisor

TEPCO announced today that it has invited Mr. Susumu Uchikawa (Honorary Advisor of Toyota Motor East Japan, Inc), who has been involved in the improvement of manufacturing sites for decades, as special advisor (tentative). TEPCO has been tackling initiatives to double its productivity and to win in the competitive environment as well as fulfilling its commitment towards Fukushima revitalization. The company hopes to learn from Mr. Uchikawa's knowledge and experience in improving workplace productivity.

Mr. Uchikawa will be visiting the sites from January 2015, cooperating closely with the board members, and will be constantly offering guidance towards doubling productivity.

Accordingly, a "Kaizen" (continuous improvement) activity team will be set up with members from the Power Grid Company and the Fuel and Power Company which will work under Mr. Uchikawa, deploying his instructions at the front line.

Another example of sloppy management of workers' safety

December 31, 2014

TEPCO's sloppy handling of suppressant led to spread of radioactive dust in 2013

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201412310025>

By MIKI AOKI/ Staff Writer

Tokyo Electric Power Co. diluted a dust suppressant that rendered it ineffective and allowed the spread of radioactive materials that contaminated 12 workers at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in summer 2013, officials said.

The suppressant is supposed to prevent radioactive dust from getting into the air and spreading. However, TEPCO not only diluted the suppressant to levels well below the manufacturers' recommended standard, but it also did not use the suppressant on a daily basis when removing rubble at the stricken nuclear plant.

The sloppy use of the dust suppressant continued for about a year.

"As a result, the effectiveness of the suppressant decreased and likely led to the spewing of radioactive materials in the summer of 2013," an official with the Secretariat of the Nuclear Regulation Authority said. The NRA Secretariat issued administrative guidance to TEPCO, instructing the utility to use the suppressant in a safe manner.

According to an official with a dust suppressant manufacturer, the product is an alkaline liquid that solidifies after a few hours. It is mainly used to prevent the spread of asbestos.

The company recommends that when removing asbestos, the dust suppressant should be used as is or diluted in 10 parts water. It should also be sprayed daily throughout the removal process.

According to TEPCO officials, when workers were removing rubble from the No. 4 reactor at the Fukushima No. 1 plant, the dust suppressant was sprayed on the day before work and right before the removal of the rubble. The suppressant was either undiluted or diluted in 10 parts water.

However, from August 2012, when rubble removal began at the No. 3 reactor, the suppressant was diluted in 100 parts water, and it was used only once every several days or even once every several weeks, the officials said.

In summer 2013, when the spread of radioactive dust came to light, the suppressant had been used at the No. 3 reactor only twice, in mid-June and on Aug. 13.

"Dilution in 100 parts water produces the same result as using only water," said an official at a dust suppressant manufacturer. "Because work should, in principle, only be conducted when the dust has been moistened with the suppressant, not using the suppressant for several days will naturally lead to the spewing of radioactive dust."

In fact, on Aug. 12 and 19, 2013, when rubble was being removed, alarms went off at the Fukushima No. 1 plant because the spread of radioactive dust raised the radiation levels there. Twelve workers were confirmed to have been contaminated by radioactive materials.

On Aug. 19, the volume of radioactive materials released was 6,700 times normal levels, according to an estimate made by the NRA Secretariat.

On one occasion, airborne radiation levels increased at a location 3 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

TEPCO officials admitted that was likely caused by the spewing of radioactive dust after the improper spraying of the dust suppressant.

“When the dust suppressant was mixed in the nuclear fuel storage pool, the level of alkalinity increased, and there were concerns about the effect on equipment,” a TEPCO official said. “While we were aware there was no problem with the effectiveness of the suppressant, our actions in the end were insufficient.” The utility returned to using suppressant diluted in 10 parts water from October 2013, and the liquid was sprayed daily before and after work to remove rubble.

TEPCO did conduct an experiment to find out if dust solidified when the suppressant was diluted by 100 parts water, but no tests were done on the duration of that effect.

“The thinking toward safety management was extremely sloppy,” said Hiroyuki Mori, a professor of public policy at Ritsumeikan University who has conducted studies on the spread of asbestos at disaster-stricken areas. “The work should have been conducted while thinking foremost about the safety of the workers and local residents.”

An official with the NRA Secretariat’s office dealing with the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 plant said: “Initially, we did not check the concentration of the dust suppressant or the frequency with which it was used. We have since strengthened monitoring.”

FIT revision just an excuse for turning nukes back on?

January 2, 2015

Nuclear motive suspected in feed-in tariff reforms

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/01/02/national/nuclear-motive-suspected-in-feed-in-tariff-reforms/#.VKbDiXt1Cic>

by Eric Johnston
Staff Writer

Recent revisions to the feed-in tariff system have been welcomed by utilities as much-needed government intervention that will ensure safe and stable supply of all forms of electricity by helping to prevent renewable energy from overloading the grid and causing blackouts.

But critics say the move by an agency under the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry does little to solve the basic electricity transmission issues, and hint that the real purpose of the changes is to limit the

amount of renewable energy generated so there is enough grid capacity to handle nuclear power once the reactors are turned back on.

The controversy began in September, when Kyushu Electric Power Co. announced it would no longer sign contracts with most companies that were supplying renewable energy. The reason, the utility said, was that its transmission network would be overloaded if it actually purchased electricity from all of the renewable energy suppliers it had signed contracts with.

Since the advent of the July 2012 feed-in tariff system, which obligates Japan's 10 utilities to purchase electricity made from solar, wind, geothermal, mini-hydro and biomass sources from private firms, there had been something of a gold rush mentality. Firms large and small rushed to take advantage of the tariff, which guaranteed a fixed price per kilowatt hour, and the latest figures show the central government had approved nearly 1.5 million different projects.

About half of these were for solar projects generating under 10 kilowatts, and are primarily rooftop solar panels for homes and small businesses. On the other end of the scale, a total of 1,265 projects had been approved for solar projects generating more than 2,000 kilowatts. Many are "megasolar" projects that generate tens of thousands of kilowatts.

But the larger than expected — by officials at least — number of entrants led Kyushu Electric to announce it would suspend applications from renewable energy suppliers. Four others, including Shikoku Electric Power Co., Hokkaido Electric Power Co., Tohoku Electric Power Co., and Okinawa Electric Power Co., quickly followed suit, sending a shock wave through the industry and sparking warnings that Japan's nascent moves toward renewable energy were in danger.

In response to the panic, METI looked into the issue. In mid-December, the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, as part of a general review of the feed-in tariff program, issued a new set of rules for both renewable energy suppliers and distributors (the utilities).

Lax standards in terms of project deadlines meant that, as long as approval for a project had been granted under one tariff price over a fixed period, firms could delay construction by waiting for costs to fall, thus widening their profit margin between the guaranteed price per kilowatt hour they would receive (the tariff price) and the actual generation cost per kilowatt hour.

Under the new rules, however, once project approval is granted, firms are given deadlines for completing construction and connecting to the grid. Missing the deadlines could mean losing the right to grid access. Also, utilities could previously limit output of renewable-generated electricity for up to 30 days annually, under the assumption the time would be calculated on a daily basis. The basic unit has been changed to hours, which means they can now limit the amount of solar project output by 360 hours annually, and wind power output by 720 hours annually.

This is being done to increase the efficient grid use of renewable energy, the government said.

"By **controlling output on an hourly basis**, the amount of available capacity can be increased," the agency said in announcing the rule changes.

A METI study found that seven utilities — Hokkaido Electric, Tohoku Electric, Hokuriku Electric, Chugoku Electric, Shikoku Electric, Kyushu Electric and Okinawa Electric — only accept about 58 percent of the total solar power renewable-energy firms can, or plan to, generate due to grid limitations.

However, renewable energy advocates say the latest decision by the energy agency under pro-nuclear METI fails to address a number of concerns and was based on assumptions about the future of nuclear power in Japan that are, to nuclear opponents, optimistic at best.

"In the basic energy plan approved by the government in April, it states that the fundamental goal is to reduce the reliance on nuclear power as much as possible. But (the agency's) calculations for the new rules are based on the premise that all of Japan's nuclear reactors, including those that are 40 years old,

will be in operation. The result is nuclear power accounting for between 50 and 60 percent of the supply at Hokkaido Electric and Kyushu Electric during minimum load demand times, and the reduction of available renewable energy,” the Japan Renewable Energy Foundation, a think tank set up by billionaire entrepreneur Masayoshi Son, said in a report released just after the agency’s announcement.

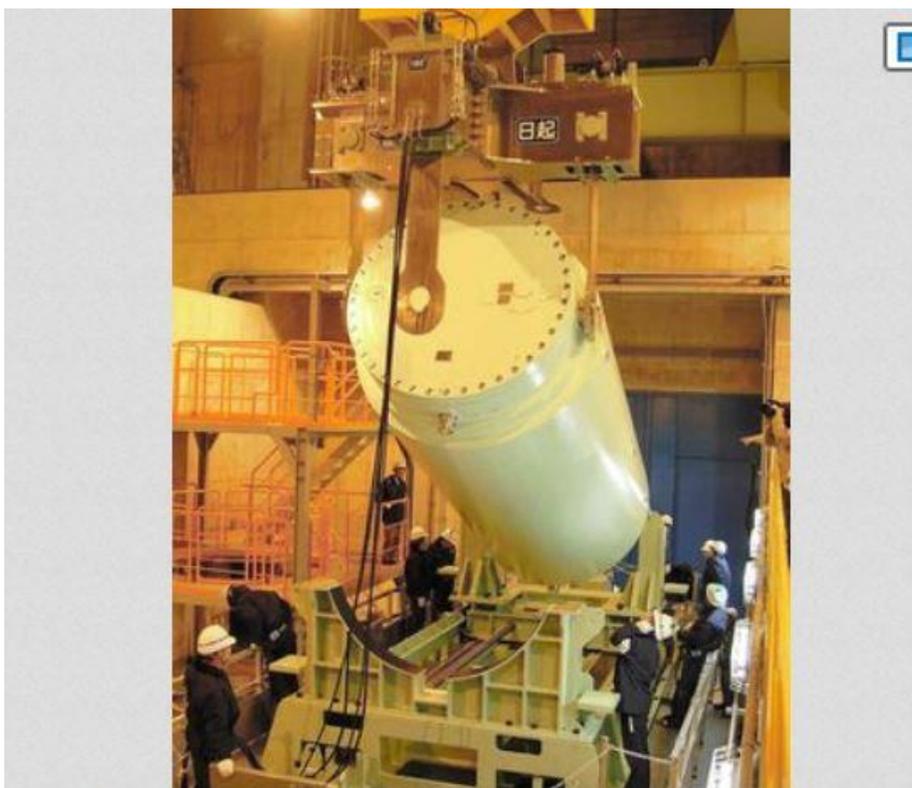
Anti-nuclear activists in Kyushu have questioned the timing of Kyushu Electric’s September announcement that it would not purchase most of the renewable energy generated. Only days before, the Nuclear Regulation Authority had given approval for two Kyushu Electric reactors at its Sendai plant in Kagoshima Prefecture to restart.

“Kyushu Electric says they stopped purchasing renewables to maintain a demand and supply balance, but I really wonder if this is the case”, said Yoshitaka Mukohara, a Kagoshima-based anti-nuclear activist.

All of the utilities have agreed to the new rules. Kyushu Electric is expected to resume purchasing renewable energy this month, but under certain conditions.

But given the ardent efforts of pro-nuclear Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the ruling coalition, as well as a pro-nuclear lobby that consists of most local politicians, utilities and METI, to restart all safe reactors as soon as possible, it’s clear that renewable energy faces a bumpy road due not only to technical and financial issues, but also political and bureaucratic hostility that makes overcoming the other issues all the more difficult.

Utilities in no hurry to switch to dry storage



Spent nuclear fuel is kept in a dry cask for storage at the Tokai No. 2 nuclear power plant in Tokai in Ibaraki Prefecture. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

January 4, 2014

Utilities balk at safer storage of spent nuclear fuel to avoid 'wasted investment'

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201501040021>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Power companies have resisted government calls to construct safer storage facilities for spent nuclear fuel and are instead waiting for a fuel reprocessing plant to finally start running after nearly two decades of delays.

The utilities say that building dry storage facilities, which hold spent nuclear fuel encased in metal or concrete casks, could prove **a waste of money if the Rokkasho reprocessing plant in Aomori Prefecture begins operations and takes all the spent fuel off their hands.**

They also cite concerns in communities that host nuclear reactors that dry storage facilities could lead to permanent storage there.

Under Japan's basic energy plan approved by the Cabinet in April last year, the central government promotes the construction and use of dry storage facilities.

Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, has repeatedly referred to the importance of such facilities, which are deemed safer and less expensive to operate than the traditional method of keeping spent nuclear fuel submerged in storage pools at nuclear plant.

Spent fuel pools are usually located next to reactors for swift transport because the fuel rods continue to be highly radioactive and emit heat after use.

The risk of using storage pools was exposed when all power sources were lost at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck on March 11, 2011.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the plant, not only had to deal with three reactor meltdowns, but it was also forced to take measures to prevent the release of radiation from spent fuel storage pools at the site.

Under the dry storage method, the encased spent fuel is cooled with circulating air at a facility built separate from the reactor building. Dry storage is mainly used for spent fuel whose radioactive decay heat has already dropped to a certain level.

One big advantage that dry storage has over storage pools is that it can continue to cool spent fuel even after a power failure in the event of a nuclear accident or natural disaster.

In fact, spent fuel in a dry storage facility at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant did not suffer any major damage in the 2011 disaster, according to TEPCO. [???]

The only other nuclear power station currently equipped with a dry storage facility within its plant site is Japan Atomic Power Co.'s Tokai No. 2 nuclear power plant in Ibaraki Prefecture.

Chubu Electric Power Co. plans to set up a dry storage facility at its Hamaoka nuclear plant in Shizuoka Prefecture in fiscal 2018. That plan was hatched before the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

But no other utility in Japan has moved in that direction despite the government's urging.

"At present, we are not considering it," said an official at Hokuriku Electric Power Co.

Hokuriku Electric operates relatively new nuclear reactors that have more storage capacity for spent fuel than utilities that have run the same reactors for decades.

But power companies whose storage space for spent fuel is nearing capacity are also not showing a sense of urgency in constructing dry storage facilities.

Kyushu Electric Power Co. and Shikoku Electric Power Co say they are still at the stage of weighing whether they should build such facilities.

Reports show that **spent fuel has already filled up 70 percent of the overall storage capacity of the nation's nuclear power plants.**

The biggest reason the utilities are hesitant to build dry storage facilities is that the government has kept alive the Rokkasho nuclear fuel reprocessing plant project, despite its many problems.

According to the project, the Rokkasho plant will take in the utilities' spent nuclear fuel and reprocess it for reuse at nuclear reactors around Japan.

The Rokkasho plant was originally scheduled to open in 1997. However, the start of operations has been delayed 21 times because of technical glitches, human error and safety issues.

Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd., operator of the Rokkasho plant, has postponed the completion date to March 2016.

Still, electric power companies do not want to spend on dry storage facilities now because they believe the plant will start running and alleviate them of their spent fuel problems.

"Even if we build a dry storage facility, it would likely be a wasted investment," said an official in the nuclear power industry, alluding to the Rokkasho plant.

The utilities say they are also concerned that building dry storage facilities could stoke fears among nearby residents and local officials that hazardous spent fuel would remain in their neighborhoods for a prolonged period.

Fukui Prefecture is home to 13 nuclear reactors, the most in the nation. The prefectural government demands that spent fuel removed from nuclear power stations in the prefecture be stored at an interim facility outside the prefecture.

"We see it as a problem that (spent fuel) could be kept here until the end of time," said a prefectural official overseeing nuclear plant issues.

Tadahiro Katsuta, associate professor of nuclear energy policy at Meiji University, said the central government should provide incentives to spur utilities to shift to dry storage facilities.

"When the safety of a nuclear plant is at issue, it is obvious that dry storage is more reliable (than pools) since it does not require emergency measures to safeguard the facility in the event of an accident," Katsuta said. "Financial benefits and setting a limit on the storage period should be considered."

(This article was written by Ryuta Koike and Toshio Kawada.)

People's views & decision-making

January 6, 2015

EDITORIAL: Consensus-building process needed for nuclear policy decisions

Nearly four years have passed since the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Signs are that 2015 will be remembered as the year when Japan restarted nuclear power generation.

The No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai nuclear power plant in Kagoshima Prefecture, which have passed the Nuclear Regulation Authority's safety screenings in line with stricter regulations, are expected to resume operation as early as this spring. The nuclear safety watchdog has

also given the green light to a plan to restart the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama plant in Fukui Prefecture.

Applications for the NRA's safety reviews have also been submitted for 17 other reactors at 12 nuclear power stations. These reactors are waiting in the wings for the NRA's approval.

DIVIDED PUBLIC OPINION

To bring an offline reactor on stream again, the operator also needs to win the consent of the prefecture and municipalities where the reactor is located.

In the case of the Sendai plant, the local assemblies of Kagoshima Prefecture and the city of Satsumasendai voted last autumn to support the plan to restart the reactors. The Kagoshima governor and the mayor of the city have also decided to approve it. The will of the local communities concerned has been made clear according to formal procedures.

But the will of the nation as a whole concerning the issue is different.

In a survey The Asahi Shimbun conducted in November, 56 percent of the respondents expressed opposition to restarting reactors, against 28 percent who supported the move. We have been asking similar questions since our survey in June 2013, and all the polls showed that a majority of the people were cautious about the idea of bringing reactors back online.

The opinions of the local governments concerned represent the popular will, as do the results of opinion polls.

If the will of the people concerning other reactor restarts is represented in the same way as in the case of the Sendai plant, the desire of many Japanese to see an end to nuclear power generation in this nation could be ignored as the NRA accelerates its safety screenings of the reactors. Is that acceptable?

Since the Fukushima nuclear disaster, public opinion has remained sharply divided over various related issues, such as evacuation plans, damage caused by radiation and hikes in electricity rates.

The situation requires the government to rethink the way it makes nuclear policy decisions.

The nation clearly needs a system to integrate widely different popular views about nuclear power generation into policies.

In many Western nations, systems are designed to allow citizens to take part in policy debate to refine and visualize public opinion.

CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION IS CRUCIAL

Denmark was a pioneer in this area by creating a system to incorporate public opinions into the policymaking process through "consensus conferences."

Since the late 1980s, the system has been actively used to make decisions on key science and technology policy issues, such as the application of genetic engineering.

Under this system, a dozen or so citizens are chosen from among those who have responded to the government's invitations to participate in debate on a certain issue. They spend several days asking experts related questions and studying and discussing the issue as a panel. Then, working on their own, the citizens prepare and publish a written opinion about the issue.

Lawmakers and media are invited to be present when the citizens publish the document.

Similar systems have been used in various ways by countries and areas. They are all designed as "dialogue-oriented" plans to build consensus among the public while respecting different opinions.

In summer 2012, the government led by the Democratic Party of Japan attempted to adopt a similar approach when it initiated "national debate" on nuclear power policy decisions.

In addition to introducing a public comment system and holding public hearings in various parts of the nation, the DPJ-led government conducted what is known as a "deliberative opinion poll" for the first time in Japan.

About 300 citizens, selected randomly from the nearly 7,000 people who had responded to a survey, engaged in a discussion meeting that ran two days with an overnight stay. A total of three surveys, including the ones conducted before and after the meeting, were held to find out changes in their opinions. The participants were chosen at random to ensure that the sample would represent the entire population demographically and vocationally. It was an attempt to create a more thought-out public opinion regarding nuclear power through in-depth discussions.

As a result of this process, the government concluded that many Japanese wanted to see their society abandon nuclear power generation.

Some problems arose with the survey method and the way the government made its policy decisions accordingly. But it was nevertheless a welcome attempt to accurately grasp the will of the people. Such an approach should be used more for debate on nuclear power policy issues.

MANY ISSUES DEMAND BROAD CONSENSUS

The division of public opinion over nuclear energy is not limited to the one between the will of the nation as a whole versus the will of local governments concerned.

Since the Fukushima disaster, there have been disagreements among local governments over the scope of “local communities” that should be involved in the decision-making process on such issues as whether to approve construction of a nuclear power plant and a restart of an offline reactor.

In April last year, Hakodate, Hokkaido, sued the state and Electric Power Development Co., or J-Power, to halt construction of the Oma nuclear power plant in Oma, Aomori Prefecture, which is located across the Tsugaru Strait.

Hakodate is located within 30 kilometers of the plant, and its citizens would be exposed to serious threats to their health if a severe accident were to occur there.

Hakodate’s legal action is based on the notion that its vicinity to the nuclear plant should qualify it for involvement in decisions on whether to approve construction.

A heap of issues related to nuclear power generation should be settled through broad consensus and agreement. They include the program to provide state subsidies to local governments hosting nuclear plants, storage of spent nuclear fuel and disposal of radioactive waste.

Public opinion will be divided in various ways over all these issues. If there is no effective system to build consensus on such contentious issues by overcoming wide disagreements, the government will have to repeat the futile choice of either forcibly executing or postponing its decisions.

The administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is seeking to revive nuclear power generation in this nation.

But the government’s new basic energy supply plan, which the Abe Cabinet endorsed in April last year, contains the following passage: “The government will consider attempts to allow diverse parties to engage in discussions on various energy-related challenges and study together to deepen their understanding for the sake of progress in policy efforts.”

The government plans to hold policy debate on the future share of nuclear power in Japan’s overall power supply with an eye to making the decision by summer.

If the government is concerned that the traditional approach to policymaking may not work with this challenge, it should change the way it makes decisions now.

What is the best way to measure people’s views and opinions and integrate them into the decision-making process? The issue of nuclear power generation raises this fundamental question about the way policy decisions are made.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Jan. 6

Second group lawsuit over Fukushima disaster

January 13, 2015

Group files fresh complaint over Fukushima nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150113p2g00m0dm077000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- A group of citizens including some from Fukushima Prefecture on Tuesday filed a second criminal complaint against a former nuclear safety official and eight others, arguing they failed to take necessary preventive measures in the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

It follows one filed in June 2012 against Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s then Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and others for causing the disaster at the utility's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in March 2011.

Among the accused this time were Yoshinori Moriyama, a former official in charge of nuclear disaster countermeasures at the now-defunct Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, officials at TEPCO and others. In the written complaint filed with the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office, **the group said the nine were responsible for a number of citizens' exposure to radiation in the Fukushima crisis by neglecting to take countermeasures for possible severe accidents.**

The prosecutors' office is continuing its investigation into the first case after an independent judicial panel of citizens decided last year that Katsumata and two other TEPCO officials merit indictment in the wake of the prosecutors' decision not to indict them.

"Raising eyebrows"

January 14, 2015

Kagoshima assemblymen on nuke safety body tied to firms with Kyushu Electric contracts

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150114p2a00m0na006000c.html>

KAGOSHIMA -- Two members of a 15-person Kagoshima Prefectural Assembly committee that approved the restart of Sendai Nuclear Power Plant have close family ties to firms hired by plant operator Kyushu Electric Power Co. to do construction work at that very power station, it has been learned.

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) assembly members Katsuzo Hokazono and Kaneoki Obata also both received "consulting" and "advisory" fees from these family firms. The companies have received at least 10 orders worth a total of some 170 million yen from Kyushu Electric since the March 2011 meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

According to construction records submitted to the prefecture and other sources, from May 2011 to March last year, Kyushu Electric contracted two construction companies run by Hokazono's son and nephew to do six jobs at the Sendai plant, including building a parking lot and waterproofing the area around sea water pumps. The firms, directly hired once and five times as subcontractors, were paid a total

of 78.58 million yen. They were also hired by the utility to do work unrelated to nuclear power plants. According to income statements, Hokazono received consulting income from both firms until autumn 2011.

A construction company owned by relatives of Obata, meanwhile, took four work orders at the Sendai plant between January 2012 and June 2013, including jobs related to bringing safety measures up to new government standards for restart. All four jobs were contracted directly by Kyushu Electric, with a total value of 96.27 million yen. Obata was a paid adviser to the construction firm at the time.

The special prefectural assembly committee on nuclear safety approved Kyushu Electric's application to restart the Sendai plant reactors by a vote of 11 to 3 in November last year. Both Obata and Hokazono voted in favor, while Hokazono also argued stridently for the restarts during proceedings.

Kagoshima Prefectural Assembly political ethics guidelines state that sitting members "will not serve as executives at firms taking construction orders from the prefecture," but there are no rules regarding private companies like Kyushu Electric. The head of the prefectural ombudsman, however, stated that "for a company related to a prefectural assembly member, who must as a representative of the local government fairly consider nuclear restarts, to take construction orders (from the utility) must absolutely be viewed as a problem. This kind of behavior should be restricted by regulations."

When asked for comment, Hokazono told the Mainichi, "Construction work is completely unrelated to assembly deliberations."

January 13, 2015

Assembly members' family ties to contracts given at Sendai nuclear plant raise eyebrows

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201501130073

By SATOSHI OTANI/ Staff Writer

Concerns over a potential conflict of interest have been raised in connection to **two Kagoshima prefectural lawmakers whose family members run companies that have been given contracts at the Sendai nuclear plant**, although no laws have been broken.

Katsuzo Hokazono and Kaneoki Obata were serving on the Kagoshima prefectural assembly's special 15-member nuclear energy safety measures committee that approved a petition in November 2014 calling for the resumption of operations at the plant in Satsuma-Sendai, Kagoshima Prefecture.

Eleven committee members voted in favor of the petition, while three voted against it. Hokazono and Obata, who voted in support of a restart, have relatives who operate construction companies that received contracts from Kyushu Electric Power Co. for work at the Sendai plant and elsewhere in the three years since the 2011 Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disaster. **Four companies with links to the two prefectural assembly members received a total of 26 contracts worth 290 million yen (\$2.5 million).**

Hokazono has been a strong proponent of resuming operations at the Sendai plant, saying on one occasion during a Kagoshima prefectural assembly session, "We must push forward with resumption of operations **for the sake of national interests.**"

The two belong to the Liberal Democratic Party and are veteran assembly members, with Hokazono having won four terms and Obata five. Hokazono and Obata received remuneration from the companies in question.

The Kagoshima prefectural assembly has ethics guidelines that prohibit members from becoming executives at companies that win contracts for work commissioned by the prefectural government. However, because Kyushu Electric is a private-sector company, those guidelines do not apply. Moreover, Hokazono and Obata serve as advisers to the four companies, which are not considered executive positions.

The two said their family relationships and the work contracts did not factor into their deliberations and decisions on safety issues concerning the Sendai plant.

According to documents submitted to the Kagoshima and Miyagi prefectural governments, one of the firms is a construction company based in Satsuma-Sendai that is headed by Hokazono's older brother and nephew. Another company based in the same city is also headed by the older brother and Hokazono's son. Those two companies received six contracts for work at the Sendai plant and another 14 contracts for work at other facilities operated either by Kyushu Electric or affiliated companies.

According to income reports and other documents, Hokazono served as an adviser to the two companies until autumn 2011, receiving remuneration.

In addition, in July 2012, Hokazono established and became the president of a construction company in Iwanuma, Miyagi Prefecture, about 1,200 kilometers from the Sendai plant. Hokazono receives about 350,000 yen a month in salary. That company received one contract from a Kyushu Electric subsidiary. It has also been involved in rebuilding projects in the Tohoku region that was devastated by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The three companies with links to Hokazono received a total of 190 million yen in orders from Kyushu Electric or affiliated companies.

A relative of Obata also heads a construction company based in Satsuma-Sendai. Kyushu Electric gave five contracts to the company for work at the Sendai plant. The contracts were worth a total of 100 million yen.

Income reports and other documents showed that Obata served as an adviser to the company, where he also received remuneration.

The companies were involved in work at the Sendai plant such as replacing equipment and improving the facilities grounds. Some of the work was geared toward helping the Sendai plant meet the new safety screening standards established by the Nuclear Regulation Authority in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear accident.

The Sendai plant was the first in the nation to receive approval from the NRA for a restart after meeting the tougher screening standards. The Kagoshima prefectural governor and prefectural assembly along with the Satsuma-Sendai mayor and municipal assembly have all given their consent to the resumption of operations.

Nukes and their real cost

POINT OF VIEW/ Eiji Oguma: Planned protective measures show real cost of nuclear power

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/column/AJ201501150006>

SPECIAL TO THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The industry ministry is discussing a new protective measure for nuclear power plants: the contract for difference (CfD) system.

The CfD, introduced in Britain, guarantees that electricity will be purchased at a fixed rate over a certain period of time.

The purchase price is calculated in consideration of the plant's total cost, including future expenses, such as those for disposing of spent nuclear fuel and decommissioning reactors.

An agreement has been reached to apply the system to one nuclear power plant in Britain, with the reference purchase price set at 8.95 pence (around 15 yen or \$0.13) per kilowatt-hour. That is higher than the corresponding price for a land-based wind farm, and comes with a longer guarantee period of 35 years.

A nuclear plant requires so much initial investment that there is no guarantee the cost will be recovered under the market economy. That is why the CfD and other protective measures for nuclear plants are being discussed in Japan ahead of the liberalization of the power retail market slated for 2016.

But various objections have been raised to the introduction of such measures.

First, **the purchase price will likely be reflected in electricity rates, increasing the financial burden on consumers.**

An article on the "real cost of nuclear power" that appeared in the December issue of the Sentaku monthly magazine introduces an expert's view: "Calculations show that applying the nuclear CfD to existing nuclear plants (in Japan) would result in total annual dues of more than 3 trillion yen, which is worth **about the same as payments for alternative fuels within the current electricity rates.**"

"Alternative fuels" refer to fossil fuels for thermal power plants that have substituted nuclear plants idled after the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011.

The article also quoted a senior official of a major manufacturer as saying: "There would be no advantage in resuming nuclear power generation if the rates were to be higher, although I don't know about companies involved in building nuclear reactors.

"We would have no choice but to sharply increase in-house power generation if the CfD were to be introduced."

Second, **the decision process is not transparent.**

Representatives of power utilities and nuclear industry sit as "expert members" on the Nuclear Energy Subcommittee, where the discussions are being held. The panel falls under the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry's Advisory Committee for Natural Resources and Energy.

According to environmental economist Kenichi Oshima's article in the December issue of the Sekai monthly magazine, live video broadcasts of panel meetings, which were available in the aftermath of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, are no longer shown, and records of the first six meetings have never been released, even in audio format.

Audio records alone have been released for the seventh and subsequent meetings, but they are designated for "temporary availability until the minutes are published."

The article said the chairman of the Nuclear Energy Subcommittee said the meetings are not broadcast live because "some members say such a setting would not help them express their opinions."

Third, **such measures would give an advantage to power utilities that fail to reform their operations.**

According to a special feature on power industry realignment in the Oct. 11 issue of Shukan Diamond weekly magazine, Chubu Electric Power Co. has long sought to enhance the efficiency of thermal power generation, and Tokyo Electric Power Co. also “decided to define thermal power operations as a pillar of growth” following the disaster at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Both utilities are seeking to integrate their fuel procurement operations to reduce their international procurement prices for liquefied natural gas.

The special feature said Kansai Electric Power Co., on the other hand, adheres to its traditional focus on nuclear power operations as if to “commit a double suicide with nuclear power.”

Policy measures that favor an old guard management policy and fail to reward efforts to meet the demands of current times would not help to open up a new future for energy.

Nontransparent protective measures that lack consensus would only create dependence and harm sound efforts.

Tatsuya Murakami, former mayor of the village of Tokai, Ibaraki Prefecture, known for having hosted nuclear plants, says “everybody stops making efforts” and “other industries stop growing” once a community hosts a nuclear plant.

In an interview published in the Feb. 6 edition of Diamond Online (<http://diamond.jp/articles/-/48302>), he said, “Clothing shops, for example, are not looking toward the village residents. They can get along by just buying in and selling work clothes and shoes for nuclear plant workers.

Murakami said the same can be said of inns.

“They are intended for nuclear plant workers, so you sleep crowded together and use a joint bath,” he said. “I used to say they have to remodel their rooms, say, into private rooms, but nobody has come forward to do so. Everybody says, ‘I don’t care about remodeling. Workers are coming, after all.’”

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe took part in a debate of political party leaders on Dec. 1, the day before the official start of the campaign for the Lower House election.

According to the Dec. 2 issue of The Asahi Shimbun, the prime minister said: “It is all too natural for the public to feel they are fed up with nuclear power. At the same time, we have the responsibility to provide a stable supply of inexpensive energy.”

I want Abe to explain if nuclear plants need to be protected, given that power utilities and the industry ministry have virtually admitted that nuclear power is anything but “inexpensive.”

New subsidies to accelerate restarts

January 15, 2015

New subsidy system designed to expedite restarts of nuclear reactors

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201501150078>



The Sendai nuclear power plant in Satsuma-Sendai, Kagoshima Prefecture, is expected to resume operations this spring at the earliest. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The Abe administration has earmarked 1.5 billion yen (\$12.75 million) for a **new subsidy system designed to accelerate restarts of idled nuclear reactors and to convince residents that nuclear plants are safe.**

The figure was included in the draft budget for fiscal 2015, which was finalized on Jan. 14.

The fiscal 2015 draft budget also includes 91.2 billion yen for an existing annual grant system that targets regions hosting nuclear power facilities. These subsidies are provided to local governments based on power production at each nuclear plant they host.

Under the new system, prefectural governments that host nuclear reactors will receive grant money when the reactors resume operations or are later stopped so that the negative impact on local economies can be alleviated.

Although the local governments will be able to decide how to spend the funds, **the subsidies are expected to be used, for example, to conduct monitoring surveys to prevent the spread of groundless rumors about nuclear power. The central government also wants prefectural authorities to use the funds to hold explanatory sessions to convince residents of the safety of nuclear plants.**

All of the nation's reactors are currently offline in light of stricter safety standards introduced after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the Fukushima nuclear crisis in March 2011. The administration decided on the figure for the existing subsidy system based on the assumption that all reactors are operating at 81 percent of capacity.

The Abe administration will revise the estimate for fiscal 2016 so that local governments that host restarted reactors will be able to receive larger amounts than other regions.

For Fukushima citizens, an outrageous decision

January 22, 2015

Prosecutors not to indict ex-TEPCO execs again over Fukushima nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150122p2a00m0na001000c.html>

The Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office is set to decide soon not to indict three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co., including then Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata, on charges of professional negligence resulting in death and injury over the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, it has been learned. In September 2013, Tokyo prosecutors made their initial decision not to file charges against three former TEPCO executives, including 74-year-old Katsumata. But investigators at the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office are currently reinvestigating the three former TEPCO executives after a judicial panel of citizens decided last July that the three should be indicted.

Sources said that prosecutors will make a formal decision soon not to indict them after experts on tsunami, plant engineering and other fields explained in the reinvestigation process that there was little they could do. "There is a high possibility that even if they had taken anti-tsunami measures, they would not have been able to prevent the accident," said the experts.

Following prosecutors' latest decision, the Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution is to re-examine the case. If the committee decides again that the three men should be indicted, the Tokyo District Court will pick lawyers to serve as prosecutors and file an indictment against the three.

In 2008, TEPCO estimated that a tsunami as high as 15.7 meters could hit the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. After its initial investigation, the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office decided not to indict the three men, saying, "The estimate was based on the severest conditions and it is difficult to acknowledge that it was possible to predict the accident."

In response to prosecutors' decision, the Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution decided in July 2014 that the three men should be indicted, arguing that they could have avoided or mitigated the accident if they had taken steps such as: installing switch boards and power generators on higher ground; and making buildings waterproof.

In its reinvestigation of the case, the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office interviewed experts on tsunami, plant engineering and other fields in addition to the former TEPCO executives. Prosecutors have apparently come to a conclusion that it is highly possible that even if the aforementioned anti-disaster measures had been taken, the damage caused by tsunami could not have been avoided.

Fukushima citizens group expresses outrage

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150122_33.html

Jan. 22, 2015 - Updated 13:12 UTC+1

The leader of a group of citizens from Fukushima and other areas has expressed outrage over the prosecutors' decision not to indict the former officials.

Ruiko Muto leads the group that filed the criminal complaint.

Muto said at a news conference on Thursday that the prosecutors' decision totally ignores the judgment by the inquest panel, which she said served to express opinions of the public.

She said the victims of the accident sincerely hope that justice will be served concerning those

responsible for the accident.

The group's lawyer Hiroyuki Kawai said it's unreasonable that the prosecutors decided not to indict the 3 even though they had done nothing to prepare for a tsunami.

Kawai said the group hopes the panel will decide to indict the former officials so that they will be held accountable.

Complaint against ex-TEPCO officials again dropped

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150122_31.html

Jan. 22, 2015 - Updated 12:09 UTC+1

Prosecutors have again dismissed a criminal complaint against 3 former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Company over the 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Tokyo prosecutors made the decision following a reinvestigation into the case in response to a judgment by a prosecutor inquest panel last July.

The judiciary panel at that time said the utility's former chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and 2 others should stand trial over their handling of the accident.

That's despite prosecutors' initial conclusion 2 years ago that it would be difficult to indict the 3 former executives.

In the reinvestigation, prosecutors have been hearing from experts on nuclear engineering and tsunami. They did not change their decision.

The prosecutors explained that Tokyo Electric in 2008 estimated the effect of a tsunami as high as the one that hit in 2011. But they said that since reactor buildings were submerged in water several times deeper than they'd estimated, it's hard to say the executives should have predicted the risk.

The case now automatically goes back to the inquest panel. If it repeats its judgment, the 3 former officials will have to stand trial according to judicial procedures.

"Once again, no indictments"

January 23, 2015

Once again, no indictments against former TEPCO execs over Fukushima disaster

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Prosecutors again decided not to indict three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. over the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, essentially saying that the disaster was unpreventable.

The Jan. 22 decision by the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office rejected the stance of an independent judicial panel of citizens that former TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and two former vice presidents, Sakae Muto and Ichiro Takekuro, should be indicted on charges of professional negligence resulting in death and injury.

The citizens panel, called the Tokyo No. 5 Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution, plans to re-examine the case. If it again decides that charges are warranted, the three former TEPCO executives will be indicted mandatorily and stand trial.

A group of residents, disaster victims and lawyers initially filed a criminal complaint against the former TEPCO executives, saying the company failed to take appropriate measures against the tsunami that hammered the plant and caused the meltdown after the March 11 Great East Japan Earthquake. But prosecutors decided not to indict them in September 2013, saying experts did not predict an earthquake and tsunami of the scale of the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake and subsequent waves.

The group took the case to the citizens panel.

In July 2014, the panel concluded that TEPCO had in fact predicted a tsunami as high as 15.7 meters based on a government organization's forecast in 2008. The panel said that if the utility had taken measures based on that prediction, it could have prevented the nuclear disaster. It concluded that the three former executives should be indicted.

Prosecutors reinvestigated the case and solicited opinions from other experts.

While acknowledging the prediction of a 15.7-meter-high tsunami, prosecutors said the reliability of the forecast was low because it was based on calculation methods that were not officially recognized in those days.

Prosecutors also said the probability of the Fukushima plant being hit by a 15.7-meter-high tsunami was "once in a million years to 10 million years."

"It cannot be said that it was a duty for TEPCO to take measures (against tsunami of that height)," the prosecutors office said.

The tsunami that inundated the Fukushima plant was 11.5 meters to 15.5 meters high.

However, prosecutors said the width of the tsunami was five times longer than the width predicted by TEPCO. Therefore, the utility could not have prepared for such a huge volume of water at the nuclear plant, they said.

"It cannot be said that TEPCO could have predicted a tsunami (of such a large scale)," the office said.

They also addressed the citizens panel's assertion that measures taken against a 15.7-meter-high tsunami could have prevented the nuclear accident.

They concluded that even if TEPCO had started constructing sea walls in response to the 2008 prediction, they would not have been completed by March 2011.

If TEPCO had taken waterproofing measures for the reactor buildings, the equipment would have been destroyed by rubble thrown about by the tsunami.

"It is difficult to recognize that the nuclear accident could have been prevented," the prosecutors office said.

Members of the group that filed the initial complaint expressed outrage.

"It is an unfair judgment with a foregone conclusion," one of the members said at a news conference in Tokyo. "We hope the citizens panel will again decide that the three should be indicted and stand trial."

Group members plan to submit to the panel a report about why they are opposed to the prosecutors' latest decision.

All a question of priorities

Up in arms

Japan's military budget swells to its largest since the second world war

Jan 19th 2015 | TOKYO | Asia

<http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21640007-japans-military-budget-swells-its-largest-second-world-war-up-arms?fsrc=nlw|newe|20-01-2015>

SHINZO Abe, Japan's prime minister, returned to power in 2012 vowing to reverse years of decline in military spending. He has, for the third year running, kept that pledge. Last week his government passed a record defence package worth **¥4.98 trillion (\$42 billion)**, topping the previous peak set in 2002 and marking Japan's third straight annual rise.

The military shopping list includes 30 amphibious vehicles, three unmanned reconnaissance aircraft and six high-tech F-35A stealth fighters. Japan's defence minister, Gen Nakatani, cited the "changing situation around Japan" as the reason for the hike—now familiar shorthand for the turbo-charged rise of China. Defence officials say they are **playing catch-up with China's military budget**, which has multiplied 30 times over the past decade, while Japan's spending has shrunk. The new hardware will help beef up defences on Japan's remote outlying islands, including the Senkakus, claimed by China, which calls them the Diaoyu islands.

The budget tags money for a radar base on the tiny frontier island of Yonaguni too, the closest Japanese territory to mainland China. The defence ministry also wants to build up an amphibious assault force, modelled on that of America's marines, to retake remote territory from enemy hands in the event of an attack—part of a strategic shift to Japan's south and south-west.

But one of the centrepieces of this strategy could unravel there too, in Okinawa prefecture. A thousand miles southwest of Tokyo, its main island hosts three-quarters of the American army's footprint in Japan. Takashi Onaga, the prefecture's new governor, has tapped into a rich vein of resentment against this heavy presence by promising to block construction of an American military base backed by the governments of Japan and America. Resentment is focused on the Futenma air base, sat on a big chunk of land right in the centre of crowded Ginowan city.

The facility has generated decades of complaints about noise and crime. In 2006 the two governments agreed to close the aging facility and build a new base near the sleepy fishing village of Henoko, in Okinawa's less-populated north. But the agreement has proved controversial. Opponents insist Futenma be moved out of Okinawa, part of a bigger demand that Japan's mainland share the burden of the country's military alliance with America. Local opinion polls suggest four-fifths oppose building it off Henoko. Elderly activists have begun blocking trucks from entering the construction site.

Mr Abe's latest budget cut general spending to Okinawa by ¥16 billion, while allocating ¥147 billion to pay for the Futenma relocation and other projects linked to America's army. That is a sign that he intends to face down opposition to the new base and reinforce Japan's ties with its American ally, which plans to shift over half its navy to the Pacific by 2020. Mr Onaga, for his part, is under growing pressure to align

himself with the protesters. Opponents of the Yonaguni base will vote in a referendum on February 22nd. It could be the last gasp of Okinawa's ageing pacifists, or the start of something more serious for Mr Abe.

One way to find money

January 27, 2015

Kansai Electric aims to cut retirement benefits, in bid to raise prices again

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/01/27/business/corporate-business/kansai-electric-aims-cut-retirement-benefits-bid-raise-prices/#.VMifFS51Cot>

JJI

OSAKA – Kansai Electric Power Co. has asked its labor union to accept cuts in retirement allowances as the firm tries to repair its balance sheet, according to informed sources.

The utility also asked Monday for the union to agree to a **suspension in housing allowances from fiscal 2015.**

The company hopes the cost-cutting moves will help it secure government approval for another hike in domestic power prices, the sources said.

Reduced retirement benefits would affect around 18,000 rank-and-file employees. After reaching an agreement with the union, the company plans to apply the cuts also to some 2,700 employees in managerial posts, the sources said.

Specifically, the company plans to review its retirement benefits system from fiscal 2015 by raising the proportion of defined-contribution pension funds that are managed by employees, the sources said. The employees would get lower retirement allowances if investments underperform.

In May 2013, Kansai Electric raised its electricity rates for households by 9.75 percent on average. In exchange for the hike, the company conducted a 60 percent cut in executive pay, reduced monthly salaries of employees by 5 percent and skipped their bonuses.

The company's earnings deteriorated further last year as the nation's fleet of commercial nuclear plants remained idle, which forced it to incur imported fossil fuel costs. **In December, it applied for government approval for another full-scale household electricity rate hike of 10.23 percent.**

Kansai Electric has already imposed another 5 percent cut in executive pay, but it faces pressure to cut costs further.

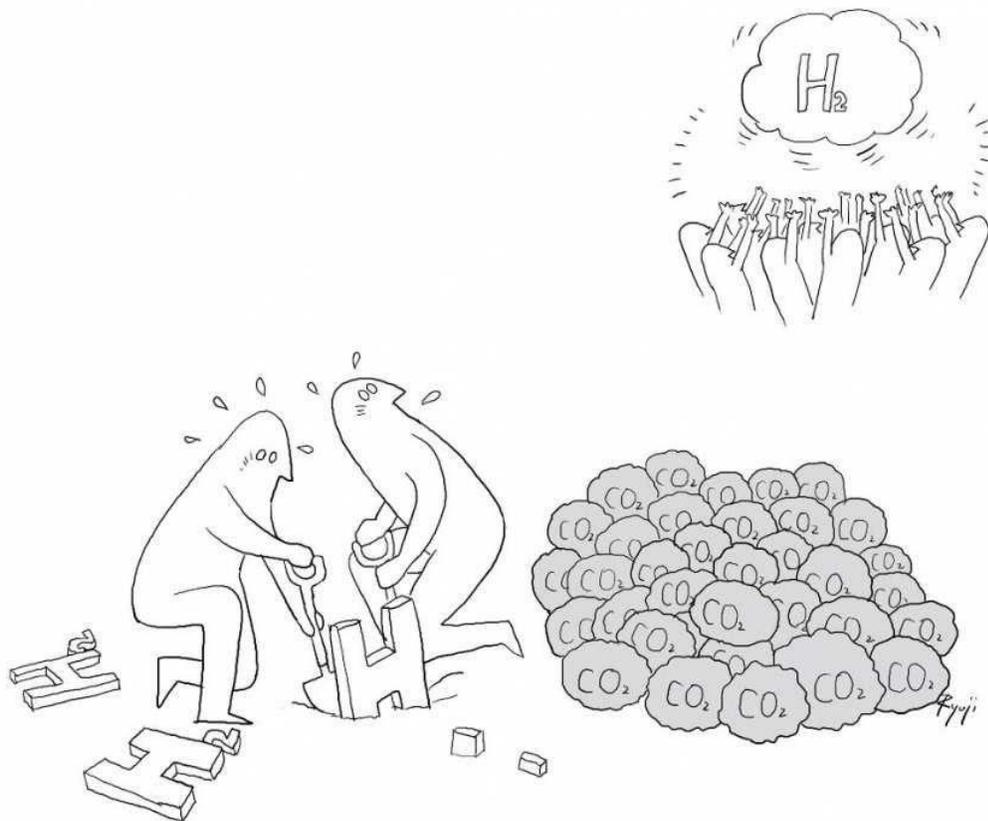
Hokkaido Electric Power Co., which faces a similar situation, hiked its household electricity rates again last November, becoming the first power supplier to conduct a second full-scale hike since the 2011 triple meltdown at Tepco's Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Hydrogen future: exaggeration and fabrication

January 27, 2015

Japan's hydrogen energy hype

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2015/01/27/commentary/japan-commentary/japans-hydrogen-energy-hype/#.VMoNBS51Cos>



Much excitement is permeating within the industrial segments related to hydrogen energy, following the government's announcement in June 2014 of the "Strategic Road Map for Hydrogen and Fuel Cells." It calls for creation of a "hydrogen-based society" as a **trump card to prevent a further global warming** and designates 2015 as the "first year" of the age of hydrogen.

In reality, however, the clean image of hydrogen-based energy and its economic viability are much exaggerated.

The government and business enterprises are rushing to building a hydrogen society in order to create huge public works largely funded by government subsidies, and gain rights and interests from them.

Creating demand for a hydrogen fuel and distributing it would require infrastructure preparations of enormous scales like mass-marketing of fuel cell-powered automobiles, building networks of hydrogen supply stations, construction of hydrogen liquefaction plants and creation of transport systems for liquefied hydrogen.

In contrast, the popularization of electric vehicles would not require large investments. Although battery cars represent another candidate for the next generation of motor vehicles, they can rely on facilities

already existing throughout the country to generate and transmit electricity and, besides, quick recharging stations can be built for only around ¥5 million each.

As **the infrastructure needed for a broad use of hydrogen is virtually non-existent**, hundreds of billions of yen would have to be invested in construction of new hydrogen plants throughout the country. In addition, ¥600 million will be needed to build one hydrogen station to supply hydrogen to fuel cell vehicles — 120 times more than the cost of setting up a quick charging station for battery cars.

With an eye on making the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympic Games an arena to showcase Japan's hydrogen energy technologies, the government is working on plans to run fuel cell buses around the sports facilities and expanding networks of hydrogen fuel supply stations in the four metropolises of Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka and Fukuoka.

Under the plans, the number of hydrogen stations will increase to 1,000 by 2025 nationwide from 100 in 2015, with the government bearing one half of the costs. This alone would represent splashing more than ¥300 billion in the taxpayer money.

In support of the plans, rosy statistics have been released by the government and think tanks. One corporation estimates, for example, that by 2020, the size of the fuel cell auto market will expand to the scale of ¥500 billion while the market for electric power generation using hydrogen will reach ¥900 billion.

Similarly, Deloitte Tohmatsu Consulting Co. forecasts that the sale of fuel cell cars will expand so rapidly that in 2025, 850,000 such cars will be sold in the United States, another 710,000 in Europe and 200,000 in Japan.

Lots of efforts are being made to drive home to the public the clean image of hydrogen as an energy source. The government is feverishly publicizing that hydrogen is the “ultimate clean energy source.” Hydrogen may appear to be the most appropriate substance to be touted as capable playing the principal role in building a carbon-free society because when it reacts with oxygen, only water is emitted. Moreover, some experts claim that if the exhaust heat is utilized in an energy supply system, the overall energy conversion efficiency could reach 90 percent, far surpassing 40 percent for thermal power generation.

These views would be correct if hydrogen was a primary energy source existing independently in nature. But hydrogen is a secondary energy source that must be obtained by reforming the composition and characteristics of hydrocarbons, which are the main components of natural gas and kerosene.

Since carbon dioxide is emitted in the process of producing this secondary energy source, it becomes clear that the government's claim that hydrogen is the “ultimate clean energy source” is fishy.

Furthermore, hydrogen will have to be liquefied and refrigerated at 253 C below zero in order to be transported. This process would consume large amounts of energy and generate carbon dioxide. Thus it is no exaggeration to say that the claim of hydrogen being carbon free is a sheer fabrication.

Studies are being conducted on directly combusting hydrogen to power cars and generate electricity, rather than using it for fuel cells. Although no carbon dioxide is emitted in this process, **nitrogen oxides**, which form when nitrogen in the atmosphere combines with oxygen, are emitted, as in the case of gasoline-powered automobiles and thermal power stations.

Another shortcoming is the small size of the hydrogen molecule and a technological solution has yet to be found to prevent hydrogen leakage from pipe seams.

The aforementioned rosy statistics about the impact of the use of hydrogen on the economy are a pie in the sky because they are based on an optimistic assumption that all problems related to technologies and

costs would be resolved easily. In other words, it represents a wishful thinking of those hoping to make windfall profits from colossal investments.

Some people say that even from a geopolitical standpoint, Japan is not fit to become a hydrogen society. European countries, for example, have closely meshed networks of pipelines that supply natural gas from Russia and they can easily obtain hydrogen with a simple method of reforming natural gas. The abundance of facilities to generate electricity through renewable energy sources, like solar and wind power, will make it possible to obtain hydrogen by using excess electricity to electrolyze water almost free of cost.

These processes are not feasible in **Japan, which doesn't have gas pipelines or excess electricity. As a result, it faces the high costs of obtaining hydrogen by reforming expensive liquefied natural gas and liquefied petroleum gas imported from the Middle East.** There is no prospect in sight of the costs of producing hydrogen dramatically falling.

The recent fall in crude oil prices has reduced the cost competitiveness of hydrogen as an energy source. Moreover, hydrogen cars costing ¥7 million each cannot be expected to be sold in large volumes in the most competitive, Asian auto market.

If the present trends continue, fuel cell automobiles made in Japan may survive solely with large subsidies provided by the government and may be sold and used only in Japan.

In the long run, it is essential to continue research on fuel cells. Development of an alternative material to platinum, which is used as catalyst in the production of hydrogen but is the cause of the high costs, is necessary.

While a number of domestic organizations are engaged in such research projects, **the government appears to be making the foolish move of providing subsidies to spread immature technologies that have not yet reached the level of practical use.** This could turn out to be a repeat of a similar folly the government committed in the promotion of solar power generation.

Politicians, bureaucrats and business circles are all rushing to the hydrogen-related projects, for which huge investments will be made, on the pretext of "reducing reliance on Middle Eastern oil" and "creating a low carbon society."

Ultimately, the taxpayers would have to pick up the bill for the public works projects the government will undertake blindly without assurance for their economic viability.

This is an abridged translation of an article from the January issue of Sentaku, a monthly magazine covering political, social and economic scenes.

TEPCO & Chubu Electric to merge

February 8, 2015

Tepco, Chubu Electric to merge existing thermal power plants

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/08/business/corporate-business/tepc-co-chubu-electric-merge-existing-thermal-power-plants/#.VNeDly51Cos>

Kyodo

Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Chubu Electric Power Co. will transfer operations of their existing thermal power plants to a new joint venture, creating a huge thermal power company with a dominating market share.

Under their agreement, to be finalized Monday, their thermal power generation operations will be transferred in several years to the fifty-fifty joint venture to be established in April, sources close to the matter said Saturday.

In October, the two utilities reached a basic agreement on a tie-up including joint procurement of liquefied natural gas and replacement of aging thermal power generation facilities, but they had continued to discuss what to do with their existing plants.

In their talks, Tepco called on Chubu Electric to transfer its existing facilities to the new venture, while Chubu Electric was concerned that spinning off its core thermal power business could impair its management autonomy, the sources said.

But Chubu Electric apparently agreed to Tepco's proposal of expanding the operation of the new venture, as the utility is likely to face a severe business environment with the full liberalization of Japan's retail electricity market in 2016.

The combined output capacity of their existing thermal power plants was nearly 70 million kilowatts as of March 2014 — **more than half of the total thermal power generation capacity of Japan's 10 regional electric companies.**

The joint operation will allow **a significant cut in fuel and other costs**, the sources said. The utilities are also expected to realize economies of scale in repair and maintenance work.

The timing of merging the existing thermal power operations could be delayed depending on how smoothly their comprehensive tie-up proceeds.

The tie-up agreement is the pillar of Tepco's rehabilitation plan approved by the government in January last year following the 2011 Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disaster.

"Politically motivated resistance"

February 10, 2015

10.02.2015_No32 / News

Failure Of Swiss Safety Initiative Blamed on 'Politically Motivated Resistance'

<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2015/02/10/failure-of-swiss-safety-initiative-blamed-on-politically-motivated-resistance>

10 Feb (NucNet): A Swiss-led initiative to further strengthen global nuclear safety by amending an international treaty has failed because of "politically motivated resistance" by some nations, Switzerland's chief nuclear regulator has said.

Representatives from 77 countries adopted the **non-binding** 'Vienna Declaration on Nuclear Safety' at a conference in Vienna yesterday, rather than voting on a proposed Swiss amendment aimed at imposing stricter rules under the Convention on Nuclear Safety (CNS).

"Without the readiness of major nuclear energy producing countries to support our initiative, the goal of improving nuclear safety worldwide wasn't achieved," said Hans Wanner of the Swiss Nuclear Safety Inspectorate (ENSI) in an online statement. "The resistance was mainly politically motivated."

The French nuclear safety authority ASN (Autorité de Sûreté Nucléaire) also issued a strongly worded statement, saying the conclusions of the conference were limited to “a non-binding political statement which does not strengthen the legal obligations of the signatory states”.

“The general objectives [approved yesterday] remain below the legally-binding dispositions of the European Directive on Nuclear Safety revised in 2014,” ASN said. “This situation might lead to a two-tier nuclear safety system in the world, which would eventually be detrimental to all countries.

“The outcome of the negotiations does not live up to the issues at stake, recalled by the Fukushima-Daiichi accident.”

But ENSI also said the adopted principles differ little from Switzerland’s original amendment. “The result is a success for Switzerland and for the world,” Mr Wanner said. “The international community has committed to continuously improving the safety of nuclear power plants around the world,” ENSI said.

ENSI said all participating countries agreed on a statement and the statement has security principles resulting from Switzerland’s initial proposal.

ENSI said key principles had been agreed including that new nuclear stations should be designed and constructed according to most recent safety standards and the latest technologies with the aim of avoiding accidents. However, if an accident were to occur, its consequences must be mitigated and significant releases of radioactive material must be prevented at an early stage.

The safety of existing nuclear facilities must be systematically and regularly reassessed. These reassessments should be used as a reference value “for the timely implementation of safety improvements achievable in a reasonable manner”.

Yesterday’s conference was initially called to consider the proposal by Switzerland to amend Article 18 of the CNS, related to the design and construction of nuclear installations.

The proposal was to add a paragraph that said: “Nuclear power plants shall be designed and constructed with the objectives of preventing accidents and, should an accident occur, mitigating its effects and avoiding releases of radionuclides causing long-term off-site contamination. In order to identify and implement appropriate safety improvements, these objectives shall also be applied to existing plants.”

The IAEA said the contracting parties had thoroughly considered the Swiss proposal and concluded it would not be possible to reach consensus on the amendment. Instead, in order to reach the same objective as the proposed amendment, parties unanimously recommended for adoption the Vienna Declaration on Nuclear Safety including principles for the implementation of the convention to prevent accidents and mitigate radiological consequences.

The declaration contains a series of principles to guide countries in the implementation of the objectives of the CNS.

While the declaration says that “reasonably practicable or achievable safety improvements are to be implemented in a timely manner,” it falls short of the original Swiss goal of requiring operators to implement back-up systems to contain radioactive contamination in the event of an accident.

The objective of the CNS, which entered into force on 24 October 1996, is to achieve and maintain a high level of nuclear safety worldwide through the improvement of national measures and international cooperation.

The IAEA said obligations for the 77 contracting parties under the CNS include submitting national reports on the implementation of their obligations under the CNS for peer review in meetings held every three years. The last review meeting took place in Vienna from 24 March to 4 April 2014, with more than 800 participants from 69 contracting parties attending.

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TEPCO & Japan Atomic Power

February 11, 2015

Tepco offers to keep contract with Japan Atomic Power

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/11/national/tepcos-offers-to-keep-contract-with-japan-atomic-power/#.VNt6EC51Cos>

Jiji

Tokyo Electric Power Co. plans to keep its business contract with Japan Atomic Power Co. in place if the nuclear power firm helps Tepco decommission its crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, informed sources said Wednesday.

Japan Atomic Power relies on basic fees it receives from Tepco and four other power suppliers to keep it afloat, as all three of its nuclear reactors remain offline. The fees are paid under contracts that are up for renewal every year.

Japan Atomic Power plans to draw up a reconstruction plan by the end of this month to win approval from the five electricity firms to keep their contracts in place. Tepco is the largest shareholder of Japan Atomic Power.

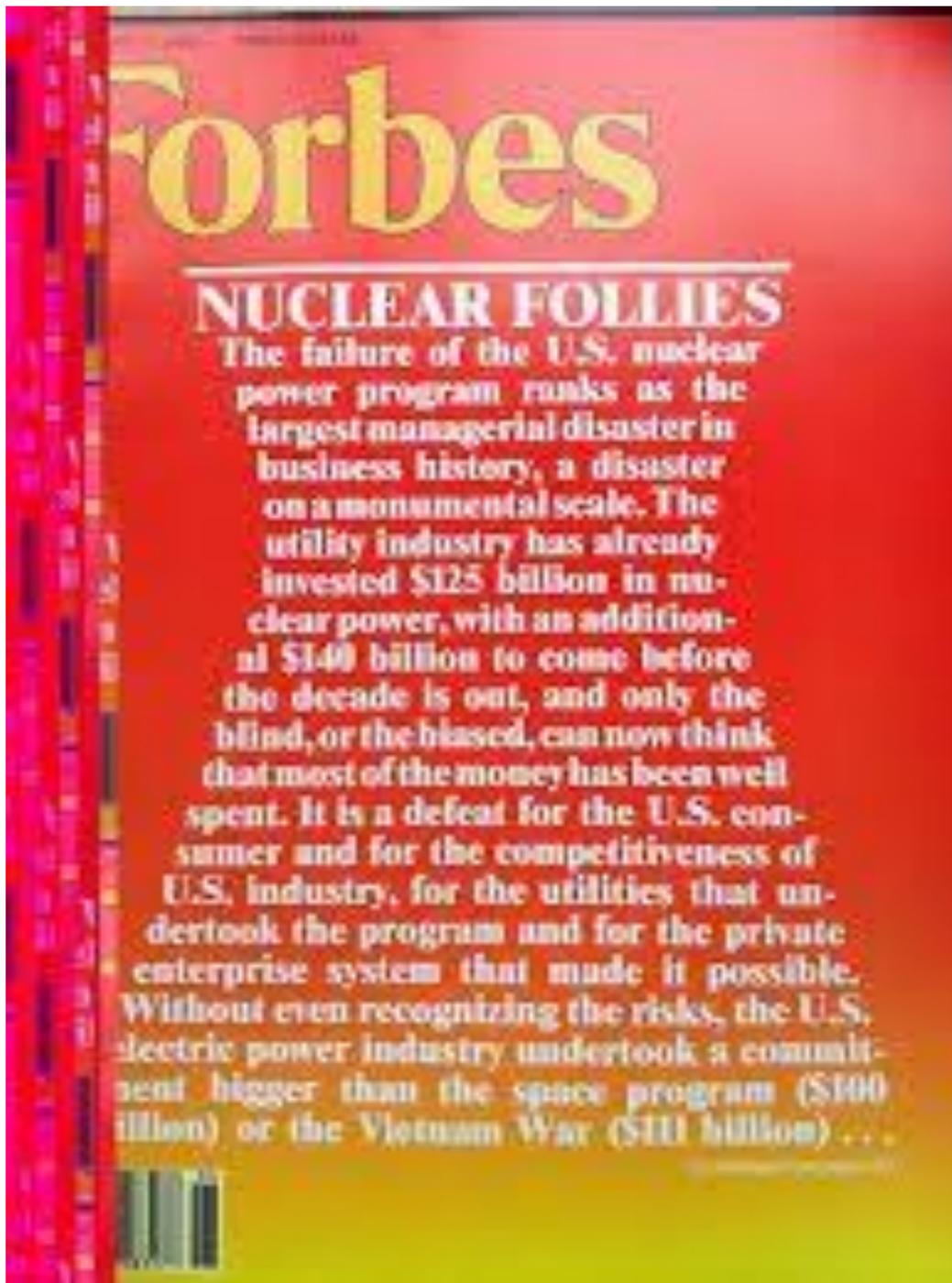
If Japan Atomic Power agrees to fully cooperate with Tepco to decommission the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, Tepco can win understanding of its own shareholders, including the government, to continue paying the fees, senior Tepco executives said. Tepco plans to make a decision by the end of the month.

The Tepco executives also said Japan Atomic Power should present a vision for its future in the reconstruction plan.

Japan Atomic Power, which started operating the country's first commercial nuclear power reactor in 1966, owns one pressurized water reactor and two boiling water reactors.

Tepco has been proposing splitting Japan Atomic Power into two smaller firms — one in charge of the pressurized water reactor and the other for the boiling water reactors, the executives said.

"Nuclear Follies" in Forbes magazine



Nuclear power's "managerial disaster" still true 30-years later

<http://www.beyondnuclear.org/home/2015/2/11/nuclear-powers-managerial-disaster-still-true-30-years-later.html>

Forbes magazine's February 11, 1985 cover story headlined "Nuclear Follies." The business investment journal wrote "The failure of the U.S. nuclear power program ranks as the largest managerial disaster in business history, a disaster on a monumental scale... only the blind or the biased can now think that the money has been well spent."

Fast forward thirty years, we see the nuclear industry still imploding. The "blind or biased" now include industry front groups like "Nuclear Matters" arguing that American taxpayers and ratepayers should still be bailing out the teetering industry at any cost. Ex-Environmental Protection Agency head Carol Browner and former New Hampshire Senator Judd Gregg were recently stumping in Northern Ohio on behalf of industry to keep the deteriorating nuclear power plant there from closing. However, their effort to spin the continued demise of dirty, dangerous and expensive nuclear power as a critical missed opportunity completely ignores the historic context that *Forbes* benchmarked decades ago for the business investment community. Nuclear power is fundamentally uneconomical. It has failed in the U.S. market economy and continues to fail worldwide.

Browner and Gregg's snapshot of the remaining 99 U.S. reactors being down from 104 units needs to be put into an accurate historical context. In fact, the remaining 99 reactors are down from the 133 units originally licensed to commercially operate, which are down from 227 units that applied for construction permits and down again from 253 units ordered by the U.S. industry. This steady retreat is actually down from the 1,000 reactors that President Nixon's "Project Independence" said would be operational by the year 2000.

In fact, what Browner, Gregg and their cohorts are suggesting is that the American people invest even more to prop up what *Forbes* then cautioned investors "is a defeat for the U.S. consumer and the competitiveness of U.S. industry, for the utilities that undertook the program and for the private enterprise system that made it possible."

The nuclear industry is being priced out of the energy service market and at the same time becoming increasingly dangerous as a result of financial shortcuts and regulatory capture. The good news is that nuclear power is being replaced by rapidly growing solar and wind energy industries, energy efficiency and conservation. No surprise that *Nuclear Matters*, which is funded by the nuclear giant Exelon Corporation, would have the American consumers put the brakes on a 21st Century of affordable and renewable energy competition and instead stay the course with a rerun of *Forbes'* 1985 warning.

Cheating: Nothing new

February 14, 2015

Corporations suspected of rigging bids for pavement projects since before 3/11

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150214p2a00m0na012000c.html>

Corporations suspected of banding together to rig bids for pavement projects in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011 are strongly suspected of having been doing so for years before the quake as well, it has been learned.

When construction costs were raised due to a shortage of personnel and other resources after the earthquake disaster, the corporations worked together to push up the prices that they would do the jobs for, it is alleged. Now, it has been learned that this conspiring is thought to have continued for over five years for a period stretching both before and after the quake disaster.

On Jan. 28 and 29 this year, the commission searched the offices of 20 companies including major construction firm Nippo Corp. on suspicion of breaking the anti-monopoly law by illicitly restricting others' transactions. The companies are accused with regard to auctions for 12 expressway paving projects that were ordered by East Nippon Expressway Co.'s Tohoku branch in August and September of 2011.

According to the source, one or more of the businesses has admitted to the allegations that corporations conspired together to rig the 12 auctions, telling the commission, "Such conspiring was taking place from at least a few years prior to the earthquake."

"Multiple large corporations acted as 'organizers,' distributing the construction jobs to each of the companies (who were in on it)," the source says that the commission was told.

According to the recorded results of auctions for the Tohoku branch's 11 paving projects from April 2010 through November 2010, the average winning bid constituted 80.23 percent of the maximum limit. By contrast, the average winning bid was 94.77 percent of the limit for the 12 post-quake auctions alleged to have been manipulated -- a jump of around 14 percentage points. The commission holds that the conspiring companies made their bids at these high levels in order to cover the raised expenses caused by personnel and material shortages after the quake.

The companies are thought to have collaborated not only on manipulating the bids for paving contracts from the East Nippon Expressway Co., but also on those from the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism's Tohoku Regional Bureau. The committee appears to believe that these started some years before the Great East Japan Earthquake as well.

East Nippon Expressway Co. was founded in October 2005 together with the privatization of four public corporations, such as the Japan Highway Public Corp. It handles management of expressways and road construction in eastern Japan, and the national government provides over half of its funds. The company recorded around 859 billion yen in sales for the 2013 fiscal year.

The Japan Fair Trade Commission is continuing to look into the matter.

Press freedom and state secrets law

February 13, 2015

Report: Japan's press freedom deteriorates under state secrets law

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201502130073

By HIDEKI AOTA/ Correspondent

PARIS--Japan's press freedom ranking dropped two notches to No. 61 in an annual survey on freedom of information in 180 countries and regions.

Released Feb. 12 by international nongovernmental organization Reporters Without Borders, the World Press Freedom Index 2015 report cited the enforcement of the state secrets protection law in December 2014.

Under the law, reporters can be imprisoned for obtaining information that the government deems a “state secret.”

The report did not cover the Japanese government’s confiscation of the passport of a freelance photojournalist who planned to go to war-torn Syria later this month.

But Benjamin Ismail, head of the Asia-Pacific desk of the Paris-based NGO, said the Feb. 7 confiscation infringed on press freedom. He added that the decision to go to certain places for news coverage is up to journalists, not the government.

Overall, media freedom deteriorated throughout the world in 2014, according to the report.

The report showed that Northern European countries continued to hold the highest ranking in terms of press freedom. Finland took the top position, followed by Norway and Denmark.

North Korea and China remained in the cellar of the rankings, standing at 179 and 176, respectively. Syria was 177th.

The report also criticized the Islamic State extremist group for its attacks against journalists. The report said the militants are mercilessly killing reporters whom it regards as enemies.

The report also expressed anxieties over recent anti-terror measures taken by France and Britain. France eased procedures to monitor certain individuals, while Britain has gathered personal information on certain reporters.

TEPCO to sell gas and electricity throughout Japan

February 16, 2015

TEPCO plans to expand business across Japan from 2016

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/business/AJ201502160023>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tokyo Electric Power Co., recipient of a government bailout to deal with the crisis at its crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, now plans to expand its power distribution network across Japan, according to President Naomi Hirose.

“We will **expand to regions where we have no market share**,” Hirose said in a recent interview with The Asahi Shimbun.

Although only a single utility is currently allowed to supply electricity in each region, power companies will be allowed to provide electricity to households outside its own assigned area from April 2016.

For entry into areas TEPCO does not serve, Hirose said the utility is considering working with mobile phone carriers and other telecommunication companies that have nationwide customer networks.

TEPCO will announce the outline of new services by the end of fiscal 2015.

According to the president, **TEPCO intends to boost its share in new markets by offering a discount to customers who use services of both TEPCO and its partner telecommunication firms as a package.**

It will also commission alliance companies to collect electricity bills.

As of the end of fiscal 2013, TEPCO covers 27.01 million households mainly in the Tokyo metropolitan area.

As utilities are expected to be allowed to provide gas for households across Japan from 2017, **TEPCO also plans to sell electricity and gas as a package throughout the country in the future.**

TEPCO struggled financially in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear crisis, triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

It was forced to accept financial assistance from the government to provide compensation to victims of the accident and to deal with the disaster. The utility also raised electricity rates for household and corporate customers.

(This article was written by Daiki Koga and Tomoyoshi Otsu.)

Raising power rates again?

February 16, 2015

Tepco to mull rate hike if it can't restart Niigata nuclear complex

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/16/business/tepcO-mull-rate-increase-hike-cant-restart-niigata-nuclear-complex/#.VOGt8i51Cos>

Bloomberg

Tokyo Electric Power Co. said it will need to consider raising electricity rates for the first time since 2012 unless it can restart the world's biggest nuclear plant.

Resumption of the Kashiwazaki Kariwa station in Niigata Prefecture is essential for sustaining profits,

Tepco President Naomi Hirose said in a Saturday interview at the utility's headquarters in Tokyo. Tepco cannot continue to prop up earnings by postponing repairs and taking other cost-cutting measures, he said.

The operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant had expected to start two reactors at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa in July as part of its turnaround plan released in January last year. Tepco, which serves about 29 million customers in the Tokyo metropolitan area, pledged earlier this month to keep electricity rates unchanged at least this year even as inactive nuclear reactors pressure Japanese utilities to increase prices.

"Even as Kashiwazaki-Kariwa remains offline, we posted a profit last year and can probably do so again this year," Hirose said. "I wouldn't say there won't be the third time, but we cannot expect it can last forever."

The station, 220 km (137 miles) northwest of Tokyo, was idled for maintenance in March 2012. It consists of seven reactor units.

All of Japan's 48 reactors remain idled as the Nuclear Regulation Authority's safety checks and other restart processes have taken longer than expected. In addition, the majority of Japan's public remain opposed to restarting nuclear reactors after the triple meltdown at Tepco's Fukushima No. 1 plant, according to opinion polls.

Hirose said Tepco "must devote ceaseless effort" to gain understanding of the governor of Niigata prefecture, Hirohiko Izumida, a vocal critic of the utility, and of local communities on restarting the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa station.

Tepco returned to profit last fiscal year, ending three consecutive years of losses after the Fukushima disaster left it with massive liabilities. The utility forecasts a net income of ¥521 billion (\$4.4 billion) for the year ending March 31, up from ¥438.6 billion profit in the previous period, according to its latest earnings report in January.

Tepco's nonconsolidated pretax profit for the year ending March 2016 may be about ¥13 billion if the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant remains idled until December, the Nikkei newspaper reported Saturday, citing the utility's forecast presented to lenders.

Pretax profit may be ¥65 billion if the station is restarted in October, while a resumption as early as in July is likely to help post a ¥199 billion profit in the same year, the newspaper said.

The best way to spend money in Tohoku?

February 13, 2015

Tokyo Gov. Masuzoe wants to use disaster recovery funds for Olympic events in Tohoku

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150213p2a00m0na016000c.html>

Tokyo Gov. Yoichi Masuzoe says he will ask the central government to use part of the Tohoku tsunami disaster reconstruction budget to cover the costs of staging some events for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics in areas that were severely affected by the 2011 disaster.

In an interview with the Mainichi Shimbun on Feb. 12, about a year after he was elected governor, Masuzoe emphasized that allocating the reconstruction budget to hold events in the Tohoku region would be the best way to spend the money.

Regarding policies laid out by the International Olympic Committee at the end of last year, which said the committee would approve of holding Olympic events in different cities to reduce the financial burden placed on the host city, Masuzoe was enthusiastic about staging events in Tohoku. He said that the cost of holding such competitions could be covered by the disaster reconstruction budget if the public agreed. However, reconstruction minister Wataru Takeshita expressed opposition to Masuzoe's plan last year, saying, "The reconstruction budget should be directly used for projects related to disaster recovery, and I believe the cost of hosting the Olympics can be covered from elsewhere," adding that the organizing committee for the Games is responsible for holding events in disaster-affected areas.

The use of the disaster reconstruction budget has come into question after it was discovered that only 0.7 percent of timber supplies planned to be provided to Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate prefectures for Forestry Agency projects had been provided to the prefectural governments. Consequently, the Board of Audit requested the government to improve the use of the budget last year.

In response to Takeshita's comment, Masuzoe said, "Remarks like that should be made after the government reflects on the issue and sees that the budget has not been spent (for Tohoku). No project is more suited for the reconstruction budget than to show the world how much Japan has recovered from the disaster."

There is a rough road ahead for Masuzoe's plan, however, as some Tohoku residents say that spending the reconstruction budget on the Olympics will not win support from the local community.

Masuzoe also told the Mainichi that the Tokyo Metropolitan Government is moving toward making a hydrogen fuel cell energy-based society and plans to start experimental projects in Chuo Ward's Harumi district, which will host the Olympic Village during the 2020 Games. "We can start city planning from scratch at the planned athletes' village, and the site is suited for experimental projects," Masuzoe commented.

February 13, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Concerns about NRA's future independence

February 19, 2015

Foreign advisers fear for loss of nuclear regulator's independence

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/19/national/foreign-advisers-fear-for-loss-of-nuclear-regulators-independence/#.VOYHvS51Cos>

Reuters

International advisers to the Nuclear Regulation Authority are worried that a mandatory review of its performance could lead to a loss of independence for the body, created in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

A lack of independent regulatory oversight of Tokyo Electric Power Co. and the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant was to blame for three meltdowns there after the March 2011 quake and tsunami, an official inquiry into the disaster found.

After the disaster, the NRA was launched under the Environment Ministry with more autonomy, but **legislation provides for a review after three years of operation with a proviso to consider placing it under the Cabinet Office, involving closer political oversight.**

While welcoming a review of the NRA, the advisers, who include the chairman of the International Atomic Energy Agency's International Nuclear Safety Group, **Richard Meserve**, are **concerned about political interference**, they said in a document dated Wednesday and posted on the regulator's website.

"We . . . are concerned about any transfer of authority that would serve to compromise the regulator's independence," the document says.

"Indeed, given the problems associated with the previous regulatory structure, we suspect **the maintenance of a clearly independent regulator is likely to be essential to the restoration of public confidence in nuclear power.**" The review of NRA operations started in September, but no decisions have been made on whether the Cabinet Office will assume oversight.

"We welcome the points raised by the international advisers and will take them into consideration," NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka said at a meeting on Wednesday that was broadcast live on the Internet.

The Cabinet Office coordinates planning and policy on issues of crucial national importance and works as the "place of wisdom" in support of the prime minister and Cabinet, according to its website.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is a strong proponent of nuclear power and wants to restart reactors that pass the new safety regime.

All of Japan's reactors were shut down gradually in the wake of the Fukushima triple meltdown, the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986.

The other international advisers to the NRA are **Andre-Claude Lacoste**, a former chairman of France's Nuclear Safety Authority, and **Michael Weightman**, a former executive head of the British Office for Nuclear Regulation.

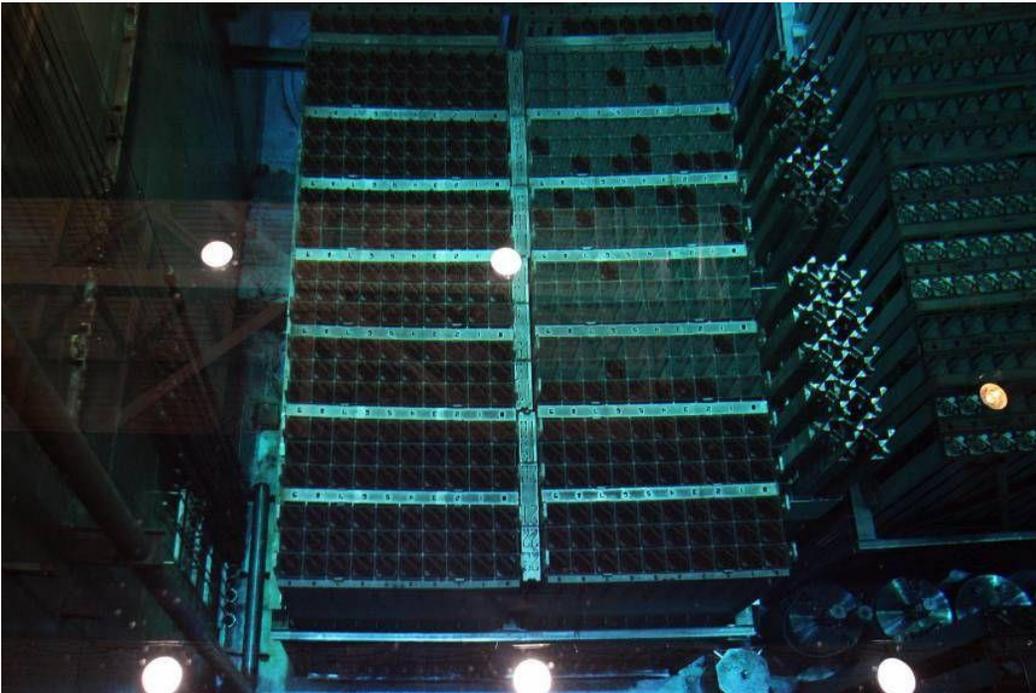
The earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011, destroyed the Fukushima No. 1 plant. The nuclear disaster forced more than 160,000 residents to flee nearby towns and contaminated water, food and the atmosphere.

MOX enormously expensive

February 22, 2015

MOX imports have cost at least ¥99.4 billion, much higher than uranium fuel

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/22/national/mox-imports-have-cost-at-least-%C2%A599-4-billion-much-higher-than-uranium-fuel/#.VOmX1i51Cot>



Channel boxes containing fuel rods with plutonium-uranium mixed oxide (MOX) lie in a pool in the building housing the No. 3 reactor at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power station in the town of Okuma in August 2010. | BLOOMBERG

Jiji

Five nuclear plant operators have spent at least ¥99.4 billion on imports of plutonium-containing mixed oxide (MOX) fuel since it was first shipped to Japan in 1999, Jiji Press learned on Saturday.

Some of the imports cost nine times more than conventional uranium fuel. The MOX expenses are partly reflected in monthly electricity bills.

The MOX fuel, a mixture of plutonium extracted from spent nuclear fuel and uranium, is a core component of Japan's nuclear fuel cycle. But the use of the fuel has drawn criticism for its high costs.

Japanese power companies that use or plan to use the MOX fuel commission the fuel's production from companies in France and elsewhere.

The five that imported MOX fuel are **Tokyo Electric Power Co., Chubu Electric Power Co., Kansai Electric Power Co., Shikoku Electric Power Co. and Kyushu Electric Power Co.**, according to the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan.

Of the five, Kansai Electric, Shikoku Electric and Kyushu Electric have revised their monthly power rates to reflect the cost of using MOX fuel.

Since 1999, MOX fuel has been shipped to six of the five companies' nuclear power stations. Trade statistics compiled by the Finance Ministry and other data show that **the imports since that time have totaled ¥99.437 billion**, including the costs of transportation and insurance.

In June 2013, Kansai Electric imported 20 units of MOX fuel assemblies from France for ¥18.514 billion for use at the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at the Takahama power station in Fukui Prefecture.

The average cost per unit stood at ¥925 million, compared with the average of around ¥103 million for 60 units of conventional uranium fuel that Kansai Electric imported from the United States between October and November that year, also for use at the two reactors.

All five power companies declined to disclose MOX fuel costs, citing **confidentiality of MOX fuel procurement contracts**.

Japanese power companies use MOX fuel by mixing it with conventional uranium fuel. The share of the MOX fuel in the total fuel used has been limited to around 30 percent so far. The Oma nuclear power station of the Electric Power Development Co. (J-Power), which is under construction, will be the first one that will rely entirely on MOX fuel.

The use of MOX fuel in Japan is being halted because all commercial reactors still remain idle nearly four years after the nuclear disaster at Tepco's Fukushima No. 1 power station began in March 2011. The federation planned to have MOX fuel used at 16 to 18 reactors across Japan by fiscal 2015, but the plan was put off.

TEPCO knew

February 25, 2015

No measures taken for radioactive water leak

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Feb. 25, 2015 - Updated 01:42 UTC+1

The operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant **did not take any measures to prevent radioactive water that accumulated on the roof of one of the reactor buildings from flowing into the Pacific Ocean.**

Tokyo Electric Power Company said on Tuesday that **rainwater with relatively high levels of radioactive substances has collected on the roof of the No. 2 reactor building.**

It said the contaminated water may have flowed into a drainage channel whenever it rained and could have spilled into the Pacific Ocean beyond the plant's port.

TEPCO was aware of these rises in the concentration of radioactive substances in the drainage channel as long ago as April last year.

But it did not make the information public or take any measures to stop the water from spilling into the ocean.

TEPCO has not installed floodgates or equipment in the drainage channel that would warn of rising concentrations of radioactive substances. **The utility says there are no radioactive standards for the rainwater it is allowed to discharge into the ocean and it does not plan to install any devices in the channel.**

The operator says no major changes have been observed in the levels of radioactive substances in nearby seawater.

But local residents, including workers in the fishing industry, may react sharply to the news. The drainage channel flows into the sea beyond the port. **TEPCO had earlier explained that the contaminated water only affected the port area.**

TEPCO knew (2)

February 25, 2015

TEPCO admits it failed to disclose cesium-tainted water leaks since April

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/25/national/tepcO-admits-failed-disclose-cesium-tainted-water-leaks-since-april/#.VO17iS51Cos>

Jiji

Tokyo Electric Power Co. said Tuesday it has failed to disclose leaks into the sea of rainwater containing radioactive substances from a drainage ditch linked to a building at its stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant although it became aware of the leaks in April last year.

The building is highly contaminated with radioactive substances such as cesium that have been released from the plant since it was damaged in the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

As the drainage ditch in question is connected to the roof of the reactor 2 building, **29,400 becquerels of radioactive cesium per liter were detected from water accumulated on the rooftop**, Tepco said.

The water also contained 52,000 becquerels of beta ray-emitting radioactive substances such as strontium-90.

The drainage ditch is linked to the Pacific Ocean. Some 1,050 becquerels of radioactive cesium and 1,500 becquerels of beta ray-emitting radioactive materials per liter were detected near an outlet leading to the sea.

Tepco said that there have been no major changes in the amount of radioactive substances detected in seawater collected from an area about 1 km from the drainage outlet.

The company saw water contaminated with high levels of radiation flowing to the plant's port through another drainage ditch Sunday.

Shocked fishermen feel betrayed

February 25, 2015

Shocked' at silence over water leak at wrecked Fukushima No. 1 plant

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/25/national/tepcos-admits-failed-disclose-cesium-tainted-water-leaks-since-april/#.VO3IYy51Cos>

Kyodo, JIJL, Staff Report

Fishermen in Fukushima Prefecture slammed Tokyo Electric Power Co. on Wednesday after it emerged that water containing cesium and other radioactive isotopes has been draining into the Pacific near the Fukushima No. 1 plant and that Tepco did nothing to prevent it despite learning of the leak last May.

"I don't understand why (Tepco) kept silent even though they knew about it. Fishery operators are absolutely shocked," Masakazu Yabuki, chief of the Iwaki fisheries cooperative, said at a meeting with Tepco officials.

Local fishermen have already given Tepco approval to dump groundwater into the ocean before it becomes tainted, to reduce the volume of water stored in tanks at the site. The operator is now doing this, pumping water from wells, monitoring it and piping it into the ocean.

The latest incident threatens to delay a second round of approval that Tepco wants the fishermen to provide.

The utility admitted Tuesday it failed to disclose leaks of rainwater containing radioactive substances from a drainage ditch at the stricken plant even though it was aware of high radiation in the water last spring.

The ditch receives runoff from the roof of the No. 2 reactor building, which is highly contaminated with radioactive substances such as cesium.

Tepco has said it recorded 29,400 becquerels of radioactive cesium per liter in water pooled on the rooftop.

The water also contained 52,000 becquerels of beta-ray-emitting radioactive substances such as strontium-90. It also detected some 1,050 becquerels of radioactive cesium and 1,500 becquerels of beta ray-emitting radioactive materials per liter near an outlet leading to the sea.

Tepco said there is no major change in the concentration of radioactive substances in seawater it sampled about 1 km from the drainage outlet.

Meanwhile on Sunday, Tepco reported water contaminated with high levels of radiation was flowing into the ocean at the plant's port through another drainage ditch.

Yuji Moriyama, a Tepco spokesman said the utility did not disclose the information because there is no evidence of environmental impact.

"We were aware that the levels of radioactive materials around the drainage ditch were higher than other places," Moriyama said, adding that they have been investigating the sources of contamination since last spring.

Fishermen accuse TEPCO of betrayal

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150225_24.html

Feb. 25, 2015 - Updated 08:03 UTC+1

Fishermen are accusing the operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant of betraying their trust. The power company has admitted it did not take steps to prevent some contaminated rainwater from spilling into the Pacific Ocean.

Tokyo Electric Power Company officials said on Tuesday the water had accumulated on the roof of the No.2 reactor building. They said the water contained relatively high levels of radioactive substances, and that it may have leaked into the sea through a drainage channel.

TEPCO officials said they were aware last April that the density of radioactive substances in the channel rose when it rained. But they did not make that information public, or take steps to prevent the water from leaking into the sea.

A TEPCO official on Wednesday apologized for the spill at a meeting of the heads of local fisheries cooperatives. But he said the company found no major changes in the level of radioactive substances in the sea near the plant. He said radiation levels in the drainage channel were lower than those in the water on the roof.

Some fisheries chiefs said they felt betrayed after working with TEPCO to settle the problem.

They said the firm's repeated concealment of information has helped fuel the rumors that are hurting the local fishing industry.

Worrying: Media self-restraint

February 25, 2015

Under Abe's reign, media self-censorship in Japan is rising

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/25/national/media-national/japanese-media-self-censorship-seen-growing-abes-reign/#.VO17-S51Cos>

by Linda Sieg

Reuters

Worries are growing in Japan about a trend toward media self-censorship as journalists and experts say news organizations are toning down criticism of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government for fear of sparking ire and losing access to sources.

No one is accusing Abe's administration of overt meddling in specific news coverage, but media insiders and analysts say the government's message is getting through.

"The media did, in recent years, play a much more positive role in . . . making people in power squirm. In the Abe era, they have begun pulling back," said Jeffrey Kingston, director of Asian studies at Temple University's Japan campus.

"There is a chilling atmosphere that encourages media organizations to exercise self-restraint."

The conservative Abe, who returned to office in 2012, had fraught media ties during his first term, which ended when he quit in 2007 after a year of scandals and ill health.

This time, Abe wants to avoid the same mistake, experts say.

His appointee as chairman of NHK, Katsuto Momii, raised doubts about the respected broadcaster's independence when he told his first news conference in early 2014: "We cannot say left when the government says right."

Late last year, a ruling party aide to Abe wrote to television broadcasters ahead of an election demanding fair coverage. Many journalists took the letter as a signal they should dampen criticism or risk losing access to officials.

"There have been cases of media self-restraint in the past, but they usually involved the Imperial family, or, as after the 2011 tsunami and nuclear disaster, when media adopted a sober tone," said Shinichi Hisadome, a foreign news editor at the Tokyo Shimbun, a feisty metropolitan daily regarded in media circles as less submissive than national media.

"I think this is the first time that criticism of the government itself has been so restrained," Hisadome said. Experts say the result is a far friendlier tone toward the government even among media that previously were critical.

"Criticism of the government has dropped sharply," said Kozo Nagata, a former NHK producer and now a professor of media studies at Musashi University.

In one example of the climate, a producer of TV Asahi's "Hodo Station," a nightly news show known for not pulling punches, will be shifted to a new post from April because she would not heed internal warnings not to criticize Abe's government, two sources said.

An outspoken guest commentator will also be replaced, the sources said. Former trade ministry official Shigeaki Koga, who sparked a flap last month by criticizing Abe over a hostage crisis that ended with the killing of two Japanese captives by Islamic State militants, told Reuters he had been told he would not be asked to appear as a guest on the show after March.

TV Asahi told Reuters nothing had been decided regarding personnel or guest commentators.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters on Tuesday the government fully respected press freedom. Referring to criticism of Abe on television over the hostage crisis that he said misrepresented facts, he added: "Seeing that, don't you think freedom truly is guaranteed in Japan?"

Journalists and experts, though, say the trend toward self-censorship has worsened since the hostage crisis. **Nearly 3,000 people, including journalists and scholars, signed a statement this month raising concern about freedom of expression.**

“We’ve reached the stage where even without the government doing anything, mass media produce articles that cozy up to authorities or refrain from criticism,” Koga said.

“The public is not getting the right information to make decisions.

TEPCO reveals another leak (NHK video)

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/features/201502251616.html>

It has taken TEPCO almost a year to make this information public...

NRA criticizes TEPCO for not tackling problems properly

February 28, 2015

Nuclear watchdog takes TEPCO to task for delay in leakage report

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201502280036>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The nation's nuclear watchdog body slammed Tokyo Electric Power Co. on Feb. 27 over its failure to disclose information on the leakage of radioactive rainwater into the sea from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Plant operator TEPCO disclosed many months later that a drainage ditch near the wrecked reactors showed high concentrations of radiation and rainwater had leaked into the sea outside the enclosed harbor.

“TEPCO must reflect seriously (on the delay). We are concerned that the company's efforts to secure a safe environment will be unable to obtain trust (from the people),” said NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka during a meeting in Tokyo that TEPCO President Naomi Hirose attended.

Hirose apologized profusely, saying, “We are extremely sorry for adding to the anxieties of fishermen and local citizens.”

This latest setback prompted local fishermen to dig in their heels over plans by TEPCO to release treated water. On Feb. 27, the Soma-Futaba fishery cooperative association and the Iwaki fishery cooperative association agreed to put talks on hold with the utility with regard to its “subdrain plan,” a key measure to reduce contaminated water in the nuclear plant.

TEPCO plans to pump up contaminated groundwater that has accumulated in the plant compound and remove radioactive materials so it can release the water into the sea. The utility has been seeking approval from local fishermen of the plan.

TEPCO became aware more than a year ago that the concentration of radioactive materials in the water flowing in the drainage ditch was high. The utility explained the situation to an NRA working group meeting held in January 2014.

The NRA that February instructed TEPCO to take countermeasures by the end of March 2015. At that time, however, the cause of the high concentration was unclear.

In April 2014, TEPCO started taking regular measurements. It suspected that the contaminated water was draining from slopes near reactor buildings. The utility covered the slopes and cleaned the drainage ditch. However, the concentration level did not decline. It reported the failure to determine the cause to the NRA in December.

Meanwhile, TEPCO continued to conceal details, including the fact that the concentration became high whenever it rained. It was only on Feb. 24 this year that it provided a detailed report to the NRA. TEPCO explained accumulated rainwater on the roof of a service entrance for large equipment that connects to the No. 2 reactor building was the cause of the high concentration.

The compound of the nuclear plant is contaminated with radioactive materials due to the March 2011 accident there. That explains the presence of contaminated rainwater that accumulates in drainage ditches and elsewhere on the site. However, **TEPCO had decided long ago there was no need to monitor rainwater for radioactive materials.**

Water that flows in drainage ditches around tanks storing contaminated water was able to drain directly into the harbor, which has been sealed off from the open sea. **Alarm devices were installed there, but TEPCO did not take special measures for the drainage ditch where the highest concentration of radioactive materials that emit beta rays was about 1,500 becquerels per liter when it rained.**

Even on days when it was not raining, the concentration level was about 100 becquerels.

In drawing up the subdrain plan, TEPCO explained to fishermen it would reduce the concentration level of contaminated water to less than three becquerels before releasing it into the sea.

In 2013, contaminated water leaked from faulty tanks one after another. At that time, concentration levels were more than 10,000 times higher than the latest incidence of leaks. Because of that, a TEPCO official said, "We put too low a priority on the situation."

Yoichi Miyazawa, minister of economy, trade and industry, accused TEPCO of dealing inappropriately with the situation.

"TEPCO should have paid more attention to the issue," he said.

An NRA official handling the matter said, "We should have pushed TEPCO much more strongly to tackle the issue."

Is TEPCO to be trusted?

February 26, 2015

Yoroku: TEPCO must not fear telling the truth on Fukushima plant leaks

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20150226p2a00m0na013000c.html>

There's a Japanese saying that goes, "A leak is more frightening than tigers and wolves." According to an Edo period dictionary, it means, "People's mouths are scarier than those of wild beasts, because saying

things that should not leak out causes disasters. It is a warning that what comes out of our own mouths is to be feared more than the jaws of beasts."

There might be some people who thought the expression in fact came from the old folktale "Furuya no mori" (The leaky old house), in which an old house that leaks in the rain is more scary than tigers and wolves. That literal "leak," too, is almost certainly covered by this saying, and the Edo dictionary quoted above also states that its warning against spilling secrets has been shifted to mean actual leaky roofs. It seems there are some who say the meaning shifted in the opposite direction.

It has been nearly four years since the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, and almost as long since plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) declared the disaster "under control." This was and is an exaggeration, as we can see with the ongoing battle to deal with repeated radioactively contaminated water leaks.

Following news on Feb. 22 that water with concentrations of radioactive material 70 times higher than normal was being discharged into the plant's harbor from a drainage ditch, we learned yesterday that this contaminated water was also escaping into the open sea. What's more, TEPCO now says it had known this water -- which collects atop the No. 2 reactor building before running down drain spouts to the ditch -- was heavily contaminated since spring 2014, but made no public announcement until now. The utility hadn't even reported the situation to the government.

This terribly managed contaminated water problem is certainly scarier than tigers and wolves. **What's truly deplorable, however, is how insensitive, how clumsy TEPCO is when it comes to releasing information. Because of the company's reticence, it is bound to be suspected of trying to hide the inconvenient fact of the leak. Both local fishing cooperatives and Fukushima Prefecture, too, are wondering openly if they can trust TEPCO.**

Without the trust of the locals, TEPCO will find it well-nigh impossible to make progress on contaminated water disposal and the eventual decommissioning of the ruined Fukushima reactors. This radioactive water leak is unacceptable, but so is misreading what we need to fear most. ("Yoroku," a front-page column in the Mainichi Shimbun)

No hope outside nukes?

March 4, 2015

Many see reactor restarts as only option to revive 'Nuclear Ginza' region

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150304p2a00m0na003000c.html>

TSURUGA, Fukui -- The reactivation of halted nuclear reactors is expected to be among the main issues of contention in the coming nationwide local election in April. But in this city, which has suffered a huge economic blow from the halted reactors, reactivation is unlikely to emerge as a point of dispute.

Elections will be held in Tsuruga, the largest city in the Wakasa Gulf Coast region -- dubbed "Nuclear Ginza" as it is home to 14 nuclear reactors -- for a new mayor and city assembly members. With the local economy in sharp decline, residents worried about making a living see no real option besides restarting the nuclear reactors.

"Money doesn't circulate when the reactors aren't in operation," lamented Riichi Tsutsumi, 65, who runs a company in Tsuruga that manufactures aluminum building materials. "It's suffocating." Prior to the March 2011 triple disasters, orders related to the nuclear power plants -- including materials for rebuilding The Japan Atomic Power Company (JAPC) employee housing facilities and replacement parts for automatic doors at the plants -- constituted 30 to 50 percent of his company's annual sales. Now such orders are virtually gone. Other clients based in Tsuruga have also scaled back on capital spending, bringing total sales of Tsutsumi's company down to less than half of what they were four years ago.

Tsuruga is host to the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors of JAPC's Tsuruga Nuclear Power Plant and the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA)'s Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor facility, neither of which have any clear prospects for reactivation. Moreover, there has been a profound drop in personal consumption in the city. Tsutsumi warned an acquaintance against opening a restaurant in the city's entertainment district after the 2011 disasters, saying it would quickly go out of business. The acquaintance went ahead with the plans anyway and opened an establishment in November 2013. Unable to attract customers even during the high year-end and new-year party season, however, the business shut down after just four months.

According to the Tsuruga Municipal Government, approximately 4,700 people worked at nuclear plants in the city -- including on scheduled inspections -- as of March 2010. The number dropped to approximately 3,300 by January 2015. According to a national government estimate, money that workers dispatched for scheduled inspections at the nuclear plants spent on accommodations and meals in Tsuruga and the neighboring town of Mihama in fiscal 2012 dropped by around 580 million yen from fiscal 2010.

Meanwhile, the central government's plan for the "revitalization of local economies" still lacks any specific policies. With about 70 percent of the city's workers in the service sector, Tsuruga faces a grave challenge for which reactivated reactors would offer an immediate solution.

Almost none of the expected candidates in the mayoral or city assembly elections in Tsuruga are anti-nuclear advocates. Harumi Kondaiji, 64, a city assembly member who has taken a clear stance against nuclear power since the 2011 city assembly election, says she's been approached by local residents who say, tongue-in-cheek, that everyone in the city is connected to nuclear power plants. "We need to get them moving soon," they tell her. Kondaiji won at least 10 percent fewer votes in the 2011 election than in the previous one in 2007.

According to a public opinion poll taken by the Fukui Shimbun newspaper last December prior to the general election, around 25 percent of voters in the Fukui No. 2 district, which includes Tsuruga, said that all reactors should be decommissioned. There are no signs, however, that reactivation will become a controversial topic in the upcoming local election.

"People are worried about their livelihoods, so even if they question (the wisdom of reactivating reactors), that's probably not reflected in how they vote," Kondaiji suggested.

Chairman of the All Japan Council of Local Governments with Atomic Power Stations and Tsuruga Mayor Kazuharu Kawase, who will step down at the end of his current term, told the Mainichi Shimbun, "An election that does not allow us to see the public's will, including how many people are critical of nuclear power, is problematic. It would be natural for an anti-nuclear candidate to run, too, under the circumstances, so hopefully that will happen."

March 04, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Compensation for Fukushima firms

March 3, 2015

Gov't, TEPCO to put off plan to end compensation payments to Fukushima firms

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150303p2a00m0na009000c.html>

The central government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) have decided not to abide by a draft plan for the time being to stop paying damages to business operators mainly in evacuation zones in Fukushima Prefecture, it has been learned.

The draft plan stipulated that the government and TEPCO, the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, will stop paying compensation for business damages caused by the 2011 nuclear disaster to the business operators in February 2016. The government and TEPCO have decided to postpone the original plan because it has been pointed out that many business operators will be forced out of business if they discontinue compensation payments.

The government and TEPCO will also shelve their plan to terminate compensation payments one year later to business operators outside the evacuation zones for damages caused by harmful rumors related to the nuclear disaster.

The business operators that are subject to compensation for business damages are those in 13 municipalities that were designated as evacuation or restricted zones in Fukushima Prefecture in the wake of the outbreak of the nuclear disaster. In the case of nuclear evacuation zones, not only those business operators that have been closed for business but also those that have moved out to resume business elsewhere and those that have gone out of business are also subject to the compensation scheme. A total of 458.1 billion yen had been paid to those business operators as of the end of January 2015. With respect to the draft compensation plan, a senior official of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry said, "The guidelines for the government's Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation stipulate that there is a 'certain limit' to the compensation period. Paying damages for an extended period of time will not lead to reconstruction."

Nevertheless, the government and TEPCO have decided to put off the termination plan for the time being because when they presented the draft proposal in December 2014, they met furious opposition from the business community and others who said that business operators continued to suffer damage, among other complaints.

As for compensation payments made for four years through February 2015, TEPCO had responded to requests for lump-sum payments or installments for every three months. But the government and TEPCO are now studying how to make payments for March and onward, sources say.

Meanwhile, compensation for damages caused by harmful rumors stemming from the nuclear disaster had been paid mainly to tour operators and other businesses. Total compensation payments, including those caused by shipment restrictions for agricultural, forestry and marine products, made as of the end of

January 2015, totaled 1.3 trillion yen. According to the draft plan, the government and TEPCO had proposed to discontinue compensation payments to business operators such as tour operators in February 2016, although they planned to continue to pay damages to business operators in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries industry who were greatly affected by the nuclear accident. TEPCO's compensation scheme covers a broad range of categories such as payments to individuals for psychological damage (100,000 yen per person per month) and compensation payments to individuals for their "incapacity" to work or for their decreased incomes as a result of their evacuation. Such compensation payments made so far amount to about 4.71 trillion yen.

It was already decided that compensation payments for psychological damage would be discontinued one year after evacuation orders were lifted, while payments for incapacity damage were terminated at the end of February 2015. While the framework of a compensation scheme for individuals has been decided, no decisive solutions to building a consensus for compensation to business operators have been found nearly four years after the outbreak of the nuclear disaster.

March 03, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Fukushima towns protest over TEPCO's handling of leaks

March 5, 2015

Towns protest over nuclear plant water leak

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150305_29.html

Mar. 5, 2015 - Updated 08:01 UTC+1

Towns hosting nuclear plants in Fukushima have lodged a protest with the operator of the plants over failing to disclose some radioactive water leaks from Fukushima Daiichi into the sea.

Tokyo Electric Power Company is facing heavy criticism over its handling of tainted water that collected on the rooftop of the No.2 reactor building at the Daiichi plant. The water is believed to have been spilling into the sea through a drainage channel.

Tokyo Electric was aware that the levels of radioactive substances in the channel rise whenever it rains. But it didn't make the information public until last month.

Naraha Town Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto, who is also the representative of the 4 towns hosting the Fukushima Daiichi and Daini plants, visited Tokyo Electric's head office on Thursday.

Matsumoto told the utility's president Naomi Hirose it's extremely regrettable that the latest development has profoundly undermined trust in the company among locals.

Matsumoto said securing the overall safety of the nuclear plants, including the issue of contaminated water, is the first step in efforts to rebuild from the 2011 nuclear accident.

He handed Hirose a letter of protest, in which the municipalities demand the company swiftly disclose information and enhance the awareness of its employees.

Hirose offered his apologies for repeatedly causing concerns among local people. He vowed the company will take thorough measures to prevent a recurrence.

End of "intensive reconstruction period"?

March 5, 2015

Gov't considering having local gov'ts shoulder post-disaster reconstruction costs

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150305p2a00m0na016000c.html>

Reconstruction Minister Wataru Takeshita has said that the government will consider having local governments in disaster-hit regions shoulder some of post-disaster reconstruction expenses in fiscal 2016 and thereafter.

The government planned to foot all the bills to rebuild Japan's northeast, which was hit by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, ensuing tsunami and the Fukushima nuclear accident, during the so-called "intensive reconstruction period" between the 2011 and 2015 fiscal years. As to what should be done after the intensive reconstruction period ends, Takeshita said, "It will be difficult to continue the rebuilding projects (solely on government funding)."

With respect to government-led decontamination work in the "difficult-to-return zones" where yearly radiation levels are above 50 millisieverts due to the outbreak of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, Takeshita said that the government will place priority on decontaminating those areas with important infrastructure. On whether to decontaminate the entire "difficult-to-return" zones, he said, "That's impossible."

Takeshita revealed the plans during an interview with the Mainichi Shimbun and other media outlets ahead of the fourth anniversary on March 11 of the triple disasters.

The government set the overall reconstruction period for 10 years through fiscal 2020, and is shouldering all expenses for reconstruction projects during the intensive reconstruction period -- the first half of the 10-year-reconstruction period -- out of consideration for the scale of the earthquake disaster as well as the fact that many local governments in the affected regions are on weak fiscal footing. Takeshita characterized this as "the most extraordinary of extraordinary measures." Regarding principal reconstruction projects such as land development and building disaster restoration housing and embankments, he said, "There is sufficient meaning in doing these projects (completely at government expense)."

Meanwhile, Takeshita said the government would hold talks with local governments in the disaster-stricken regions on ways of distributing expenses and securing financial resources because it would be difficult for the government to cover costs for all projects in fiscal 2016 and thereafter. In light of the harsh fiscal conditions, **the government is apparently aiming to streamline reconstruction projects by**

asking local governments to shoulder some of the costs. But the talks are expected to run into rough waters as Miyagi, Fukushima and Iwate prefectures are seeking that the central government continue to foot the bill for all reconstruction projects.

TEPCO promises transparency...again

March 6, 2015

TEPCO to change disclosure rules

Mar. 6, 2015 - Updated 10:30 UTC+1

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150306_30.html

The operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant says it will swiftly release any radioactivity data that could affect the external environment.

Tokyo Electric Power Company announced Friday it will set up a third-party panel to examine information disclosure.

The move comes after the utility faced a barrage of criticism from the fishing industry and local residents over a radioactive leak that was undisclosed for months.

TEPCO failed to announce until recently that contaminated rooftop water at the No.2 reactor building had been spilling into the sea via a drainage channel. Employees knew about the problem since last April.

TEPCO says it will now promptly release all data that could pose a risk to the plant's surrounds. Examples include the radioactivity densities in groundwater and airborne dust in the plant, regardless of their levels.

Current information disclosure is limited to underground tunnels and channels linked to the sea, and other areas of the plant site that have previously posted high radiation levels.

The utility says the third-party panel will establish why the rooftop water leak was not publicized earlier, in addition to reviewing disclosure rules.

A report into the latest leakage will be released this month. TEPCO says it will also create a new organization to make regular checks on the adequacy of information disclosure.

Open discussion?

March 10, 2015

Nuclear experts in Japan call for open discussion

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Mar. 10, 2015 - Updated 09:55 UTC+1

The head of a nuclear energy expert group in Japan has called for more openness in the industry on the eve of the 4th anniversary of the Fukushima Daiichi accident.

The president of the Atomic Energy Society of Japan, Reiko Fujita, was speaking to reporters on Tuesday.

Fujita referred to the industry's closed nature before the accident, and said the lack of frank acknowledgment of issues and open, vigorous debate was a serious problem.

Fujita stressed that her academic society's role is to bring more transparency to the industry.

Fujita said her group of nuclear researchers and experts wants to sincerely reflect on the accident. She said the members will continue doing their utmost to ensure an accident like Fukushima Daiichi never happens again.

The society last year set up a committee to study the decommissioning of reactors at Fukushima Daiichi. It plans to make independent proposals on ways to decommission the plant, and improve the safety of nuclear power generation.

"Returning to pre-disaster days of complacency"

March 10, 2015

FOUR YEARS AFTER: Ex-panel chief says Japan still hasn't learned lessons from Fukushima crisis

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201503100048>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The Abe administration is recklessly trying to restart nuclear reactors across Japan without learning lessons from the Fukushima crisis and failing to prepare effective countermeasures against another potential disaster, a former accident panel chief said.

Yotaro Hatamura, former chairman of a government panel that investigated the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, said in a recent interview with The Asahi Shimbun that the atmosphere surrounding nuclear power is returning to the pre-disaster days of complacency.

"Sufficient investigations have not been conducted," Hatamura, professor emeritus of mechanical engineering at the University of Tokyo, said of the Fukushima nuclear accident.

In its final report submitted in July 2012, the panel led by Hatamura called on the government to continue efforts to determine the cause of the nuclear disaster.

“Almost none of (our proposals) have been reflected” in recent government actions, he said. Tougher safety standards for nuclear facilities were introduced after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, led to the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. But with the exception of this “regulatory hurdle,” he said, “the situation seems unchanged from before the accident.” “It does not appear that organizations to watch (government actions) are working properly,” he said in the interview.

Hatamura also said that people once again believe that nuclear plants are safe although the problems related to these facilities have only been addressed superficially.

“There could always be lapses in oversight in safety assessments, and an accident will surely happen again,” Hatamura said.

Among the countermeasures needed, he said, are effective evacuation plans for residents living near nuclear plants throughout the country. He said the feasibility of current evacuation plans is doubtful because they were compiled without fully reflecting on the Fukushima accident.

“The restarts of reactors should be declared only after sufficient preparations are made, such as conducting evacuation drills covering all residents living within 30 kilometers of each plant based on developed evacuation plans,” he said.

According to Hatamura, Japanese citizens need to prepare for future nuclear disasters if the nation continues nuclear power generation.

“Even before the Fukushima disaster, I thought it was inappropriate to state that an accident would never occur,” Hatamura said. “And the Fukushima crisis, in fact, did happen.”

Most people in Japanese society did not view the issue of nuclear plants as their problem and had only looked at the benefits of nuclear energy until the Fukushima disaster, he said.

“They believed what they wanted to believe--nuclear plants were safe just because there had been no severe accidents and those facilities had undergone safety screenings,” Hatamura said. “It is wrong to end the problem by passing the buck to someone else when an accident occurs.”

(This article was compiled from reports by Keiji Takeuchi, Toshio Kawada and Tsuyoshi Nagano.)

UN Conference in Sendai

March 7, 2015

Japan set to share lessons of 2011 disasters at U.N. forum in Sendai

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/07/national/japan-set-share-lessons-2011-disasters-u-n-forum-sendai/#.VPtU7eF1Cot>

by Kayo Mimizuka

Kyodo

Japan is set to share the lessons it has learned from the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami when delegates and activists from across the globe gather in Sendai next weekend for a U.N. disaster risk reduction conference.

More than 5,000 participants, including leaders and ministers from national governments, are expected to attend the conference on disaster management from March 14 to 18.

A key outcome of the international gathering in the Tohoku region, which took severe damage, is expected to be a new framework, now under negotiation, to replace the 10-year Hyogo Framework for Action adopted at a previous U.N. conference in 2005. The new framework is expected to reflect calamities that have occurred in the past decade, including in Japan.

Apart from quakes, tsunami and other hazards, the world is also focusing more on nuclear disasters in the wake of the man-made crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant that was triggered by the 2011 quake and tsunami.

“One area that definitely will be of great interest ... is how you rehabilitate an area after it’s been exposed to an accident at a nuclear plant,” Margareta Wahlstroem, special representative of the U.N. secretary-general for disaster risk reduction, said in a news conference in Tokyo.

“There is a great deal of interest from other countries that also have nuclear plants. They are looking into, if something like this (the Fukushima disaster) happens to us, what it is that we can learn from Japan,” Wahlstroem said.

There will be a working session to discuss nuclear disasters in the context of technical hazards, among other events.

The third U.N. World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction will involve many of the world’s leaders as well as private-sector businesses, and is seen as a significant opportunity to bring more attention to the importance of disaster risk reduction in the context of economic growth and development.

Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida said in late February that leaders from about 30 countries and ministers from over 70 are expected to participate. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will also attend the meeting and is expected to announce additional support for developing economies in the form of funds and technologies on disaster management, according to government officials.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will also attend Sendai the event.

While many ministerial sessions and other high-level dialogue are being planned, the focus is also on a number of events that will take place outside the meeting rooms, officials in Tokyo said.

On the sidelines of the five-day meeting, more than 25 study tours are being scheduled so participants can visit places across Tohoku affected by the mega-quake, tsunami and subsequent nuclear crisis, and see how people are trying to recover and rebuild their devastated communities.

The tours include one to the crippled Fukushima No. 1 and others to wrecked schools, fishery ports and markets.

“As this conference will take place in the disaster-affected area, I hope that participants will not only engage in discussions inside meeting rooms but also learn first-hand about reconstruction, and deepen their debates in light of what they see,” said Kaoru Saito, director at the disaster management bureau of the Cabinet Office.

The government and the city of Sendai are also planning to hold 10 forums on such topics as disaster prevention measures, medical support and disaster prevention education for children, while some 350 symposiums and seminars will be organized by international nongovernmental organizations and other entities.

Between 2000 and 2012, some 1.2 million people were killed and 2.9 billion affected by natural calamities around the world. The damage is estimated at \$1.7 trillion, highlighting the necessity of putting more global efforts into disaster risk reduction to realize sustainable growth, according to the Abe government. The U.N. conference on disaster management was held in Yokohama in 1994 and in Kobe in 2005.

Fukushima lessons can't be erased

March 11, 2015

NRA chief: Never let Fukushima lessons fade away

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150311_25.html

Mar. 11, 2015 - Updated 09:46 UTC+1

The chief of Japan's nuclear regulator has told his staff never to forget the lessons of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis in fulfilling their mission to ensure safety.

Nuclear Regulation Authority Chairman Shunichi Tanaka was speaking before officials of the NRA secretariat on Wednesday to mark the 4th anniversary of the Fukushima Daiichi plant accident.

Tanaka said there's no erasing the fact that the accident worsened the tragic damage of the March 11th earthquake and tsunami.

He said regulators must never let the lessons of Fukushima fade away even though others may tend to do so some 4 years on.

Tanaka also urged his staff to do their best to reduce risks. He said serious accidents completely change life for local residents, and that restoring it is difficult. He stressed that such situations should never be allowed.

The authority and its secretariat were established in 2012 after their predecessors were criticized for failing to cope with the Fukushima crisis.

Govt. officials urged to learn Fukushima lessons

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150311_17.html

Mar. 11, 2015 - Updated 05:56 UTC+1

A Japanese Cabinet Minister has instructed government officials to learn from the lessons of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster. He has asked them to do so when helping municipalities around nuclear plants make evacuation plans for future accidents.

Nuclear Emergency Preparedness Minister Yoshio Mochizuki spoke to about 50 officials on Wednesday, the 4th anniversary of the March 11 disaster. The officials belong to a Cabinet Office section that was established in October.

Mochizuki, who is also Environment Minister, said the officials should reflect on the fact that effective disaster-response measures had not been in place at the time of the Fukushima accident.

He said they should draw concrete lessons from the experience and rethink the response to the accident. He said this should be reflected in new countermeasures.

All commercial nuclear reactors in Japan are currently offline. But utilities have applied for permission to restart 21 of them.

Municipalities within a radius of 30 kilometers of a nuclear power plant are now required to make plans to evacuate residents. But many problems with the plans have been raised.

The Cabinet Office intends to help verify the effectiveness of the plans by reviewing evacuation drills run by the relevant prefectures.

Message from US Regulatory Commission

March 10, 2015

Burns: Fukushima accident has key lessons for US

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150311_05.html

Mar. 10, 2015 - Updated 23:43 UTC+1

The head of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission says the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident has key lessons for American nuclear policy.

Stephen Burns made the comment in a speech on Tuesday near Washington.

He said the NRC is trying to complete safety measures for the spent nuclear fuel stored in pools at all power plants in the US by the end of 2016.

Burns later told reporters that the challenges after the accident have been taken very seriously by the Japanese government and the country has made a lot of progress.

Burns said he will visit Fukushima in early April to observe the decommissioning of the crippled plant.

He also said he is planning to meet his Japanese counterparts to discuss the safety measures for other plants. All of the nation's nuclear reactors remain offline.

Japanese regulators are screening the safety steps for those plants using the stricter requirements that were adopted after the 2011 Fukushima accident.

Update! Fukushima at four

http://www.beyondnuclear.org/storage/publications/OnLine_Thunderbird_BeyondNuclear_March2015.pdf

What is new at the stricken Fukushima site since the March 11, 2011 nuclear disaster there began? What really happened? And what are the health implications, both in Japan and for the U.S. if a similar nuclear disaster happened here? The newly released spring edition of the Beyond Nuclear newsletter, The Thunderbird, looks at these issues and more. Free to download and distribute widely.

Abe and Merkel don't see eye to eye on nukes

March 10, 2015

On nuclear energy, Abe and Merkel remain far apart

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201503100068

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

German Chancellor Angela Merkel agreed on a number of things during her talks with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, but where the two leaders parted company was on the issue of nuclear energy.

Merkel explained her decision to cancel Germany's dependence on nuclear power plants was a direct result of the Fukushima disaster in Japan four years ago.

Abe, on the other hand, was at pains to state that Japan must continue to rely on nuclear energy as a cheap and stable source of power.

At a joint news conference following their March 9 meeting, Abe was asked by a German reporter why Japan was still thinking about resuming operations at nuclear power plants when Germany had decided to move away from nuclear energy by 2022 following the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in 2011.

"Japan depends on nuclear plants for one-third of its energy source," Abe said. "Suspension of operations at those plants has forced us to depend more on fossil fuels, such as petroleum. We have to fulfill our responsibility of providing an inexpensive and stable supply of energy. We hope to resume operations at nuclear plants that have been judged by the Nuclear Regulation Authority to have passed safety standards."

The Abe administration has made clear its intention to resume operations at nuclear plants. Moves are already under way to resume operations at the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors of the Takahama nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture operated by Kansai Electric Power Co. and the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors of the Sendai nuclear plant in Kagoshima Prefecture, operated by Kyushu Electric Power Co.

Those reactors could come back online before the end of 2015.

For her part, Merkel staked out an energy policy that is sharply at odds with the direction Japan is taking. In a video message released shortly before her arrival, Merkel said she Japan should join Germany in promoting renewable energy sources as a way of moving away from a dependence on nuclear energy. Trained as a physicist, Merkel gave a detailed explanation of her decision to move away from nuclear energy during a lecture she gave prior to her meeting with Abe.

Saying that the Fukushima nuclear accident had played a major role in affecting the change in her thinking, Merkel said: "One reason is because the accident occurred in a nation like Japan, which has a high level of technology. It clearly showed that even in such a nation, there are risks such accidents can happen. I came to realize there are risks for events which we thought would never happen."

She went on to explain that for many years she had supported the peaceful use of nuclear energy, but added: "The era of the peaceful use of nuclear energy in Germany is ending. Now we have to construct our energy structures based on the decision."

With courage and the political will, Merkel suggested that any nation could follow Germany's example in moving away from a dependence on nuclear energy.

Because of their obvious differences on energy policy, Abe and Merkel did not discuss nuclear energy during their talks, according to Japanese government officials who briefed reporters.

Merkel also toned down her rhetoric at the joint news conference. She did not directly mention nuclear energy, but only said that Germany and Japan "are working closely on energy efficiency and the stable supply of energy."

(This article was written by Toru Tamakawa and Shinya Sugizaki.)

But has TEPCO learned anything?

March 13, 2015

It's time to punish Tepco

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2015/03/13/commentary/japan-commentary/its-time-to-punish-tepco/#.VQM0seF1Cov>

by William Pesek

Fishermen trawling the waters off Japan's eastern coast have been alleging for a while that radioactive water is again spilling into the Pacific from the Fukushima power plant that melted down after a massive earthquake in 2011. On Feb. 24, Tokyo Electric Power Co., which is responsible for the site, admitted those suspicions were justified.

And it turns out that Tepco knew about this latest radioactive leak since last May — **and the giant utility said nothing for almost a year.**

In the 15 days since Tepco finally confessed, have investigators raided its Tokyo headquarters? Have regulators demanded that heads roll? Has Prime Minister Shinzo Abe used his bully pulpit to demand accountability from the company that gave the world its worst nuclear crisis since Chernobyl?

In any other major democracy, those steps would have been obvious. But none have occurred in Japan. And **that raises troubling questions not just about Tepco's corporate governance, but the rampant cronyism enabling it.**

When he took office in December 2012, Abe pledged to make corporate executives more accountable to international codes of conduct. In August 2013, he had a perfect chance to show his mettle. At the time, Tepco was still the butt of international criticism for its handling of the aftermath at Fukushima. Abe —

concerned that the bad press would affect Tokyo's campaign to host the 2020 Olympics — declared his government would push Tepco aside and handle the cleanup efforts directly.

It was all for show. **Abe's government never intervened, and Tepco stayed in charge.** Four years to the day since the earthquake, Fukushima is still leaking; 120,000 people remain displaced; and Tepco's opacity and incompetence are unchanged.

The company's obfuscations "tell us all we need to know about its resilient corporate culture of irresponsibility," says Jeff Kingston, director of Asian Studies at Temple University in Tokyo. "It has not changed its stripes. The decommissioning efforts have been shambolic, it's still incompetent and negligent and has a very deep hole to climb out of in trying to regain any public trust."

How does Tepco get away with it?

It is protected from on high by the "nuclear village," Tokyo's answer to the military-industrial complex that is said to hold sway in Washington. This alliance of pro-nuclear politicians, bureaucrats and power companies promotes reactors over safer forms of energy like solar, wind or geothermal, and works to shield utilities from competition and global standards. (That's how Tepco got away with consistently doctoring its maintenance reports for Fukushima and putting all of its backup generators underground in a tsunami-prone area.)

Even after the Fukushima disaster, national nuclear regulators seemed more concerned about restarting Japan's 48 remaining reactors (all of which have been shut down in the interim) than neutralizing the one contaminating the northeast of the country.

Tokyo was a scary place to be in March 2011 amid Fukushima's triple meltdown. Most frightening, though, was the utter lack of transparency from the authorities. Tepco's then-President Masataka Shimizu gave maddeningly contradictory accounts of events at Fukushima. Two months later, Shimizu took the fall for Tepco's sending radiation clouds Tokyo's way. Tepco's idea of a new start was to replace him with a 36-year company veteran.

Four years on, it's still not clear whether Tepco has learned anything.

"I find it galling that not only was Tepco never punished for constructing reactors well below the tsunami warning markers, thereby worsening the effects of the quake and tidal wave, but was even allowed to raise its rates to make the consumer pay for the cleanup costs," says Robert Whiting, author of "Tokyo Underworld."

Even in the context of Japanese cronyism, it's astounding that nobody at Tepco has gone to jail. Criminal proceedings against Japan's business titans aren't unprecedented.

Executives of the optics manufacturer Olympus were arrested over a 2011 fraud scandal.

Internet entrepreneur Takafumi Horie and fund manager Yoshiaki Murakami got locked up for insider trading.

Yet, Tepco's executives continue to enjoy a get-out-jail-free card, courtesy of the Tokyo establishment.

At the very least, Tepco's senior management should be fired without pensions and face charges from prosecutors. The company should also be nationalized. (Taxpayers are bearing the costs of Tepco's negligence anyway.)

Abe's desire to eliminate the cronyism endemic to Japan Inc. is laudable. It would make the economy more vibrant, productive and attractive to overseas investors. He should start by bringing the most egregious offender to justice. I'm sure the Fukushima fishermen will be happy to testify.

William Pesek is a Bloomberg View columnist based in Tokyo who writes on economics, markets and politics in the Asia-Pacific region..

TEPCO considering tie-ups with other industries

March 13, 2015

Tepco in talks with mobile carriers to form partnership: sources

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/13/business/corporate-business/tepcos-in-talks-with-mobile-carriers-to-form-partnership-sources/#.VQRTeOF1Cos>

Kyodo

Tokyo Electric Power Co. is currently in talks with three major Japanese mobile carriers to find a partner for joint marketing, as the planned liberalization of the retail electricity market next year is expected to boost competition, informed sources said Friday.

The utility will choose its partner from among NTT Docomo Inc., KDDI Corp. and SoftBank Corp. and will reach a basic agreement by the end of April, the sources said.

Tepco, whose regional monopoly in Tokyo and surrounding areas will end with the April 2016 deregulation, aims to use the tie-up **to keep subscribers by offering a package deal for electricity supply and mobile phone services at reduced rates**, they said.

The move would also provide the utility with a nationwide sales network.

To help increase business, Tepco is also considering tie-ups with companies in other industries including a home builder and an insurance company, the sources said.

Tepco is expected to face intense competition from other utilities and new entrants seeking to supply electricity in its lucrative service area, which encompasses nine prefectures in eastern Japan.

What about the Fukushima disaster, Mr.Abe?

March 15, 2015

Abe mum on Fukushima at U.N. disaster risk confab

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/15/national/abe-mum-on-fukushima-at-u-n-disaster-risk-confab/#.VQV8nuF1Cov>

Kyodo, JIJI, Staff Report

SENDAI – Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had little to say on the tsunami-triggered core meltdowns in Fukushima as representatives from across the globe met at a U.N. conference on disaster risk reduction Sunday to underscore the urgent need to address climate change and reduce disaster impacts.

On the second day of the U.N. World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, French Minister of State for Development and Francophony Annick Girardin said climate change is responsible for over 80 percent of the damage caused by natural disasters.

The Sendai conference is “above all a call for lucidity, because it is no longer possible to ignore climate chaos” in the context of disaster risk mitigation, Girardin told the gathering, which began Saturday.

Meanwhile, in a speech Saturday at the conference, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had few words on the triple core meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant. The disaster in Fukushima Prefecture erupted after a massive quake on March 11, 2011, spawned huge tsunami that took out the plant's cooling systems. Abe's speech was strongly criticized by Tamotsu Baba, mayor of the town of Namie.

"(Abe's speech) was no good at all. He may not have wanted to give negative impressions (of Japan) because world leaders have gathered here," Baba told reporters Saturday.

Namie is close to the plant, and about 21,000 of its residents were still living outside the town as of the end of February after losing their homes to radioactive fallout.

Speculation has been rife that Abe was attempting to avoid discussion about the Fukushima disaster because the No. 1 plant is plagued radioactive water woes, including operator Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s failure to disclose the extent of the tainted water flowing into the Pacific.

Tests on samples of seawater and fish from sites close to the plant have shown no alarming signs for human health, apparently as the contaminated water is being diluted by the sea. This has prompted Abe to claim that, despite the continuing water woes and the harm that they are causing to local fishermen, the situation is "under control."

During a session Sunday, Cabinet members from about 40 nations discussed post-disaster efforts to build more disaster-resistant communities.

"Japan has assumed the largest (possible) quake may hit the country, and has been preparing evacuation routes and strengthened (disaster) monitoring systems," land minister Akihiro Ota said.

Japan also has taken steps to make houses and schools earthquake-proof since the Great Hanshin Earthquake struck the Kobe area in 1995, Ota said.

He said the nation will provide as much support as possible to Vanuatu, which was devastated by a massive cyclone over the weekend.

Meanwhile, Abe underlined the importance of female leadership in anti-disaster efforts.

"Women's leadership is indeed essential in order to stand up to disasters," Abe said in a dialogue session at the conference.

Because women's perspectives have not been fully utilized in disaster prevention, Abe said, there is a need to consider measures that are friendly to women, who are more likely to face tougher situations than men when natural disasters hit.

In the Dialogue on Mobilizing Women's Leadership in Disaster Risk Reduction, cochaired by internal affairs minister Sanae Takaichi, former Finnish President Tarja Halonen called for improving a disaster warning system to allow women in rural areas to obtain evacuation information promptly.

TEPCO to balance "responsibility" and "competitiveness"

Press Releases 2015

Press Release (Mar 17,2015)TEPCO announces the establishment of in-house companies ahead of its transition to a holding company system

http://www.tepco.co.jp/en/press/corp-com/release/2015/1248790_6844.html

Tokyo Electric Power is announcing today that it will establish three new in-house companies on April 1, 2015 **ahead of the introduction of a holding company system from April 2016.**

The new companies, together with the Fukushima Daiichi Decontamination & Decommissioning Engineering Company, will exist within the holding company system after the transition and will be responsible for the balance of payments, results and quality of each of their businesses.

The company is committed to making continuous efforts in order to establish a management structure which enables TEPCO to balance both "responsibility" and "competitiveness" as we engage in our business.

- Renewable power company

Hydroelectric power and new energy power generation businesses are currently managed by Power Grid Company (PGC). As we look toward the third stage of the electricity system reforms which will legally separate power transmission and distribution, we will separate these businesses from the PGC and establish them as a new in-house company. (The operation and maintenance of the power plants will continue to be managed by PGC.)

This company will aim to increase sales profit by developing new renewable energy sources, cutting generation costs and repowering hydroelectricity.

- TEPCO Research Institute

Technological development, Intellectual property management, and construction / architecture technology related functions, which are shared by each business, will be brought together to maintain and strengthen technological capabilities. The institute will aim to create and deploy new competitive technologies, and provide solutions arising from the field. It will also aim to become a new model for how research and development is conducted by a utility company by providing research on business and technological strategies linked to market liberalization as well as analysis and advisory on energy policies.

- Business Solution Company

Specialist and general business administration functions such as general affairs, personnel, training, accounting and internal systems which are common to each new business company will be integrated as a shared service company to provide effective and high quality solution services to improve the productivity of TEPCO's group companies.

Shutting down research reactors means no more hands-on training

March 11, 2015

FOUR YEARS AFTER: There's a price to pay for university research reactor shutdowns

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201503110041>

By TATSUYUKI KOBORI and AKIYOSHI ABE

University research reactors were not exempt from the shutdowns of nuclear reactors that the central government ordered after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that triggered the nuclear crisis in Fukushima Prefecture.

University research reactors exist at only two locations in Japan. The shutdowns mean that students are still unable to practice hands-on operations.

This could have repercussions for experiments on decommissioning nuclear reactors and radiation therapy. For this reason, some universities have begun organizing training programs overseas.

Those involved in the programs have called for a prompt restart of the research reactors, but there are no signs that any decision will be made anytime soon.

Ten or so students from Kinki University, Nagoya University and Kyushu University had the opportunity last July to work with a 10-watt nuclear reactor at Kyung Hee University in South Korea.

They conducted experiments relating to nuclear reactor physics, radiation readings and other areas.

Tetsuo Ito, who heads the Kinki University Atomic Energy Research Institute, said, "This was the first time for us to do practical training at a nuclear reactor overseas."

The institute intends to continue the program this year as well.

Kinki University has a 1-watt research reactor in Higashi-Osaka, Osaka Prefecture. The university applied to the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) last October to restart it. The goal was for a restart in or around spring 2015, but as yet there are no indications this will happen.

There are no changes to room temperature and pressure when the reactor is operating.

Since there is no need to counter large amounts of heat, the reactor requires no cooling equipment. A Kinki University faculty member said with bewilderment, "It is structurally impossible for a big accident like the one at Fukushima to occur at the Kinki University reactor."

Aside from the two research facilities belonging to Kinki University and Kyoto University, Japan has 11 other research reactors.

After the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co. in March 2011, new regulatory standards were drawn up to cover not only commercial reactors, but also the 14 owned by universities and private companies.

One of two research reactors operated by Kyoto University generates 100 watts. It has been used for practical training since 1975, and more than 3,000 graduate students from Japan and abroad have worked on it.

Prior to the nuclear disaster, the university's 5,000-kilowatt reactor was used for 200 or so joint research projects by researchers from across Japan every year. Ken Nakajima, a professor of nuclear engineering at the Kyoto University Research Reactor Institute, says, "We want to somehow restart sometime in the upcoming academic year" that begins on April 1.

On Feb. 25, during a regular meeting of the NRA, chairman Shunichi Tanaka was at pains to point out that a research reactor is quite different from a normal nuclear reactor. He called on experts to "also think a little bit about pushing the screenings forward" while basing their decisions on safety considerations.

EDUCATION IN THE FIELD CANNOT BE IGNORED

The University of Tokyo, Rikkyo University and other institutions also used to operate research reactors, but they were decommissioned because of maintenance costs and aging equipment. The number of research reactors owned by companies and other non-utilities also looks set to decline.

In 2013, a subcommittee of the Science Council of Japan compiled a document that proposed Japan "should begin considering replacements for research reactors" so that aspiring workers in the field can get the proper training.

Computers that simulate the inner workings of a nuclear reactor are, of course, another option. But Shinsuke Yamanaka, a professor of nuclear fuel engineering at Osaka University, says, "It can't be a substitute for the tension of handling the real thing."

Yamanaka added this plea: "Even if we adopt a policy of not promoting nuclear power, universities will still need to produce graduates who work with nuclear energy. I'd like the NRA to conduct its screening with this reality in mind."

In the meantime, efforts are under way to build new research reactors.

In November, Fukui Governor Issei Nishikawa declared in the prefectural assembly that he would begin working with the national government, universities, corporate entities and other sources of funding to consider taking on the project of building a new research reactor.

As there are no university reactors in the prefecture, the University of Fukui and Fukui University of Technology had used Kinki University's nuclear reactor for hands-on training. Some assembly members questioned the need for such a facility in Fukui Prefecture.

Prefectural government officials explained that the intention was to "consider this issue because universities have expressed a sense of crisis."

They said the prefecture will not be involved in attracting such facilities.

30 years to recoup compensation funds

March 23, 2015

Nuclear compensation recovery could take 30 years

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Mar. 23, 2015 - Updated 11:14 UTC+1

Japan's Board of Audit says it could take the government up to 30 years to recoup the funds it provided to help compensate victims of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident.

The government issued bonds worth nine trillion yen, or about 75 billion dollars, to help the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, pay compensation. The money is mainly intended to help those who have been forced to evacuate and to cover the costs of decontamination work.

The funds were given to TEPCO through the government-backed Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corporation.

The government plans to recover the funds through an annual pay-back by TEPCO as well as contributions from other power companies, and gains on the sale of TEPCO shares owned by the government-backed organization.

The Board of Audit says that if TEPCO pays back about 416 million dollars a year, the same amount as fiscal 2014, recovery would take up to 30 years, or until fiscal 2044. It says the earliest would be in 21 years, or in fiscal 2035.

The board says that even if TEPCO pays the government half of its current profits every year, recovery of the funds will take until fiscal 2032 at the earliest.

The board says the interest that must be paid by the government for borrowing the funds may amount to as much as 1.04 billion dollars, increasing the financial burden.

The Board of Audit says that, depending on the amount the utilities pay and the gains from the sale of shares, recovery of the funds could require more time and add a fiscal burden to the government.

Professor Kenichi Oshima of Ritsumeikan University, an expert on TEPCO's management, says the utility will face the additional costs of disposing of the waste generated by the decontamination work, and the total costs could exceed the nine trillion yen.

He says it will be necessary to study and disclose the details of the sharing of the financial burden and the recovery of the funds, because the contributions from other utilities include the base cost consumers pay for electricity.

Land prices affected by disaster risks

March 19, 2015

Disaster risks affect land prices in wake of quake disaster, typhoon

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150319p2a00m0na007000c.html>

Land prices have been fluctuating across Japan on the heels of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and other natural disasters, pushing down prices in areas that are vulnerable to tsunami and liquefaction while driving up prices inland.

According to official land prices released on March 18, land prices for the Chiba Prefecture city of Abiko significantly dropped apparently because the area suffered damage from liquefaction in the Great East Japan Earthquake and from a major typhoon. Meanwhile, land prices for the Shizuoka Prefecture city of Fujieda spiked, after the inland area was recognized to be less vulnerable to tsunami.

Among residential areas, land prices for the Fusatorimachi district of Abiko saw the country's largest decline rate at 10.9 percent. "I have almost no customers now. After the Great East Japan Earthquake and flooding, no one moved in here," said a 70-year-old barber in the district.

The Fusa district, which encompasses Fusatorimachi, suffered major liquefaction damage in the March 2011 quake disaster, with about 120 residences destroyed. The disaster was followed by flooding brought by Typhoon No. 26 in October 2013. A downpour with record rainfall totaling 282 millimeters pounded areas that had already suffered extensive ground sinking in the quake disaster, flooding some 400 homes. The area is now dotted with vacant lots where damaged houses were torn down, and many of the residents who moved out of the district following the disasters have no intention of returning.

In order to cope with flood damage, a pump station with a processing capacity of 7.6 times previous levels is set to go online later this month. However, measures to prevent additional liquefaction by strengthening the ground were not implemented due to opposition from residents concerned with financial burdens.

"We used to get to sell land if we lowered the prices, but we find no buyers nowadays," said a local realtor. An official with the city's taxation division said, "From a long-term perspective, our revenues from fixed property taxes will plummet, adversely affecting the city's finances."

Meanwhile, the city of Fujieda -- an inland commuter town within a 20 minute train ride from the city of Shizuoka -- saw its land prices rise by 0.2 percent, thanks to an influx of the population from coastal areas susceptible to tsunami. High-rise condominiums have popped up in areas around JR Fujieda Station, while further construction work is under way. Between 2011, the year when the Great East Japan Earthquake hit the country, and February this year, the city's population increased by at least 1,500 to some 146,500 - - though the population growth had continued since before that period.

A local realtor in Fujieda, however, gives a cautious view, saying, "The demand for land may dwindle after the population inflow from coastal areas slows down." Meanwhile, the Fujieda Municipal Government is aspiring to promote an influx of child-rearing generations into the city by developing libraries and parks near Fujieda Station.

March 19, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

189 billion yen spent so far on decommissioning Fukushima No.1

March 23, 2015

¥189 billion in public money spent on Fukushima cleanup so far

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/23/national/%C2%A5189-billion-in-public-money-spent-on-fukushima-cleanup-so-far/#.VRALa-F1Cos>

Kyodo

A total of ¥189.2 billion in taxpayers' money has been spent since fiscal 2011 on decommissioning the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and dealing with the buildup of radioactive water there, according to the Board of Audit.

The board also said Monday that Tokyo Electric Power Co. has allocated a massive amount of money for radioactive water treatment facilities and tanks that functioned only for a short period of time, with the amount totaling around ¥68.6 billion.

Tepco has spent some ¥32.1 billion on equipment to remove radioactive cesium from tainted water at the crippled plant, but the facilities stopped operating three months after the start of operations in June 2011, due mainly to equipment failure.

The utility also spent ¥16 billion to build more than 100 tanks for storing radioactive water at the plant. But Tepco is now replacing the bolt-joint tanks with more reliable containers after around 300 tons of highly tainted water was found to have leaked from one of the tanks in 2013.

The Board of Audit said it will take up to 30 years through fiscal 2044 for the government to recover ¥9 trillion it may provide to Tepco to help with compensation payments related to the nuclear crisis.

The government is raising funds to support Tepco from financial institutions by issuing bonds. Taxpayers will effectively need to shoulder ¥126.4 billion in interest payments, the board said.

The ceiling on interest-free loans to Tepco, provided through a government-backed bailout fund, has been raised to ¥9 trillion from ¥5 trillion amid the growing cost of the crisis.

By the end of 2014, Tepco had received around ¥4.5 trillion from the government-backed Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp., or NDF.

Of the ¥9 trillion, the government plans to recover an estimated ¥2.5 trillion in costs for radiation cleanup work by selling Tepco shares currently owned by NDF.

But the Board of Audit said the plan can't be realized unless Tepco's stock price more than doubles from the current level to ¥1,050 per share.

Tepco's share price has dropped amid uncertainty over its business outlook. Although the company sought to bring back online its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear complex in Niigata Prefecture last July as key to its business turnaround plan, it remains uncertain when the company can restart it.

"The government should give sufficient consideration to ensuring the recovery of the state funds and boosting Tepco's corporate value" to reduce the burden on taxpayers, the board said, urging Tepco to make further cost-cutting efforts.

Fukushima disaster: How much?

March 23, 2015

Estimated costs of Fukushima nuclear accident

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150323_33.html

Mar. 23, 2015 - Updated 12:17 UTC+1

Here are the estimates of compensation costs for victims of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant accident as well as the costs of decontaminating and decommissioning the reactors.

As of the end of January, Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, says compensation costs for the victims would come to 5.62 trillion yen, or about 46.8 billion dollars. This would cover their evacuation expenses and emotional suffering.

An Environment Ministry estimate puts the cost of decontamination and building initial storage sites for soil and other waste generated from the decontamination work at around 17.5 billion dollars.

The disposal of contaminated waste will require 4.4 billion dollars, and the construction of intermediate storage facilities will be another 8.8 billion dollars.

These figures do not include the costs of decontaminating the evacuation zones in which decisions on conducting a full-scale decontamination have not yet been made. The costs of final-stage disposal outside Fukushima Prefecture of soil and waste stored at intermediate storage facilities are also excluded.

TEPCO estimates that as of the end of January, about 8 billion dollars will be necessary to decommission the reactors and deal with contaminated water. About 3.7 billion dollars will be required to inspect and maintain related facilities until fiscal 2022.

Separately, the Japanese government has provided 1.57 billion dollars until fiscal 2015 to cover research and development costs for decommissioning reactors and dealing with contaminated water.

This includes the costs of conducting experiments in a project to freeze the soil around the damaged reactor buildings to create an underground wall of ice to keep groundwater out of the plant.

TEPCO says it will do all it can to achieve these goals in its business plan through further cost-cutting efforts.

Fukushima disaster: How much? (2)

March 24, 2015

Costs in problem-plagued struggle at Fukushima plant near 600 billion yen

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201503240035>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tokyo Electric Power Co. and the government have spent 590 billion yen (\$4.93 billion) battling the Fukushima nuclear disaster, but problems persist and taxpayers could lose if the situation doesn't improve, the Board of Audit said.

TEPCO initially estimated that the entire process of decommissioning the No. 1, 2, 3 and 4 reactors at the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and taking measures against the daily accumulation of contaminated water would cost 1 trillion yen.

The plant operator had already used 400 billion yen by the end of fiscal 2013. But the numerous water leaks, errors and mishaps at the plant prompted the government to appropriate 189 billion yen to the utility by the end of fiscal 2014.

In addition, the government will cover up to 9 trillion yen of TEPCO's expenses for compensating victims of the disaster and decontaminating areas around the plant. Under that plan, TEPCO and other electric power companies will eventually pay back most of these costs.

However, a Board of Audit official indicated that the return of taxpayer money would hinge on progress at the Fukushima nuclear plant.

"If the decommissioning process and the measures against the buildup of contaminated water are not carried out smoothly, it could affect the government's plans to recover the expenses," the official said.

Four years after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused the triple meltdown at the plant, TEPCO continues facing difficulties, particularly dealing with the groundwater that keeps entering reactor buildings and becoming contaminated with radiation.

As of January, about 600,000 tons of contaminated water was stored in tanks on the plant grounds. But water purification systems, which cost tens of billions of yen in investments, have experienced a series of malfunctions.

In addition, 40.7 billion yen, including 31.9 billion yen from a government fund, was earmarked to create a frozen wall of soil to divert clean groundwater away from the plant and into the ocean. That project started in June 2014, but progress has been slow, and doubts remain about the efficacy of the plan.

As for the actual decommissioning of the reactors, radiation levels are so high in some areas of the plant that workers cannot even approach to determine the extent of the damage to the nuclear fuel.

“We still estimate the costs to deal with the decommissioning process and the buildup of contaminated water at about 1 trillion yen,” a TEPCO public relations officer said. “We plan to add another trillion yen to the budget to avoid a shortage of funds, and we hope to avoid affecting the government’s plans to recover the expenses.”

(This article was written by Kenichi Mizusawa and Shun Niekawa.)

At least 20% nukes, says business lobby

March 25, 2015

Business leaders says 20% nuclear power needed

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Mar. 25, 2015 - Updated 06:12 UTC+1

A group of business leaders in Japan is proposing that nuclear power supply at least 20 percent of the country's energy needs by 2030.

The nuclear accident at Fukushima four years ago has prompted Japan to reconsider how it produces electricity.

Government officials, politicians and business leaders, as well as academics and civic groups, are working on the problem. They are trying to figure out what mix of energy sources could meet the country's needs.

Officials with the Japan Association of Corporate Executives say nuclear power will be needed as a base-load energy source for some time to come.

They say it's unlikely that renewable resources such as wind and solar power will supply more than 30 percent of energy needs by 2030.

They say Japan will probably have to rely on nuclear power for 20 percent or more of its energy needs.

Before the 2011 accident, nuclear power supplied 28 percent.

All of Japan's nuclear power plants are currently off line.

Business lobby calls for minimum 20% dependence on nuclear energy

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/business/AJ201503250024>

By KIYOHIDE INADA/ Staff Writer

An influential business organization called on the central government to maintain at least a 20-percent dependence on nuclear energy, citing expected limits on expanding the use of renewable energy sources. Keizai Doyukai (Japan Association of Corporate Executives) also proposed extending the operating life of nuclear reactors beyond the 40-year period set by the central government.

The organization's recommendations on energy policy released on March 24 came as the government is discussing Japan's "energy mix" for power generation. A key element of that mix is having nuclear energy account for between 15 and 25 percent of the nation's electricity in 2030.

Keizai Doyukai urged the government "to set a minimum level of about 20 percent" as a "realistic" target for that year.

The proposal foresees continuing to use nuclear reactors beyond 2030 and calls on the central government to consider rebuilding reactors or constructing new ones.

The business group cited the limits of renewable energy sources and the benefits of nuclear energy for consumers and the economy.

Reflecting on the suspension of operations at nuclear power plants following the 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the proposal said, "We should not forget the serious effects on the daily lives of the people and economic activity brought about by increasing electricity rates."

In 2011, Keizai Doyukai issued a proposal to reduce dependence on nuclear energy in the medium to long term by seeking out alternative renewable energy sources.

Teruo Asada, chairman of trading company Marubeni Corp. who also serves as chairman of Keizai Doyukai's Committee for Environment and Energy, denied the business organization has switched its policy.

"We never said that the ultimate goal should be zero nuclear plants," Asada said at a March 24 news conference. "The latest recommendations do not represent any change in our thinking."

A big waste of (taxpayer) money!

March 24, 2015

Board of Audit: Billions of yen wasted in Fukushima No. 1 cleanup

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/24/national/board-of-audit-billions-of-yen-wasted-in-fukushima-no-1-cleanup/#.VRKC8uF1Cos>

by Mari Yamaguchi

AP

Government auditors say **Tepco has wasted more than a third of the ¥190 billion in taxpayer money allocated for cleaning up Fukushima No. 1.**

A Board of Audit report describes various expensive machines and untested measures that ended in failure. It also says the cleanup work has been dominated by one group of utility, construction and electronics giants despite repeated calls for more transparency and greater access for international bidders.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. spokesman Teruaki Kobayashi said all of the equipment contributed to stabilizing the plant, even though some operated only briefly.

Some of the failures cited in the report:

French import: Among the costliest failures was a ¥32 billion machine made by French nuclear giant Areva SA to remove radioactive cesium from water leaking from the three wrecked reactors.

The trouble-plagued machine lasted just three months and treated only 77,000 tons of water, a tiny fraction of the volume leaking every day. It has since been replaced with Japanese and American machines.

Salt removal: Sea water was used early in the crisis to cool the reactors after the normal cooling systems failed.

Machines costing ¥18.4 billion from several companies, including Hitachi GE Nuclear Energy, Toshiba Corp. and Areva were supposed to remove the salt from the contaminated water at the plant.

One of the machines functioned only five days, and the longest lasted just six weeks.

Shoddy tanks: Tepco hurriedly built dozens of storage tanks for the contaminated water at a cost of ¥16 billion.

The shoddy tanks, using rubber seals and assembled by unskilled workers, began leaking and some water seeped into the ground and then into the ocean. The tanks are now being replaced with more durable welded ones.

Giant underground pools: A total of ¥2.1 billion was spent on seven huge underground pools built by Maeda Corp. to store the contaminated water. They leaked within weeks, and the water had to be transferred to steel tanks.

Unfrozen trench: A ¥100 million project to contain highly contaminated water in a maintenance tunnel by freezing it failed because the water never completely froze.

Tepco subsidiary Tokyo Power Technology even threw in chunks of ice, but eventually had to pour in cement to seal the trench.

See also

March 23, 2015

¥189 billion in public money spent on Fukushima cleanup so far

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/23/national/%C2%A5189-billion-in-public-money-spent-on-fukushima-cleanup-so-far/#.VRALa-F1Cos>
and

March 23, 2015

TEPCO urged to probe troubled projects at plant

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150323_37.html

Fukushima crisis compared to Tower of Babel

March 25, 2015

Pope cites Fukushima nuclear crisis as a modern-day Tower of Babel

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201503250073

By YUKIE YAMAOKA/ Correspondent

ROME--Pope Francis warned against the dangers of arrogance in comparing the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant crisis to the biblical Tower of Babel, in a talk held with Japanese bishops in the Vatican.

"Mankind can become arrogant and create a society convenient to them, driven by an egotistical motive," Francis told members of the Bishops of Japan on March 20, according to Takeo Okada, archbishop of Tokyo. "Acts thought to help mankind are ending up destroying themselves."

The pope also warned that the production and export of arms is the most destructive threat to civilization, stating that "the problem lies in how massive wealth is created through them."

The Japanese bishops issued a message in February to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, in which they expressed concern over groups that deny wartime atrocities and the Abe administration's efforts to alter Article 9 of Japan's pacifist Constitution to allow the nation to exercise the right to collective self-defense.

The Japanese clerics discussed this message, along with issues regarding Article 9, in a meeting with Vatican Secretary of State Pietro Parolin.

Parolin urged the group to submit the message to the Japanese government.

"You must encourage them in order to have them resolve the issues through dialogue," Parolin told the Japanese bishops.

Active faults a heavy blow to nuclear operators

March 26, 2015

Nuclear watchdog's decision on active faults a serious blow to reactor operators

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150326p2a00m0na009000c.html>

The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) decision to accept reports stating that active faults run directly beneath two reactors in Fukui and Aomori prefectures may prove a heavy blow to nuclear plant operators.

Japan Atomic Power Co., which operates the Tsuruga nuclear station in Fukui Prefecture, will be more seriously affected by the NRA move, as the company relies solely on its nuclear plant business. The No. 2 reactor at the Tsuruga station will likely have to be scrapped after an NRA expert committee reported that it stands right above an active fault. This reactor is 28 years old and is the newest operated by the utility. The active fault is likely to be confirmed again during an upcoming safety inspection of the area required to restart the reactor. Japan Atomic Power decided this month to scrap the No. 1 reactor at the Tsuruga plant. **It manages one more nuclear station in Ibaraki Prefecture, but restarting the Tokai No. 2 plant there faces strong local opposition.**

Japan Atomic Power has continued to make profits while all its reactors remain off-line as the five utilities with capital investments in the firm are required to pay basic fees regardless of whether any electricity is flowing from the plants. It made a 1.6 billion yen net profit for the year ending March 2014.

It's not clear, however, that this business model can continue. Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), Japan Atomic Power's largest shareholder, is seeing persistent internal opposition to continuing basic fee payments while the plant operator's reactor restart plans remain up in the air. A TEPCO representative says the utility would not be able to give an acceptable explanation to consumers and shareholders if it continued paying large sums for nothing.

Japan Atomic Power announced earlier this month that it will convert into a holding company by the end of fiscal 2017 and establish affiliate firms that focus on nuclear reactor decommissioning work and overseas operations. It looks to secure future profit by helping other utilities decommission reactors, including TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, and introducing nuclear power abroad. As the plan to restart its own reactors has become unrealistic, reshaping its business structure is an urgent issue.

Meanwhile, **Tohoku Electric Power Co., operator of Higashidori nuclear plant in Aomori Prefecture, is also facing a tough situation.** While the utility plans to counter that the fault under the No. 1 reactor at the Higashidori plant is not active in a planned safety screening, a prolonged process is unavoidable.

The utility calculates that the restart of the nuclear reactor can bring down the cost of fuel by 5 billion yen a month, but there is no prospect for actually reaching that figure. It is also possible that the utility will be forced to undertake additional earthquake resistance construction if the NRA concludes that the fault under the Higashidori reactor is indeed active, saddling the company with ballooning operational costs.

March 26, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Reassuring?

comment from the blogmaster : don't quite know what to make of this

March 21, 2015

Survey by Fukushima students seeks to address radiation fears

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201503210039>

By YURI OIWA/ Staff Writer

A group of Fukushima students will head to France in the coming week to present results of a study showing **minimal differences in radiation levels between local communities in Japan and locations in three other countries.**

Five students attending Fukushima High School embarked on the survey to clarify their situation for people outside Japan. They said they were baffled when foreign teenagers they have chatted with online since 2012 expressed disbelief that **life was back to normal** following the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011.

About 220 teachers and students living at a combined total of 30 sites in Japan, France, Belarus and Poland participated in the study.

The foreign participants used the same type of dosimeters as the students, and annual radiation exposure for individuals at each site was calculated based on readings over a two-week period between June and October last year.

The results showed that the median figure for the annual radiation exposure in Fukushima Prefecture was between 0.63 millisievert and 0.97 millisievert.

Meanwhile, figures for locations in France, Belarus and Poland were between 0.51 millisievert and 1.17 millisieverts.

The reading for Fukushima was 0.86 millisievert, while the figures for Nihonmatsu and Iwaki, both in Fukushima Prefecture, were 0.97 millisievert and 0.69 millisievert, respectively.

Figures in the more-distant Yokohama and Ena, Gifu Prefecture, were 0.59 millisievert and 0.87 millisievert, respectively.

“The difference (in annual radiation dosage levels) between municipalities outside the nuclear disaster zone in the prefecture and those overseas was insignificant,” said Haruka Onodera, a second-year student at the school. She will discuss the results at the International Radiation Protection Workshop for High School Students in France, which starts from March 23.

TEPCO has only paid 2% of decontamination work so far

March 30, 2015

Tepco refusing to pay fallout-hit municipalities for most decontamination work

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/30/national/tepc-refusing-pay-fallout-hit-municipalities-decontamination-work/#.VRg7BeHwmot>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. has only covered 2 percent of the ¥76.1 billion (\$638.8 million) municipalities have spent on decontamination work since the Fukushima nuclear crisis began in 2011, Environment Ministry officials said Sunday.

The operator of the crisis-hit Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has effectively refused to cover the costs of removing tainted soil and other debris accrued by the fallout-hit governments, saying it is confirming whether such payments are required by law.

The central government has paid for the cleanup work on behalf of the utility better known as Tepco, but if the utility continues to balk, more taxpayers' money will be spent to cover interest payments.

Tepco has so far basically paid for decontamination work conducted directly by the central government in areas close to the nuclear plant, but treated decontamination work carried out by local governments in other areas designated by the government as needing cleanup, in a different manner.

Under the current scheme, municipal governments have been authorized to conduct decontamination in designated areas. The central government pays them first and has Tepco reimburse it for the expenses later.

A law enacted in August 2011 stipulates that Tepco bears the responsibility to pay for the decontamination work. The central government had earmarked a total of ¥1.4 trillion in this regard, including around ¥630 billion for work done by local municipality offices, by the end of fiscal 2014. The Environment Ministry has requested that Tepco pay back ¥76.1 billion by the end of February to cover work for which costs have been finalized. But Tepco has only paid ¥1.5 billion.

Asked about the issue, a Tepco official said, "It takes time for us to confirm if they were decontamination operations for which we are obliged to pay the costs."

In response, an Environment Ministry official said, "All of our requests to Tokyo Electric Power have been made based on the law and we will continue to urge the company to pay back all the money."

Tepco posted its first pretax profit in three years in the business year ended in March 2014 after plunging into financial difficulties following the triple core meltdowns in March 2011.

The utility is projecting a group pretax profit of ¥227 billion for the current business year ending next Tuesday.

TEPCO: More promises of transparency

March 30, 2015

TEPCO to issue all radiation data at damaged plant

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Mar. 30, 2015 - Updated 12:41 UTC+2

Tokyo Electric Power Company says it will release all radiation data taken at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant to improve information disclosure.

TEPCO made the announcement on Monday after mounting criticism about its handling of tainted rainwater leaking into the sea.

Its workers had been aware since April last year that radiation levels in a drainage channel at the No.2 reactor building rose every time it rained. But it did not make the problem public for months.

The workers were worried that it might impact talks with local farmers about a plan to discharge treated groundwater into the sea.

TEPCO will name an executive officer posted to the plant who is responsible for communicating information to the public.

President Naomi Hirose said his company will implement measures that take into account the public's viewpoint.

TEPCO to disclose all data on radiation

March 31, 2015

TEPCO to come clean on radiation levels, allow checks by outside experts

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201503310040>

By HIROMI KUMAI/ Staff Writer

Embattled Tokyo Electric Power Co. pledged to disclose all data on radiation levels at its stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant after it was taken to task for delaying by nearly a year in reporting the state of contaminated rainwater.

Responding to criticism from outside experts about its failure to reveal variations in levels of radioactivity in a drainage ditch at the crippled plant, TEPCO said March 30 the information could be available on its website as early as April.

“The willingness to disclose information has yet to permeate the entire organization (of the utility),” stated a report from the experts, who had been tasked with investigating the leakage of radioactive water from the facility into the sea outside the enclosed harbor.

The utility will appoint John Crofts, a former executive of the British Atomic Energy Authority, as one of its directors on April 1 to strengthen nuclear safety and information disclosure. As part of its new openness, TEPCO will also allow regular checks from outside experts.

It also issued strict warnings to three employees, including Naohiro Masuda, head of an in-house organization to promote decommissioning of the nuclear plant. The three were linked to delays in disclosing information.

The utility started to measure radioactivity in the drainage ditch at the facility in April 2014. Later, it found that the concentration of radiation became higher whenever it rained. However, it did not reveal this fact until February.

During the intervening period, TEPCO employees did not even investigate whether it was necessary to disclose the data. They also failed to submit the data to an in-house division in charge of releasing information to the public.

As the concentration of radiation was lower than that in other contaminated water, the employees did not think the data was important.

“Unconsciously, (TEPCO employees) held a different view from that of regular people in society,” said the report.

After failing to report tainted rainwater leak, Tepco vows to release all radiation data

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/31/national/failing-report-tainted-rainwater-leak-tepco-vows-release-radiation-data/#.VRpUMeHwmos>

JJI

Tokyo Electric Power Co. said Monday it will release all available radiation data associated with its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, in response to criticism over its failure to swiftly announce leaks of radioactive rainwater into the sea.

According to Tepco, the company had a policy of disclosing radiation information for contaminated water stored at the plant facilities if there is a risk of the water leaking into the sea. But this policy was not applied to radioactive rainwater that may leak into the sea via drainage ditches.

The power utility has been criticized for not promptly releasing information about radioactive rainwater when it had data confirming leaks into the sea.

At a press conference Monday, Managing Executive Officer Takafumi Anegawa said that the additional disclosures will include aerial radiation levels at the decommissioning work sites and contamination levels around plant buildings.

The volume of such data is likely to be larger than that of the already disclosed, he said.

The company did not specify when it will start releasing the additional data.

On the same day, Tepco said it will appoint John Crofts, the head of the company's internal regulatory organization, known as the Nuclear Safety Oversight Office, to the post of managing executive officer, effective Wednesday.

Crofts, former director for safety assurance at Britain's Atomic Energy Authority, will be the first non-Japanese to serve as managing executive officer of Tepco.

TEPCO to disclose all data on radiation at Fukushima nuclear plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150331p2g00m0dm029000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. said Monday it will disclose all data on radiation levels measured at the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant to enhance transparency, doubling the amount of data made public.

The decision follows harsh criticism last month when it was revealed that the utility had not disclosed immediately the possibility that highly radioactive rainwater was leaking into the ocean through a gutter, even though it had learned of the risk last May.

TEPCO plans to release the data on its website, including that related to radiation levels of water running through and soil at the plant. It also plans to have the data evaluated regularly by a third party.

TEPCO President Naomi Hirose told a press conference that the company will start disclosing all data "as soon as they become available" for release, as the utility aims to "break away from our tendency of covering up" information.

Hirose took the helm of the company in 2012 to play a leading role in restoring the utility, which is still grappling with the disaster at the Fukushima plant triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Takafumi Anegawa, director of the company, said the amount of data it plans to release will be around double the current level.

March 31, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

March 30, 2015

TEPCO to issue all radiation data at damaged plant

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Mar. 30, 2015 - Updated 12:41 UTC+2

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Its workers had been aware since April last year that radiation levels in a drainage channel at the No.2 reactor building rose every time it rained. But it did not make the problem public for months.

The workers were worried that it might impact talks with local farmers about a plan to discharge treated groundwater into the sea.

TEPCO will name an executive officer posted to the plant who is responsible for communicating information to the public.

President Naomi Hirose said his company will implement measures that take into account the public's viewpoint.

Government putting residents in danger



A young girl is checked for internal radiation exposure using the Baby Scan device in Minami-Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, in September 2014. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

April 1, 2015

Fukushima residents suing government for lifting evacuation advisories

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201504010062>

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Hundreds of residents here plan to sue the central government for lifting evacuation advisories near the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant, **saying the decision endangered their lives because radiation levels remained high around their homes.**

In the lawsuit that will be filed with the Tokyo District Court, **the 535 plaintiffs from 132 households in the city just north of the nuclear plant will demand that the government retract its decision to lift the advisories and pay 100,000 yen (\$837) in compensation to each plaintiff.**

According to the plaintiffs, the government's cancellation of the advisories goes against the Law on Special Measures Concerning Nuclear Emergency Preparedness, which states that its purpose is to "protect the lives, bodies and properties of citizens from a nuclear disaster."

After the crisis started at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011, the government issued evacuation orders for areas within 20 kilometers of the plant. The plaintiffs' homes are in areas that were issued evacuation advisories and surrounding neighborhoods.

During the decontamination process for areas around the plant, the government initially wanted to lower annual radiation exposure doses to 1 millisievert. After that goal proved impossible, the target became 20 millisieverts.

“The government has selfishly raised the limit on annual public radiation exposure from 1 millisievert set before the nuclear crisis to 20 millisieverts, having residents return to their homes still exposed to high doses of radiation,” said Kenji Fukuda, an attorney representing the plaintiffs. **“This is an illegal act that violates the residents’ right to a healthy environment guaranteed by the Constitution and international human rights laws.”**

A public relations official at the government’s nuclear disaster response headquarters denied the government had put residents in danger.

“Annual radiation exposure levels in all areas that were previously issued the advisories have fallen below 20 millisieverts following decontamination procedures,” the official said. “With the radiation levels unlikely to have a significant effect on the residents’ health, we have called off the advisories by going through legal procedures.”

The government issued the advisories to households starting in June 2011, urging pregnant women and children in particular to evacuate their homes.

The advisories, issued to 281 households in Fukushima Prefecture, were all lifted by the end of last year. But many of the 152 households that were issued advisories in Minami-Soma opposed the government’s decision.

“The woodlands and farmlands of the surrounding areas are still contaminated, leaving many of the radiation levels unreduced,” said Shuichi Kanno, the 74-year-old chief of a ward in Minami-Soma who heads the plaintiffs. “Radiation levels have even increased in some areas. There is no way our children and grandchildren will be returning to their homes like this.”

Translation firm leaks NRA documents

April 1, 2015

Nuclear watchdog's in-house documents leaked online via translation agency

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150401p2a00m0na009000c.html>

The Secretariat of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) is mulling barring a translation company from participating in bids for the agency after in-house documents it commissioned the firm to translate were found to have been leaked online.

The NRA secretariat disclosed the finding during a regular press conference on March 31. The agency had outsourced the translation of internal documents to be used in the training of new employees to Tokyo-based translation service firm Erklaren -- though none of the documents contained confidential information.

Erklaren had accepted the nuclear watchdog's order for the translation of 55 sets of documents from Japanese into English and subtitling for approximately 40 million yen in November last year.

After the NRA secretariat was informed of the leakage of the documents on the Internet on March 30, it started investigations into the case and subsequently identified Erklaren as the source of leaked information. Although the leaked documents did not contain confidential information, they were classified as "Level 2" in the agency's confidentiality scale of 3 because they "could obstruct clerical work if leaked to outsiders," according to the agency.

The leaked documents -- spanning 50 pages on A4-sized paper -- carried the outlines and safety regulations of the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant in Aomori Prefecture and other nuclear fuel reprocessing

facilities at home and abroad. The documents were credited to the NRA and bore the names of officials who produced the documents.

Aside from the documents leaked online, the translation agency is also suspected to have leaked other documents to outsiders by outsourcing the translation work to third parties. The company had posted on an online job offer site a request reading, "Subtitling in English on power point slides related to nuclear power," and sent out relevant documents.

The NRA secretariat is considering punishing the firm through measures including suspending it from participating in bids for the agency.

April 01, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Translation firm leaked classified document, NRA says

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/04/01/national/translation-firm-leaked-classified-nra-document-onto-internet-secretariat/#.VRvt-eHwmos>

Kyodo

A translation company under contract with the Nuclear Regulation Authority has leaked an internal, classified document online from the nuclear watchdog, its secretariat said.

The document does not contain confidential information but is marked "Classified 2," one of three levels of classification by the government, the secretariat said Tuesday.

The document contains information on how spent nuclear fuel is reprocessed, regulations on reprocessing, and details about nuclear power plants.

The NRA secretariat suspects the source of the leak is Erklaren, a Tokyo-based company it hired to have Japanese documents translated into English. The company sent the document, without password protection, to a job applicant, according to the secretariat. Erklaren solicited translators who would double-check its translations via a private-sector online bulletin board.

Kenichi Fujita, head of the international affairs office at the NRA secretariat, insisted the document is not confidential, saying it is part of "materials compiled from information that is already known."

The information leak was discovered through a tip that the secretariat received that the translation company was urgently looking for people to translate the NRA document via the online bulletin board. Translation companies hired by the NRA secretariat are prohibited from outsourcing their work or revealing such content to a third party, official Hitoshi Kometani said, adding that Erklaren has violated that policy.

The translation company undertook the work for ¥40 million. The secretariat is considering whether to pay the firm and whether to blacklist the it from bidding on future contracts.

Working without being notified of risks

April 3, 2015

100 people worked near Fukushima nuclear plant without radiation knowledge



A man holds a copy of his radiation control notebook, which does not mention his radiation dose from his work as a traffic patrol worker. (Mainichi)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150403p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Roughly 100 people worked in a former no-go zone near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant between December 2012 and March 2013 without knowledge that their work was subject to a special radiation dose limit, it has been learned.

The workers were employed by a contractor that secured jobs for them under a deal with the central government's Cabinet Office to monitor passing vehicles. Labor standards authorities ordered the contractor to correct its practices after the problem came to light.

The contractor says it had only about two weeks to begin work after winning the government contract, and did not have much time to check pertinent laws. **The case highlights the central government's hasty approach in requesting such work -- without a sufficient preparatory period or explanation.**

The Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry has asked both contractors and outsourcers to comply with legal requirements.

According to the Cabinet Office and other sources, the deal called on the contractor to assign 20 regular cars to the former no-go zone within 20 kilometers of the nuclear plant run by Tokyo Electric Power Co. to direct and monitor other motor vehicles. The Cabinet Office hastily asked a local taxi company to do the job after local governments were given permission to issue passes to local government officials and reconstruction workers in December 2012.

The taxi company, which had handled requests from local residents for temporary homecomings, procured regular vehicles and temporary workers to do the job.

However, the Tomioka Labor Standards Inspection Office was alerted by third parties about a possible violation of regulations for jobs other than decontamination work that are subject to special radiation limits. It launched an investigation and ordered the contractor in August last year to rectify the situation,

pointing out that the job fell under the category of work in which people would be exposed to an air dose of over 2.5 microsieverts per hour.

Although the contractor independently monitored the traffic patrol workers' radiation exposure through their dosimeters, it did not check their respective radiation exposure records, conduct an 150-minute course on radiation effects on the human body and measurement methods, carry out advance research on air doses or issue dose records.

The contractor sent workers their radiation dose records after receiving the improvement order from the labor standards inspection office, but some of the records returned unopened because the workers had changed their addresses.

The Cabinet Office says the traffic patrol work has changed somewhat in content since April 2013, and another contractor is now engaged in tasks subject to the special radiation dose limit.

The health ministry's guidelines for jobs subject to the radiation limit say that an outsourcer can place an order after confirming that a contractor has in place a system to secure enough workers who have been educated to carry out the assignment.

The taxi company's president told the Mainichi Shimbun that his company barely managed to secure enough people and cars. The company, he said, is a novice when it comes to nuclear radiation. He said that the firm might have checked the special radiation dose regulations if there had been a longer preparatory period. The Cabinet Office says it has no clear-cut recollection of its request, but acknowledged that the request was urgent. It added it was not required to explain whether or not the job was subject to the special radiation dose limit because the contractor was primarily responsible for making judgments.

The health ministry declined comment on the specific case other than to say that it has urged outsourcers including the Cabinet Office and contractors to honor pertinent regulations.

A 63-year-old man who was a member of the vehicle patrol team says the central government should care more for people working in no-go zones.

The man was recruited after a suspension of decontamination work. He and other prospective workers assembled at an izakaya restaurant in Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, and were briefed in December 2012. They received explanations about granting motor vehicles passes and reporting suspicious vehicles, but were not notified about outdoor radiation levels.

On the evening of the following day, the man and another man got into a used car and set up four checkpoints along National Route 6 in the onetime no-go zone and checked passing vehicles from their car. The closest checkpoint was less than 2 kilometers from the nuclear plant, and they were scared as their dosimeters showed high levels of radiation.

The man learned about the special radiation dose limit last year and inquired with the Cabinet Office. He was told that the contractor said the job was not subject to radiation dose limits. He wanted to know his overall radiation dose because he had engaged in decontamination work in the past.

After the labor standards inspection office issued its order, he received his radiation dose record for his traffic patrol duty. It said his dosage was less than 1 millisievert.

"It's wrong to continue to work without advance notification of the risks," he said.

April 03, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Who should be accountable for the disaster?

April 4, 2015

Gov't reluctant to charge TEPCO over rent money for voluntary Fukushima evacuees

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150404p2a00m0na014000c.html>

The government has been covering the rent for apartments provided for evacuees from Fukushima Prefecture, while not demanding payment for this purpose from Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) -- the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant -- it has been learned.

While TEPCO is ready to pay the rent costs for those who have been forced to evacuate from their hometowns due to government evacuation orders, **the utility is reluctant to do the same for evacuees who left their homes voluntarily**. The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry has fallen in line with TEPCO on the matter, while the decision on which party is to charge TEPCO -- the national government or Fukushima Prefecture -- is still also up in the air.

Since the Disaster Relief Act has applied to the entirety of Fukushima Prefecture following the 2011 nuclear crisis, local residents -- whether forced or voluntary evacuees -- have all been provided rent-free apartments as temporary shelters. Prefectural governments that have taken in Fukushima evacuees initially submit the housing charges to the Fukushima Prefectural Government, which compiles data -- but **the central government has effectively been covering the entire cost**.

According to the Cabinet Office, which holds jurisdiction over the Disaster Relief Act, the aid money spent on disaster relief measures in Fukushima Prefecture totaled 31.7 billion yen in fiscal 2013 and 28.7 billion yen in 2014, based on the fiscal budget. **Much of the aid money is believed to have gone to cover apartment rental costs, meaning that taxpayers' money is going into something that should be covered by TEPCO**.

For the cost of government-led decontamination work on the radioactively contaminated areas, meanwhile, the Environment Ministry and other related parties have been charging TEPCO 229.1 billion yen since 2012. The utility has paid 121.7 billion yen for the decontamination work, including areas outside the designated evacuation zones.

According to sources close to the matter, the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry began consulting with TEPCO and the industry ministry over the housing provision during the spring of 2012, at which time the health ministry was overseeing the Disaster Relief Act. In August of that year, the health ministry and TEPCO notified the Fukushima Prefectural Government that the utility was to cover rent costs for evacuees from no-entry zones. They agreed that the utility should pay for the rent shouldered by the central government.

TEPCO and the industry ministry show reluctance, on the other hand, in shouldering the rent costs of voluntary evacuees.

The government's dispute reconciliation committee for nuclear damage has proposed to pay a monthly 100,000 yen fee for each forced evacuee as compensation for psychological damages, while setting the amount at 120,000 yen in total for voluntary evacuees (except for children and pregnant women, who are offered a total of 720,000 yen). Following the committee's decision, the industry ministry and the utility seem to reject the idea of dealing with the two types of evacuees equally.

Furthermore, the central and Fukushima prefectural governments have failed to settle which party is to charge TEPCO for the rent money. Since the Ibaraki Prefectural Government demanded that private businesses pay rescue costs for a 1999 accident at the JCO nuclear material processing plant in the prefectural town of Tokai, the health ministry sought to establish measures that enabled the Fukushima Prefectural Government and municipal governments in the prefecture to charge TEPCO over the rent

money. However, **the Fukushima government has claimed that the central government should take responsibility for demanding that TEPCO pay the housing fees, since the latter has been shouldering the cost.**

A Cabinet Office representative told the Mainichi Shimbun that the government cannot demand that TEPCO pay for something the utility refuses to pay -- suggesting the government's plan to exempt TEPCO from covering rent payment compensation for voluntary evacuees.

Masafumi Yokemoto, a professor of environmental policy at Osaka City University, points out that **a reason why the central government and other related parties haven't charged TEPCO over the rent money for voluntary evacuees is because they don't want to admit that those people are victims of the nuclear meltdown.**

"The issue clearly shows how the government and TEPCO try to avoid responsibility for clarifying accountability for the disaster," Yokemoto added.

April 04, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Oversight committees too weak to help

April 5, 2015

Oversight for secrets too weak

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2015/04/04/editorials/oversight-secrets-weak/#.VSDyy5Pwmos>

Committees in both chambers of the Diet overseeing government operations under the state secrets law held their first meetings last week. But their powers are so weak they may not be able to compel the government to reverse improper designations of state secrets. The Diet should earnestly search for ways to strengthen these committees.

The launch of the committees was delayed even after the law took effect on Dec. 10 due to a tug of war between the ruling and opposition forces over their membership and the setup of their secretariats. The eight-member committee in each house will receive a report annually from the government on its operations under the state secrets law. Their meetings will be held behind closed doors and committee members who leak state secrets will be punished.

The committees' first task will be to check 382 items that the government designated as state secrets last year. But the report will only feature lists that summarize the contents of these secrets. The descriptions of some listed items, disclosed at the request of the Democratic Party of Japan, are fairly concrete — such as “information on North Korea’s nuclear and missile development,” and “information on territory preservation and protection of interests in the air and the ocean in the East China Sea.” But descriptions of other items are too vague and each item can include a large number of secrets — such as “information provided by foreign governments,” “plans and methods for cooperation with foreign governments in the field of information on security” and “conclusions of National Security Council meetings in 2013 and 2014.”

This is problematic in at least two ways. First, committee members will have no clue as to what bits of information have actually been designated as secrets. Second, by using vague and catch-all designations, government ministries and agencies may designate as secrets a vast amount of information that does not merit such classification and should instead be made public.

In theory, the committees have the power to compel the government to submit state secrets to it for examination, and if necessary recommend that the government declassify specific secrets or improve its handling of them. But the committees' request for submission of state secrets has no binding power because the government can turn it down if it deems the disclosure would greatly aggravate the nation's security. In addition, the panels' recommendations have no binding power.

The composition of the committees' members are decided in accordance with the number of seats held by the parties in each chamber. The Lower House committee will be composed of five lawmakers from the Liberal Democratic Party and one each from the DPJ, Ishin no To (Japan Innovation Party) and the LDP's coalition partner Komeito. The Upper House committee will be made up of four LDP members, two DPJ members and one each from Ishin no To and Komeito.

Committee members from the ruling camp have been quoted as saying that they in principle trust what the government does. Such an attitude risks turning the Diet panels into bodies whose function is to simply rubber-stamp the government's designations of secrets.

To help ensure the committees function properly, the Diet should make changes to the way they operate. Receiving a report just once a year from the government is not enough. Such reports should be provided to the committees more frequently. The description of items on government lists need to be more concrete and detailed. Experts on information management, security and diplomacy should be assigned to the committees to help the members examine the government's reports and make recommendations. More importantly, the committees each should have a section that government workers can report to when they believe information has been unjustly classified as a secret. The Diet should develop effective measures to protect such whistle-blowers.

Even if these measures are implemented, the state secrets law can hide information that the Diet and public may need to scrutinize the actions of the government since it gives discretionary powers to government ministries and agencies to classify information related to security, diplomacy and anti-terrorism policies almost without limits. At the very least, these deficiencies in the law must be corrected.

Japanese-French consortium to build nuclear plant in Turkey

April 4, 2015

Source : Balkans

<http://www.balkans.com/open-news.php?uniquenumber=202484>

Turkish Parliament approved the construction of second nuclear plant from Japan

Balkans.com Correspondent - 02.04.2015

Parliament's General Assembly accepted in the early hours of April 1 an international agreement between Turkey and Japan for the construction of Turkey's second planned nuclear plant. With the approval, the legal framework for the construction of the plant has been laid.

Turkey's second planned nuclear plant was awarded to a **Japanese-French consortium** in May 2013, to be constructed in the northern province of Sinop.

Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd (MHE) and Itochu Corporation, with France's GDF Suez, will build

the **4,800 MW plant at an estimated cost of \$22 billion**. The plant will be operative with **ATMEA1** reactors developed by MHE and the French company of **Areva**.

Turkey's first nuclear power plant will be built by the Russian Rosatom in the southern province of Mersin. hurriyetdailynews

Japan's "withering" democracy

April 6, 2015

VOX POPULI: Japan's democracy withering like old cherry trees

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/vox/AJ201504060012>

Vox Populi, Vox Dei is a daily column that runs on Page 1 of The Asahi Shimbun.

An old poem reads, "It often becomes windy and rainy after flowers blossom." As it implies, a huge number of cherry blossom petals have been blown away by the wind and rain in areas west of the Kanto region over the past several days.

While being disturbed by the falling blossoms, we are also worried about whether some cherry trees have been felled by strong winds.

Many "somei-yoshino" cherry trees across the nation are aging. This species is said to have a lifespan of 60 to 80 years.

The cherry trees planted around the country soon after the end of World War II are now in this age range. A cherry tree is believed to be in danger if mushrooms are growing on the base or the trunk. If a tree produces an odd sound when it is hit by a wooden hammer, experts say, there is the possibility that the trunk is rotting and hollowing inside.

If tree trunks were "local elections," what sound would they produce if struck?

These trees should have spread thick branches and leaves to all parts of the nation. Sadly, however, these trees have cut a rather miserable figure.

In 41 prefectural assembly elections, 321 constituencies, or one-third of all constituencies, were uncontested. As a result, 501 candidates won their seats without any competition.

This column once quoted an American aphorism warning about abstention from voting: "Bad politicians are sent to Washington by good people who don't vote."

In Japan, however, many people can't vote even if they want to because there are no contests in their electoral districts. That means many candidates are elected simply because they have run.

Part of the blame should be placed on the pathetic Democratic Party of Japan, which has sharply reduced the number of its candidates. But there seems to be more deep-rooted problems behind the deplorable situation.

Sixty-eight years have passed since the first unified local elections were held in postwar Japan. This nation's democracy is now as endangered as the old cherry trees.

Voter turnouts in various elections have been generally low in recent years. This clearly indicates a disturbing tendency among Japanese voters to leave policymaking to politicians and bureaucrats.

There has been a series of scandals involving unseemly conduct by members of the Diet and local assemblies. That's partly because of the lack of serious tension between politicians and voters.

The same is true for the administration's arrogance.

We need some good tree doctors who can breathe new life into our precious trees.

--The Asahi Shimbun, April 5

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Vox Populi, Vox Dei is a popular daily column that takes up a wide range of topics, including culture, arts and social trends and developments. Written by veteran Asahi Shimbun writers, the column provides useful perspectives on and insights into contemporary Japan and its culture.

Meltdowns, victims and hydrogen explosions: 1984 simulation never published

April 8, 2015

Government withheld report of a simulated attack on a nuclear power plant

1984 ministry document addresses a Fukushima-like scenario

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/04/08/national/1984-report-warned-attack-nuclear-power-plant/#.VSZTn5Pwmos>

by Reiji Yoshida

Staff Writer

The Foreign Ministry secretly conducted a simulation in **1984** to assess damage from a hypothetical attack on a nuclear power plant in a war and concluded that up to 18,000 people would be killed with acute symptoms from radiation exposure, it emerged Wednesday.

The previously secret report **also mentioned the possibility of a hydrogen explosion that could follow the meltdown of fuel rods in a nuclear power plant, the exact phenomenon that happened during the 2011 Fukushima crisis.**

Anti-nuclear activists slammed the ministry for not publicizing the report earlier, allegedly out of fear that the warnings could fan anti-nuclear sentiment among the public.

"The report should have not been held secret. (The government) should publicize it and consider how it can protect" nuclear power plants, said Hideyuki Ban of the Citizens' Nuclear Information Center.

The content of the document was first reported Wednesday by the Tokyo Shimbun, which obtained a copy of the 63-page report through the information disclosure law.

The Japan Times confirmed the outline and key conclusions of the report with a senior Foreign Ministry official.

According to Yasushi Noguchi, head of the ministry's arms control and disarmament division, the ministry asked the Japan Institute of International Affairs, an affiliate of the ministry, to draw up the report **after Israel staged an airstrike and destroyed a reactor under construction in Iraq in 1981.**

Noguchi said **the report concluded that up to 18,000 people would die in the worst-case scenario if the primary containment vessel of a 1 million kilowatt-class reactor in Japan was severely damaged and local residents did not evacuate immediately.**

In another scenario, **the report also warned that if all power supplies were cut and critical cooling functions lost, fuel rods would melt down. The hydrogen generated from metals used for fuel assembly cladding could then potentially cause an explosion.**

This type of hydrogen explosion actually happened and aggravated the meltdown crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant after the massive tsunami of March 11, 2011, knocked out the power supply, killing the critical cooling operation.

Few plant workers and nuclear experts anticipated a hydrogen explosion until one actually ripped through the No. 3 reactor building.

The Tokyo Shimbun alleged the Foreign Ministry did not publish the report because it feared it would fan anti-nuclear sentiment while the government was trying to build more nuclear power plants in the 1980s.

Noguchi said it was not published because it was intended as an internal reference for Foreign Ministry officials.

Ban claimed nuclear plants in Japan are not designed to be robust enough to withstand missile attacks or a suicide airplane crash such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York in 2001.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority now requires that reactor buildings be robust enough to withstand the “intentional crash of a large aircraft” and other terrorist attacks.

But the NRA declines to disclose any more details of the safety regulations, saying they should be kept secret for security reasons.

IAEA's unabated support for nukes

April 13, 2015

IAEA chief stresses nuclear power

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/04/13/business/iaea-chief-stresses-nuclear-power/#.VSvOKpPwILM>

Kyodo

International Atomic Energy Agency Director-General Yukiya Amano on Monday underscored the importance of nuclear power generation, saying it contributes to stable electricity supply and economic growth.

“Nuclear power supports the economy as it ensures stable energy supply, and bolsters a nation’s competitiveness,” Amano said in a speech during an annual event in Tokyo organized by the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum, which promotes nuclear power.

The chief of the U.N. nuclear watchdog also said: “It is a misunderstanding that (international society) is pressed to choose either nuclear power or renewable energy” as they are “complementary to each other.”

Following the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear disaster triggered by a huge earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, the majority of the public in Japan remain opposed to restarting nuclear reactors amid safety concerns.

Various ways to look at things

April 15, 2015

Editorial: Court ban on restarting Takahama nuclear plant serves as serious warning

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20150415p2a00m0na003000c.html>

The judicial branch of the government sounded an alarm bell when the Fukui District Court banned Kansai Electric Power Co. (KEPCO) from restarting two idled reactors at the utility's Takahama Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture.

KEPCO attempted to resume operations at the power station's No. 3 and 4 reactors that have passed safety inspections by the government's Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA). However, the court issued a provisional injunction on April 14 ordering KEPCO not to reactivate these reactors, pointing out that the new standards for inspections are too lax.

We have insisted that Japan should eliminate nuclear power as early as possible by expanding the use of renewable energy, promoting energy-saving measures and abiding by the government's rules that nuclear reactors should be shut down after 40 years in operation. Based on this idea, we believe that the minimum necessary reactivation of idled nuclear plants should be permitted

However, the court appears to be of the view that the safety of residents in areas that host atomic power stations cannot be protected unless the danger posed by nuclear plants is completely eliminated or restarting nuclear plants is totally banned in this quake-prone country.

If an accident is to occur at a nuclear plant, it would threaten the lives, livelihoods and assets of residents of extensive areas around the power station over an extended period. Considering these risks, we should take seriously the judicial branch's warning that current moves to hastily restart idled nuclear plants without sufficient debate would lead to the revival of the myth of nuclear plants' infallible safety.

In its latest decision, the district court pointed to the need to stiffen safety standards to guarantee that absolutely no accidents will occur at nuclear reactors that meet the standards. In other words, the court deemed that no risk should be permitted in restarting nuclear reactors.

After applying to the NRA for safety inspections, KEPCO upgraded its prediction of the maximum shaking of an earthquake that could hit the area hosting the Takahama plant from 550 gals to 700 gals and that of the maximum tsunami from 5.7 meters to 6.2 meters and emphasized that the measure has enhanced the safety of the power station.

However, noting that five earthquakes with stronger vibrations than assumed have hit areas that host atomic power stations over the past decade, the district court said the possibility cannot be ruled out that a more powerful temblor than KEPCO predicts could hit Takahama. The court concluded that such a quake could destroy the plant's facilities and damage reactor cores.

The court then pointed out that these risks cannot be completely eliminated unless the prediction of the shaking of possible quakes hitting the plant is significantly raised. It also cited the need to fundamentally reinforce facilities and equipment, such as external power sources and the coolant water supply system, to

increase their quake-resistance to the maximum level, as well as erect walls around pools for used nuclear fuel.

KEPCO had intended to go through necessary procedures with an eye to restarting the reactors in November this year, but the court's provisional injunction will force the company to review its schedule. The views that the court expressed in its latest decision also apply to many other nuclear plants that their operators are aiming to restart. The injunction was handed down by the same presiding judge that also banned KEPCO in May last year from restarting the No. 3 and 4 reactors at its Oi Nuclear Power Plants. The judge apparently handed down these decisions based on his common ideas on safety of nuclear plants.

The pros and cons of restarting idled nuclear reactors have a huge impact on people's livelihoods and economic activities. It would be too excessive if the restart of any nuclear plant were disapproved to pursue zero risk. However, the court's warning that nuclear reactors should not be restarted without addressing numerous problems should be taken seriously.

April 15, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Various ways to look at things (2)

April 15, 2015

Injunction on reactors seen as victory by some, blip on road to restarts by others

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201504150089>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Anti-nuclear activists rejoiced, Kansai Electric Power Co. expressed some jitters and the government appeared unconcerned about the Fukui District Court's injunction that prevents the utility from restarting two nuclear reactors.

The court ruled April 14 that the new safety regulations of the Nuclear Regulation Authority are "too lenient" and would not guarantee the safety of the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at Kansai Electric's Takahama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture.

The injunction took effect immediately.

It was a rare court decision that went against the government and electric power industry. The ruling doubted the efficacy of what the government has described as "the world's toughest safety standards."

The two reactors have cleared the key part of the NRA's regulations and were effectively approved for a resumption of their operations.

Hiroyuki Kawai, a lawyer representing the nine plaintiffs who live in an area 50 to 100 kilometers from the Takahama plant, hailed the court's decision as tantamount to banning the restarts of all nuclear reactors in Japan.

"It clearly described the inadequacies of the new safety standards and declared that the regulations are invalid," he said.

Kansai Electric, which was seeking to restart the reactors in November, was not surprised by the decision, considering the judge in the case had made a similar decision last year.

The Osaka-based utility is expected to appeal the injunction at the district court and later at the Kanazawa branch of the Nagoya High Court if the initial motion is rejected. The procedure could take months to complete and affect the company's profits.

"We expect the ruling to be overturned at a high court with a different judge in charge," a senior Kansai Electric official said.

A senior official of the industry ministry, which oversees the nuclear power sector, was equally optimistic, saying, "We do not have to nervously react to one court ruling."

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a news conference on April 14 that the government will take a wait-and-see strategy toward the issue.

"Things are still in the stage of a court injunction," he said. "So we will closely watch how the parties involved will react."

But the top government spokesman emphasized that the Abe administration's policy is to allow reactors to resume operations as long as they are cleared by the NRA.

Hitoshi Kometani, director of the general affairs division with the NRA secretariat, also dismissed the negative impact of the Fukui ruling, which called his organization's standards subpar.

Komentani told reporters on April 14 that the NRA will proceed with its safety screenings for reactor restarts as usual.

Presiding Judge Hideaki Higuchi of the Fukui District Court took issue with safety features of the Takahama plant related to quake-resistance levels and the pools for storing spent nuclear fuel.

Utilities estimate the largest possible shock of an earthquake at their nuclear plants based on data on active seismic faults in the surrounding areas and earthquakes that have struck other parts of the nation. Higuchi disputed the method of evaluating earthquake ground motions under the NRA regulations. Kansai Electric's anti-seismic features at its nuclear facilities are based on this method.

The court noted that since 2005, five earthquakes have caused ground motions exceeding the maximum expected levels at four nuclear power plants, including the now-stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Higuchi said Kansai Electric underestimated the possible ground motion level near the Takahama plant, thereby failing to significantly bolster its ability to withstand earthquakes.

Kansai Electric's assessment of the plant's safety was still based on "an assumption that a severe accident will rarely occur," according to the court. The judge pointed to the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, on which the NRA regulations were based.

The court also noted that NRA regulations do not require pools of spent nuclear fuel to be protected by a sturdy building. In addition, the ruling criticized the NRA for allowing a moratorium on construction of anti-quake emergency response centers where plant operators can deal with severe accidents.

Higuchi concluded that despite the NRA's approval of Kansai Electric's safety reports on the two reactors, its regulations lack rationality and do not ensure safety.

He said that given the inadequacies of the NRA's regulations, restarting the reactors at the Takahama plant could infringe on the plaintiffs' constitutional right to live a peaceful life.

In a similar case and based on similar reasoning, Higuchi in May last year ordered a halt to operations of two reactors at Kansai Electric's Oi nuclear power plant in Oi, Fukui Prefecture. The case is still pending at a high court.

A court ruling is expected on April 22 in legal action seeking an injunction to stop the restarts of two reactors at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai power plant in Kagoshima Prefecture.

The two reactors of Kyushu Electric have also been cleared by the NRA. They are expected to be the first in Japan to be restarted under the NRA's safety regulations.

"If the court rules against the Sendai plant, similar to the Takahama plant, it could jolt the entire electric power industry," a senior official with Kansai Electric said.

Before the Fukushima disaster, Kansai Electric depended on nuclear energy for half of its overall power generation, the highest ratio among Japanese utilities.

But with the continuing shutdown of all nuclear reactors in Japan, the company has projected a pretax loss for fiscal 2014, which ended March, for the fourth straight year.

Restarting the reactors was seen as indispensable in turning around the company's business performance.

"We are at a loss over how long it will take us to overturn the court's decision," a senior Kansai Electric official said. "It could be six months, one year or even two years."

Hitoshi Yoshioka, a professor of science history at Kyushu University, welcomed the court's decision as "one that took into account citizens' concerns."

"If a nuclear accident takes place, it can cause tremendous damage," said Yoshioka, who leads the think tank Citizens' Commission on Nuclear Energy. "The court took an approach that reactors should fulfill particularly stringent requirements. The court's decision is clear-cut and persuasive."

But Akihiro Sawa, head of the International Environmental Economic Institute, criticized the district court for setting the safety bar too high.

"The ruling calls for extremely vigorous regulations so that a severe accident would never ever occur," he said. "But by global standards, safety regulations are crafted to minimize the risks after weighing the frequency of accidents and expected damage in a comprehensive manner."

He said the ruling effectively set different standards in judiciary from those of the public administration and brought about confusion in the nuclear industry and the public.

Various ways to look at things (3)

April 15, 2015

Court decision on Takahama reactors throws cold water on gov't nuclear policy

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20150415p2a00m0na002000c.html>

The injunction issued by the Fukui District Court on April 14 to prevent the restart of two reactors at the Takahama Nuclear Power Plant has poured cold water on the government's efforts to return to atomic energy.

Officials of Kansai Electric Power Co. (KEPCO), the operator of the Takahama plant in Fukui Prefecture, were shocked and disappointed to learn of the court decision, with one senior official saying, "We have plunged into an uncertain extended game."

For KEPCO, which had relied on nuclear reactors for about 50 percent of its total power generation before the Fukushima nuclear crisis, the restart of the No. 3 and 4 reactors at the power station was a trump card to pull the utility out of the red. In December last year, KEPCO applied to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry for approval to raise its electricity rates for households by an average of 10.23 percent -- its second rate increase since the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The utility had developed a scenario in which it would move into the black in fiscal 2015 by raising its electricity rates again in the first half of fiscal 2015 and restarting the Takahama nuclear reactors as early as November this year. The 10.23 percent increase in electricity rates for households was based on the assumption that the Takahama reactors would be reactivated as planned. The temporary injunction order issued by the Fukui District Court has made it difficult to foresee whether the reactors will be restarted in the future, quickly blurring the utility's scenario to achieve profitability.

KEPCO is expected to post its fourth consecutive deficit in fiscal 2014 due to the prolonged shutdown of its reactors. Its total debt for the four-year period is forecast to reach over 700 billion yen. If the utility continues to post a deficit in fiscal 2015, concerns would grow about the possibility of the company falling into a state of insolvency with its debts exceeding its assets. KEPCO President Makoto Yagi said, "It is a situation that shakes the continued existence of our company."

A senior KEPCO official said, "We want to manage to secure a surplus by cutting costs and other means." But Kansai Electric's banks could harden their stance toward lending, forcing the utility to move ahead with recapitalization and raise its electricity rates over and over again.

The latest court decision has also poured cold water on the government which has been pushing for the early restart of the country's nuclear plants in a bid to return to atomic energy.

Seven major utilities in the country raised their electricity rates as fuel costs for thermal power generation increased due to the prolonged shutdown of their nuclear reactors. The electricity rates for industrial use have risen 30 percent since the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis, while those for households have increased 20 percent. The government had thought that it would need to ensure economic recovery by keeping electricity rates low through the early reactivation of nuclear reactors. As part of the scenario, the government called attention to the safety of nuclear power generation by describing the Nuclear Regulation Authority's new regulation standards as the "world's highest level" and laid the groundwork for the early reactivation of nuclear reactors.

One year and nine months have passed since the NRA started screening reactors for restart, and the No. 1 and 2 reactors at the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant operated by Kyushu Electric Power Co. are expected to be reactivated as early as this summer. However, a court decision is scheduled to be made on April 22 on whether to issue an injunction order to ban the utility from restarting the two reactors. Kyushu Electric is also aiming to avert its fifth consecutive deficit by restarting its reactors. A Kyushu Electric official said, "We hope the Fukui District Court's decision to issue the injunction will not affect us."

The government maintains its stance to press for the early restart of the country's nuclear reactors, as Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said the latest court decision was nothing but a "provisional ruling." But applications for injunction orders are expected to be filed one after another by citizens to prevent nuclear reactors across the country from being restarted. A senior industry ministry official said, "Economic recovery will be hampered if a restart of nuclear reactors is delayed by judicial rulings."

Nevertheless, the problem seems to lie in the fact that the government has been reluctant to take measures swiftly to break with nuclear power generation.

Various ways to look at things (4)

April 16, 2015

Takahama nuclear restart injunction polarizing

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/04/16/national/takahama-nuclear-restart-injunction-polarizing/#.VS_q0ZPwLM

by Eric Johnston

Staff Writer

A provisional injunction handed down Tuesday by the Fukui District Court against the restarting of Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama No. 3 and 4 reactors is a boost to opponents of nuclear power, even as the decision draws criticism from senior politicians, nuclear regulators, Kepco, and pro-nuclear Japanese media.

A panel of three judges led by Hideaki Higuchi handed down a provisional injunction banning the restart of the two Takahama reactors, saying that the earthquake-risk prediction method used by the Nuclear Regulation Authority in approving the reactors' restart was flawed.

"It is hard to find, for a nuclear power station that must be prepared for a remotely possible accident, the rationale for establishing a basic earthquake ground motion that is based upon the foundation of the image of a mean earthquake," the ruling said.

"This signifies that basic earthquake ground motion has lost its reliability (as an assessment method) not only based upon the track record but also, logic."

The text was welcomed widely by the anti-nuclear camp.

"The great thing about the Fukui court's ruling is that it's written in relatively easy-to-understand Japanese. The NRA and Kepco are saying they don't understand the ruling, but the fact that they don't understand is strange," said Yuji Kano, a lawyer who supported those seeking the provisional injunction. The question now is whether the decision will influence efforts to block the restart of reactors elsewhere. Whether it becomes an important precedent rests on two factors, one political and one legal.

While not legally required, precedent demands that the utilities seek the "understanding" of local governments hosting the reactors before any restart. Fukui's local governments are pro-nuclear and anxious to have the reactors restart for economic reasons, but some other localities greeted the news about the provisional injunction with more caution.

In Hokkaido, where Hokkaido Electric is seeking the restart the Tomari nuclear plant, Gov. Harumi Takahashi, who was re-elected on April 12 and has indicated she favored a restart, said Wednesday that she was now unsure if the Fukui decision would effect Tomari.

Those involved in seeking the provisional injunction of the Takahama reactors said Friday that they hoped the decision would spur local governments to think more seriously about evaluating the safety of nuclear plants in their midst rather than just waiting for experts in Tokyo to tell them what to do.

"Here in Kansai, the (seven prefecture, four city) Union of Kansai Governments has said that as far as the safety of nuclear reactors is concerned, not only specialists from the central government but also local safety specialists appointed by local governments should be relied upon to evaluate a broad range of issues like local evacuation plans and to talk about problems related to the overall safety issues affecting the restart of reactors," said Hidenori Takahashi, one of those involved in seeking the court injunction.

But the legal issue starts with how other courts hearing appeals for provisional injunctions might rule.

Tadashi Matsuda, also one of the nine plaintiffs, said he worries the Fukui court ruling could be the exception rather than the precedent.

“The Fukui court judge’s ruling was based on the people’s right to human dignity. But the government and probably most Japanese are living lives based on economic values, and making judgments based on economics,” he said.

“Even if we don’t want judges elsewhere to rule on reactor restarts based on economic values, there’s a possibility the results will be influenced by a priority on economics,” Matsuda said.

KEPCO appeals court decision

April 18, 2015

Kansai Electric appeals reactor restart injunction, cites economic impact

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201504180031

Kansai Electric Power Co. filed an objection on April 17 seeking revocation of a court ruling that banned the restart of two reactors at its Takahama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture.

The utility also requested that the Fukui District Court suspend the temporary injunction it issued on April 14, saying the order could cause “major economic loss” to the company.

The injunction, which residents in the prefecture and elsewhere had sought over safety concerns, legally bans Kansai Electric from bringing the No. 3 and 4 reactors at the plant back online.

Even if the two reactors pass the remaining safety screenings by the Nuclear Regulation Authority and the utility obtains permission from local governments to restart, it cannot do so unless the injunction is suspended or reversed.

If the district court upholds the decision, the utility plans to appeal it to the Kanazawa branch of Nagoya High Court.

Kansai Electric President Makoto Yagi said at a news conference in Tokyo on April 17 that the company will seek revocation of the injunction as early as possible while making every effort to prove the plant is safe.

Given the stoppage in nuclear power generation across the nation and the increase in imported fuel costs for thermal power plants, Kansai Electric has applied for a second time to the industry ministry for approval to raise household electricity rates.

The price increase was calculated on the premise that the two reactors at the Takahama plant will be brought back online in November.

(This article was written by Hideki Muroya and Koji Nishimura.)

Kansai Electric appeals court decision to ban nuclear restart

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150418p2g00m0dm011000c.html>

FUKUI, Japan (Kyodo) -- Kansai Electric Power Co. filed an objection Friday seeking revocation of a recent court decision that banned the utility from restarting two nuclear reactors at its Takahama nuclear plant in western Japan.

The utility serving Osaka and neighboring areas is not allowed to switch the reactors back online unless the Fukui District Court undoes the temporary injunction it issued Tuesday as sought by a group of residents in Fukui Prefecture and elsewhere.

The court decision dealt a blow to the government's plan to revive nuclear power generation, suspended following the 2011 Fukushima meltdowns. Kansai Electric hoped to restart the two units in November after it obtained safety clearance from the regulator in February based on post-Fukushima regulations. The court said the safety of the Takahama plant is not secured despite the Nuclear Regulation Authority safety approval, saying the new regulations -- which the government has touted as "the world's toughest" -- are "too loose" and "lacking rationality."

Kansai Electric President Makoto Yagi said at a press conference Friday he believes there are "factual errors" in the content of the court decision.

Aiming to restart its reactors as soon as possible, the utility has spent a massive amount of money to boost their safety as required by the regulations.

Amid an increase in imported fuel costs for thermal power generation in the absence of atomic power, Kansai Electric expects a fourth straight yearly loss in the business year that ended in March.

Kepeco appeals injunction blocking restart of Takahama reactors

AFP-JIJI, JIJI

FUKUI – The operator of a Japanese nuclear plant whose restart was blocked this week by a court injunction said Friday it would appeal the ruling.

Kansai Electric Power has submitted “a motion of complaint to Fukui district court” over Tuesday’s injunction banning the refiring of the Takahama nuclear plant’s No. 3 and 4 reactors, a company spokesman said.

In its ruling, the court said the safety of the reactors at Takahama had not been proved, despite a green light from the Nuclear Regulation Authority, whose guidelines, the court said, were “too loose” and “lacking in rationality.”

“We genuinely regret that the court did not understand our argument,” the spokesman said, adding that the temporary court order “includes significant factual errors.”

Kepeco also warned of huge economic damage if the reactors are not restarted.

The utility had been aiming to begin operating the facilities as early as November, but it cannot restart them unless the ban is removed or suspended.

The nuclear issue is a highly sensitive one in Japan, which remains deeply scarred by the triple meltdown disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 atomic plant in 2011.

The worst atomic accident in a generation forced tens of thousands of people from their homes, with some still displaced and scientists warning that tracts of land might be uninhabitable for decades.

The nation’s entire stable of reactors — which once provided more than a quarter of the country’s electricity — was gradually switched off following the disaster.

Activists are also seeking an injunction to prevent the restart of reactors at the Sendai plant in Satsumasendai, Kagoshima Prefecture, with a court expected to rule that issue April 22.

But pro-nuclear power Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has backed an industry push to return to fire up the stalled reactors, with the country's manufacturers complaining over the high cost of electricity produced from dollar-denominated fossil fuels.

What future for 'voluntary' evacuees?

April 17, 2015

'Voluntary' evacuees of Fukushima nuclear disaster face unclear future

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150417p2a00m0na006000c.html>

The approaching deadline for an announcement on whether the provision of emergency temporary housing will be extended has turned the spotlight on those whose evacuations from Fukushima Prefecture are considered "voluntary."

Immediately after the outbreak of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster, the Disaster Relief Act was applied to the entirety of Fukushima Prefecture, making emergency temporary housing facilities available to all Fukushima prefectural residents. Soon afterward, however, evacuation designations for individual municipalities were put into place, and residents were classified into those whose homes were within designated "no-go zones," referred to as "mandatory evacuees," and those whose homes were not in designated "no-go zones," referred to as "voluntary evacuees." In other words, this differentiation between so-called mandatory and voluntary evacuees was made after the residents had already fled their homes.

There are two main types of emergency temporary housing: prefabricated facilities built within Fukushima Prefecture, and public housing and rentals in and outside the prefecture appropriated for use as emergency temporary housing. Because the Fukushima Prefectural Government for the most part made housing within the prefecture available to mandatory evacuees only, many voluntary evacuees live in appropriated housing outside of Fukushima.

Under the Disaster Relief Act and related laws, emergency temporary housing is provided for two years, except for in extreme disasters, in which lease terms can be extended up to a year at a time. In the case of the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake, the provision of such housing went on for just over four years. The central and Fukushima prefectural governments have heretofore announced yearlong extensions three times between late April and late May each year. The expiration for the current extension is late March of 2016.

If the provision of emergency temporary housing were to be discontinued, mandatory evacuees have several options to choose from, including moving to disaster recovery public housing. Voluntary evacuees, meanwhile, do not meet the requirements for moving into such facilities, although many of them are reluctant to return home out of concerns over radiation exposure. Termination of the emergency temporary housing program would thus lead directly to unclear prospects for so-called voluntary evacuees.

Asked about appropriated temporary housing facilities during a House of Councilors Budget Committee meeting April 9, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expressed enthusiasm for continuing the program, saying, "I'd like to handle the issue in a way that puts residents at ease."

Why are extensions capped at a year at a time in the first place? The laws cite the durability of prefabricated facilities as the rationale for this rule.

According to the Disaster Relief Act and related regulations, the durability of prefabricated constructions dictates the initial term for the provision of emergency temporary housing as two years. The one-year extensions are made only after the structural durability of the facilities has been confirmed. Public housing and rentals appropriated as emergency temporary housing have longer-term durability than prefabricated housing, but the reasoning, according to a Cabinet Office official, is that the terms are made the same in both types of housing for the sake of fairness.

The evacuees, meanwhile, live in a constant state of uncertainty. A 43-year-old woman who has evacuated to Saitama Prefecture with her husband and two children in junior high and high school, respectively, longs for more stability. "Instead of one-year extensions, which don't allow us long-term prospects, we want to be able to live where we are for several more years until our children graduate from school," she said.

Susumu Tsukui, an attorney well-versed in residential issues surrounding evacuees, is critical of the current system. "It's wrong to set a time frame for emergency housing based on the durability of prefabricated housing," he said. "Instead of trying to cram the current situation into a pre-existing framework, we should be thinking about what needs to be done so that evacuees can live at ease."

Voluntary evacuees living in appropriated emergency temporary housing face other disadvantages, too. In the spring of 2012, the municipal governments of the Fukushima Prefecture towns of Namie and Futaba -- both of which were wholly designated as no-go zones -- sought approval from the central government to allow evacuees to relocate to new appropriated housing facilities inside and outside the prefecture, a plea that was commonly heard among many evacuees. That August, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, which at the time had jurisdiction over the Disaster Relief Act, and Fukushima plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. sent a notice to the Fukushima Prefectural Government that while they would not permit evacuees to relocate from one appropriated housing to another, evacuees would be able to receive compensation for rental fees of homes they move into after leaving temporary housing. In effect, this was an approval for mandatory evacuees to relocate but does not cover the relocation of voluntary evacuees. The authorities' stance toward voluntary evacuation has been made clear by how it has tried to pass off the burden of rental fees for appropriated housing -- currently covered entirely by the national government -- to TEPCO.

Internal government documents obtained by the Mainichi Shimbun through a freedom of information request show that the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare and the Reconstruction Agency summoned officials from Fukushima, Iwate and Miyagi, the three prefectures hit hardest by the 2011 disasters, as well as officials from Yamagata, Niigata, Tochigi and Saitama Prefectures, which have hosted large populations of voluntary evacuees, to the Fukushima Regional Bureau of Reconstruction in the Fukushima capital on May 24, 2013.

According to inside sources, a Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare official at the meeting proposed that each prefecture bill TEPCO directly for rental fees incurred by nuclear disaster evacuees, pointing to the example of the 1999 JCO nuclear incident in Tokaimura, Ibaraki Prefecture, in which Ibaraki prefectural authorities received disaster relief funds from the plant operator. The proposal was abandoned, however, after prefectural officials objected, demanding why the prefectural governments and not the central government -- which had heretofore shouldered all the costs -- should have to charge the utility. TEPCO has expressed reluctance to cover the rental fees of voluntary evacuees, and the government has deliberated the possibility of initially billing the power company for the rental fees incurred by mandatory evacuees, but a final decision has yet to be made. If the government ultimately decides not to charge

TEPCO for the rental fees of voluntary evacuees, it would imply that TEPCO bears no responsibility for the evacuation of those people. Whoever eventually charges TEPCO for evacuation costs -- a role which prefectural and central government officials tried to foist onto each other in May 2013 -- will have to decide how voluntary evacuees are treated and explain the rationale behind the decision.

As one central government official said, "It all comes down to the fact that no one wants to be held accountable."

April 17, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Majority of Japanese against nukes

April 22, 2015

Survey shows strong opposition, concern over nuclear power

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150422p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Seventy percent of Japanese are against restarting the country's nuclear reactors, and 90 percent believe nuclear disaster evacuation plans in their municipality are insufficient, according to a recent survey.

Tokyo Woman's Christian University professor emeritus Hirotsugu Hirose conducted the opinion survey about Japan's nuclear power plants March 4-16. To eliminate weighting the results towards certain demographics, polltakers were sent to homes in 200 locales across Japan. A total of 1,200 people between the ages of 15 and 79 responded.

Asked about the possibility of an incident at a nuclear power plant as severe as the Fukushima nuclear crisis, 22 percent of the pollees said they thought such an incident would occur, and another 52 percent said that such an incident was likely to occur. Meanwhile, only 1 percent told the survey that such an incident would not happen, while another 24 percent said such an incident was unlikely to occur.

When asked if they thought evacuation plans mapped out by municipal governments were sufficient, 37 percent of respondents said "absolutely insufficient" and another 50 percent said they were "somewhat insufficient."

Asked about restarting currently idled nuclear reactors, 45 percent said they were "somewhat opposed" and another 26 percent said they were "absolutely opposed." Twenty-four percent of respondents said that they supported restarting reactors "to some extent," while only 4 percent "strongly" supported reactivation.

In addition, 85 percent of the pollees said that permission for restarts should be obtained from all municipalities within 30 kilometers of a nuclear plant, not just from host municipalities as is currently the case. Just 10 percent said the decision to back reactor reactivations should be made solely within host municipalities. Furthermore, 53 percent said that use of nuclear energy should be reduced in phases while approving reactor restarts for the time being.

Hirose says the survey shows that people's sense of danger over nuclear power has not faded in the four years since the Fukushima nuclear crisis began, citing insufficient measures from authorities to prevent future disasters.

Frugality not always synonymous with security

April 21, 2015

Tepco's frugality rapped after 48,000 PCs found running Windows XP

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/04/21/national/tepcos-frugality-rapped-after-48000-pcs-found-running-windows-xp/#.VTeDTJPwmot>

AFP-JIJI

Embattled Tokyo Electric Power Co. has been slammed by an independent auditing watchdog for **skipping on its computer network, which still uses the Windows XP operating system.**

Facing multi-billion dollar cleanup and compensation bills from the March 2011 nuclear crisis, Tepco figured it could save a few yen by delaying an upgrade.

But the independent watchdog — which usually on the lookout for wasteful spending — warned the nation's biggest electric utility about its frugality, saying it must replace the outdated computer system because of **security concerns.**

Tepco — effectively nationalized through a government bailout after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011 — **was hoping to save ¥3.6 billion (\$30 million) by continuing to run about 48,000 computers on Windows XP until 2018.**

Microsoft stopped providing security updates and technical support for Windows XP last year, aggravating concerns about cybersecurity.

"The company decided, on its own initiative, to move up the deadline to update the software due to system security concerns," a Tepco spokesman said Tuesday.

In a report last month, the Board of Audit warned the company not to be so stingy.

"Upgrading the operating system must be done as swiftly as possible, and the firm must not push it back, given the security risks," the board said.

Fukushima still needs money in years to come

April 21, 2015

Fukushima reconstruction bill estimated at ¥3.57 trillion once intensive period ends

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/04/21/national/fukushima-reconstruction-bill-estimated-at-%C2%A53-57-trillion-once-intensive-period-ends/#.VTeDlpPwmos>

JII

FUKUSHIMA – At least ¥3.57 trillion will be needed to rebuild Fukushima over a five-year period starting in fiscal 2016 after the “intensive period” for post-disaster reconstruction, set by the government, ends in fiscal 2015, the prefectural government said Tuesday.

The estimate was unveiled at the daily meeting of the prefecture’s headquarters for promoting reconstruction. In light of the estimate, the prefectural government plans to seek financial support from the central government.

During the intensive period, the central government is to cover the cost of all reconstruction projects in the prefecture and all other areas damaged by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, which triggered the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

“Reconstruction of disaster-hit areas will enter a crucial stage from now,” Fukushima Gov. Masao Uchibori said at the meeting, adding that his prefecture will work to **secure reconstruction funds in a stable manner over the long term.**

Fukushima is considering asking the central government to shoulder ¥2.49 trillion of the ¥3.57 trillion, excluding decontamination expenses, which the prefecture plans to charge to Tepco, and costs to be covered by reserve funds.

Back to profits

April 28, 2015

Tepco returns to profit amid lower global energy prices

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/04/28/business/corporate-business/tepco-returns-to-profit-amid-lower-global-energy-prices/#.VUHPXZPwmos>

Bloomberg

Tokyo Electric Power Co. returned to profit in the fourth quarter, as lower energy prices helped offset a weaker yen and one-off gains boosted net income.

Tepco, the country’s biggest power utility, posted operating profit of ¥17.3 billion (\$145 million) in the three months ended March 31, rebounding from an operating loss of ¥40 billion a year earlier, according to Bloomberg calculations based on full-year results released Tuesday.

Full-year operating profit of ¥316.5 billion fell short of expectations and the company said it couldn’t give profit or sales forecasts for the year while the restart of nuclear power in Japan remains uncertain.

The operator of the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 plant said full-year net income was ¥451.5 billion, up 2.9 percent on the year and benefiting from net gains in government payments to the company that will be disbursed as compensation for the Fukushima disaster.

A more than 50 percent plunge in crude oil prices last year has helped Japanese utilities offset the impact of a weaker yen that makes imports more expensive. Tokyo Electric, or Tepco, has also embarked on a cost-cutting campaign to help rein in operating expenses.

Japan’s regional power utilities have endured several years of mounting losses after turning off nuclear power since the Fukushima disaster began in March 2011. All of Japan’s operable reactors remain shuttered pending safety reviews and approvals.

The most cost-effective?

April 28, 2015

Nuclear energy cheapest power source due to reduced disaster risks, ministry says

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201504280045>

By TOMOYOSHI OTSU/ Staff Writer

Nuclear power is the most cost-effective method of generating electricity, even when factoring in increased safety fees, accident compensation and other related expenses following the 2011 nuclear disaster, the industry ministry said.

The government's new estimates were based on the assumption that the probability of a major nuclear disaster occurring has been reduced following the introduction of new safety screening standards, meaning that the costs of dealing with such accidents would be spread out.

A ministry report assessing electricity generation costs said nuclear power generation will cost a minimum of 10.1 yen (8.5 cents) per kilowatt hour in 2030. A 2011 analysis had estimated the minimum cost as 8.9 yen per kilowatt hour. Even so, nuclear power remains particularly cost-effective because the other methods, including renewable energy and thermal energy, have also risen in cost.

The report was released during an April 27 session of the ministry's Power Generation Cost Verification Working Group and approved in principle.

The ministry plans to use its analysis to draw up a proposal for Japan's energy mix for 2030, in which it plans to have 20 to 22 percent of the nation's electricity produced by nuclear power.

The latest assessment was to be presented at an expert panel meeting on April 28.

Using the same method as the 2011 analysis, the cost of nuclear power generation was determined by taking into account expenses such as compensation to be paid in the event of accidents, subsidies to municipalities in the vicinity of power plants. Increased safety fees were also taken into account this year. However, the cost for dealing with nuclear disasters was reduced on the back of stricter safety standards that the government insists has cut the probability of large-scale accidents by half.

In the 2011 assessment, the minimum generation costs for 2030 for renewable energy sources, such as land and offshore wind turbines, had been below that of nuclear power plants at around 8.8 yen per kilowatt hour.

These power sources were estimated to be more costly in the latest report because fees to fund government research projects on renewable energy were also included as expenses.

Nuclear power, on the other hand, is relatively cheap only in the sense of its minimum cost, not taking into account that compensation and fees to deal with nuclear disasters could see exponential growth.

"Nuclear power plants will become a power source with high risks and high costs after the deregulation of the electric power industry," an industry expert said.



An iodine filter to reduce the release of radioactive materials in event of an accident is installed at the Shimane nuclear power plant in Matsue, Shimane Prefecture, on April 27. (Ryo Isshiki)

Fukushima hasn't changed Gov't energy policy

April 29, 2015

Editorial: Returning Japan to bad old days of nuclear dependence a major blunder

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20150429p2a00m0na010000c.html>

Japan is about to go right back to where it started before the triple-meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. In a recently released Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry energy mix plan for the year 2030, nuclear power still takes up 20-22 percent of Japan's power generation capacity, with renewables slated for a 22-24 percent share. In the post-3.11 era, it's very difficult indeed to call this an appropriate mix.

Before the Fukushima nuclear disaster, nuclear power made up just under 30 percent of Japan's generating capacity, and the government had planned to push that to more than 50 percent by 2030. Renewables including hydro accounted for about 10 percent, and were penciled in for a 20 percent or so share in the future.

Then came 3.11 and the nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima, which ought to have prompted the government to rethink its energy strategy. Under the energy policy approved by Cabinet decision last year, "the introduction of renewable energy sources will be sped up to the greatest degree possible. Furthermore, by adopting renewables and energy-saving systems, as well as by increasing the efficiency of thermal power generation, we will reduce (Japan's) dependence on nuclear power to the greatest possible extent."

The majority of the Japanese people, too, desire a "non-nuclear dependent society," and supported a radical denuclearization policy agenda. That support is now going unrecognized, those desires ignored. After the meltdowns, new regulations came into force dictating that no reactor could be in service for more than 40 years. If this remains in force, then even if every currently idled reactor is restarted, and every reactor now under construction goes on line, by 2030 nuclear power will cover only around 15 percent of Japan's energy needs.

As such, that "20-22 percent" target in the economy ministry energy plan means extending the operational lives of or replacing old reactors, or building new ones. In other words, it is an outright declaration of dependence on nuclear energy. By the same token, the 22-24 percent of the energy mix assigned to renewables is a far, far cry from using green energy to the "greatest degree possible."

Lowballing renewable energy is just one more example of the "reactors first" policy and its broader impact.

We at the Mainichi Shimbun have long maintained that the risks of nuclear power far outweigh the benefits in this earthquake-prone nation of Japan, and that we should do away with atomic energy as soon as possible. **We do not deny there is an argument for keeping nuclear power from the perspective of economic risk and energy security, but if one considers that nuclear waste will continue to build up inside Japan as long as there are reactors in operation, atomic energy cannot be considered a sustainable energy source for this country.**

We can hardly discuss the country's energy mix without considering whether it is right to keep pushing the nuclear waste problem onto future generations, thinking only of present-day economic prosperity. And yet the economy ministry has pushed that very problem to the side, insisting on preserving nuclear energy regardless. We cannot agree with this.

We must also take issue with the assumptions that form the basis of energy mix figures and valuations. The government says that renewable energy cannot be expanded because costs -- such as the rates paid under the feed-in tariff system and the expansion of power transmission networks -- are simply too high to make it practical. Of course, no one can ignore a rising electricity bill, but surely we can all bear somewhat higher energy prices for the sake of reducing our nuclear power dependency. **There also needs to be a debate on who should pay for electricity transmission network expansion.**

Furthermore, far more than expanding transmission networks, what needs to be tackled first is reforming the daunting regulatory framework for getting renewable energy sources on line. **Surely freeing up network capacity by decommissioning reactors, as well as emphasizing local generation and consumption -- which puts little load on the grid -- leaves a lot of room to expand green energy generation.**

New energy cost calculations released by the government put the lower limit of nuclear energy costs at the cheapest they have ever been. **We have to wonder, however, if the costs of implementing new safety measures and accident response funds have been properly reflected in the figures.** Not everyone should agree, too, with the government assumption that the frequency of accidents will be halved due to the extra safety measures. We would like to see the government query a far larger range of experts and explain the issue exhaustively to the public to obtain their consent.

Even if the government wishes to guarantee 20 percent or more of the energy market to atomic power, it must open its eyes to the fact that it won't be easy.

If there is a move to extend the lives of old reactors, then there will be extra safety measure costs. Getting the consent of host municipalities and their residents will also be difficult. As such, we'll likely see utilities shuttering older nuclear reactors purely for business reasons. What's more, even if a utility could keep a reactor going past the 40-year limit, chances of some sort of mishap would increase, and there would be no guarantee of smooth, trouble-free power generation.

So it seems likely that some quarters will argue for building new reactors, new plants. But then again, construction mishaps and holdups can delay a new reactor for years, swelling costs. There is more than one example of this overseas. What's more, if the electricity market is opened up to true competition, nuclear energy may very well be driven to extinction by free market forces.

What will happen, then, if the government shuts its eyes to all this and sticks to its well-crafted figures and tables, all pointing to continued reliance on "cheap" nuclear power? It would blunt the society-wide drive to reduce carbon dioxide emissions through green energy and electricity saving. And then, when nuclear energy generation fell short we would, in the end, fall back on fossil fuels. This is an all-too likely scenario, one in which Japan's CO2 emissions rise once more and we are forced to buy fuel from foreign lands to keep the lights on.

Essentially, the failure of the economy ministry to produce an energy policy that can pass the public's sniff test is down to this: government policy formulation has not changed a whit from before the Fukushima meltdowns. **The committee considering Japan's energy mix is still composed almost entirely of people pushing for the continuation -- or even the expansion -- of nuclear power in this country.** We must question a decision-making process that seemed to begin with setting aside a large share of the future energy market for atomic power.

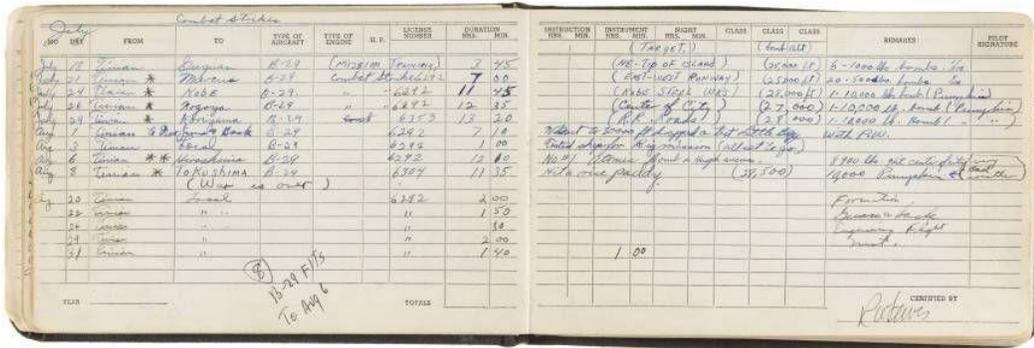
This way of doing business looks more than likely to lose the trust and cooperation of the Japanese people. The government must state clearly and absolutely that it is committed to freeing Japan from nuclear dependence, and then think on an energy mix policy that will get us there.

Enola Gay log copy sold in auction

April 30, 2015

Moving Enola Gay pilot's log copy fetches \$50,000 at N.Y. auction

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/04/30/world/moving-enola-gay-pilots-log-copy-fetches-50000-n-y-auction/#.VUHO7JPwmos>



AFP-Jiji

NEW YORK – A copy of a deeply moving pilot’s log, written during the top-secret Enola Gay mission that dropped the first atomic bomb on Japan, was auctioned in New York on Wednesday for \$50,000.

Robert Lewis, co-pilot of the B-29 bomber, made the copy in 1945 at the request of the then-science editor at The New York Times, and it includes a pencil sketch of the mushroom cloud, Bonhams auction house said.

Lewis wrote the original log on Aug. 6, 1945, as he flew to and from Hiroshima, disguised as a letter to “Mom and Dad” because as there was to be no official account of the top-secret mission, Bonhams said. “I am certain the entire crew felt this experience was more than anyone human had ever thought possible,” Lewis wrote in the log. “It just seems impossible to comprehend. Just how many Japs did we kill? “I honestly have the feeling of groping for words to explain this... My God what have we done,” he wrote. The original was sold at auction for \$391,000 in 2002 by Christie’s.

The same World War II memorabilia auction also sold Lewis’s hand-drawn plan for dropping the bomb for \$37,500, Bonhams said.

The single sheet of graph paper shows a pencil and ink drawing of the Enola Gay approaching Hiroshima and on dropping the bomb, turning 150 degrees to the right to avoid the shock waves of the explosion. The atomic bombing of the city had claimed 140,000 lives by December 1945. When Lewis saw the huge mushroom cloud, he uttered the famous remark “My God, what have we done?”

Japan surrendered on Aug. 15, 1945, after the Americans dropped a second atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki.

But two top lots at the auction failed to sell: a 1945 German surrender order and two of Lewis’s log books, which were valued at \$150,000-\$200,000.

A spokeswoman for Bonhams said that many buyers around the world had expressed interest and that it was “quite common” for post-sale offers to emerge later.

The surrender order, valued at \$20,000 to \$30,000, was sent by Karl Doenitz, the last leader of the Third Reich to the head of the Luftwaffe, Field Marshal Robert von Greim on the evening of May 8, 1945.

It said all hostilities would cease at 1:00 am on May 9.

Von Greim received the telegram at 10:40 pm on May 8. He fled Germany but was arrested by U.S. forces outside Prague and later committed suicide.

10,000 plaintiffs against TEPCO

May 5, 2015

Plaintiffs soon to exceed 10,000 in lawsuits against TEPCO seeking extra compensation

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201505050033>

By ATSUSHI KOMORI/ Senior Staff Writer

Dissatisfied with government-orchestrated compensation, the number of local residents and others affected by the Fukushima nuclear crisis who have sued Tokyo Electric Power Co. is expected to soon top 10,000 plaintiffs.

According to a lawyers' group supporting the plaintiffs, a total of 9,992 people, including those who lived in evacuation zones or voluntarily fled their homes, have joined 25 lawsuits filed with 20 district courts and court branches across Japan, including Sapporo and Fukuoka, by the end of April in the four years since the disaster.

The first such case was brought to court in December 2012 by evacuees from Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture, and elsewhere.

The plaintiffs are demanding that TEPCO, operator of the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, pay additional compensation and bring down radiation levels near the facility to pre-disaster conditions. Because 900 people have joined the suits since January, the number of plaintiffs seeking compensation for damages related to the nuclear disaster triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011 will most likely exceed 10,000 in the not-too-distant future, the lawyers' group said.

Most of the plaintiffs are also seeking compensation from the central government based on the state redress law. In another massive litigation, more than 20,000 residents living near the U.S. Kadena Air Base in Okinawa Prefecture in 2011 called for compensation for damages caused by aircraft noise in the third lawsuit related to the military base.

Based on guidelines compiled by the national Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation, TEPCO has been paying compensation to those forced to evacuate from their hometowns after the nuclear crisis. The utility is also compensating local business operators for losses associated with the disaster.

But the plaintiffs are arguing the payments are insufficient and demanding that TEPCO pay additional compensation until the radiation readings return to pre-disaster levels, and that the utility compensate the victims for the "loss of their hometowns."

TEPCO refuses to submit simulation documents

May 5, 2015

TEPCO refuses to reveal tsunami simulation results in nuclear disaster suit

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150505p2a00m0na016000c.html>

KOBE -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) will not allow plaintiffs in a nuclear disaster damages suit to see the results of a tsunami simulation the utility conducted before the March 2011 disasters, the Mainichi has learned.

Sources familiar with the lawsuit told the Mainichi Shimbun that the plaintiffs -- all nuclear disaster refugees now living in Hyogo Prefecture -- had requested the documents from TEPCO, but that the utility

had refused. The plaintiffs are suing TEPCO and the government of Japan for damages in the Kobe District Court. The power company is not under any legal obligation to divulge the simulation documents, but "they are records vital to finding out if TEPCO could have actually predicted this terrible disaster," representatives for the plaintiffs stated. The utilities actions "are obstructing the pursuit of the truth," claim the plaintiffs.

The 92 plaintiffs (from 34 households) are demanding a total of 790 million yen in compensation from TEPCO and the government for uprooting their lives due to the radioactive contamination from the nuclear disaster.

They are seeking documents related to a 2008 simulation, in which TEPCO modeled tsunami generated by a theoretical major earthquake off the coast of Fukushima Prefecture, based on historical accounts of an 1898 temblor of the magnitude 8.0 level in the same region and other data.

TEPCO, however, did not report the results of this simulation to the former Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (under the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry) until March 7, 2011 -- just four days before the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami that caused the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 plant. The utility released part of the report revealing it knew a tsunami more than 10 meters high was possible, but not until around five months after the disaster.

The plaintiffs assert that TEPCO and the government should have been aware that a disaster severe enough to knock out all power at the Fukushima No. 1 plant was possible. They asked the Kobe court in March this year to order TEPCO to divulge the simulation documents. On April 9, TEPCO attorneys submitted a counterargument declaring that "the documents are neither related to nor necessary for the plaintiffs' claims. The hearings of the trial should focus on whether there is a causal relationship between the (nuclear) accident and damage to the plaintiffs."

On May 1, the plaintiffs filed a rebuttal stating, "TEPCO has revealed only one part of its tsunami simulation estimates. The details of the (simulation report) remain entirely obscured."

"As the offending company, TEPCO is being called on to find out the entire truth of what caused the nuclear accident," commented Hiroki Tatsumi, chief secretariat of the defense counsel. "I cannot understand the company's refusal" to release the simulation documents.

A TEPCO public relations representative, meanwhile, told the Mainichi, "Regarding the lawsuit, we would like to respond sincerely based on a detailed inquiry into the plaintiffs' demands and assertions."

Responsibility of employers in disasters

May 10, 2015

Company executives' attitude and judgment can mean life or death for employees in disasters

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150510p2a00m0na002000c.html>

Since over 2,400 people were killed by the Great East Japan Earthquake and ensuing tsunami on March 11, 2011 while at work or in transit to or from work, some employers have faced court orders to pay damages to bereaved families. All employers, meanwhile, face the great challenge of protecting the lives of their employees and customers from disasters in the future.

At 2:46 p.m. on March 11, 2011, Kenji Saito, the executive director of confectioner Saito Seika, was at the company's head office in Ofunato, Iwate Prefecture, when files fell from the shelves and everything began to shake. The temblor registered a lower 6 on the Japanese seismic intensity scale. In the spur of the moment he yelled, "Get out, there's going to be a tsunami! Turn off the power. Evacuate!"

As soon as the shaking subsided, the 35 employees who had been at the head office -- located some 100 meters from the ocean -- headed for their designated evacuation site on higher ground about 270 meters away. They arrived at the site shortly before 3 p.m., and a tsunami over 8 meters high struck some 20 minutes later. The company headquarters were completely destroyed, but no one was hurt.

From the time he was a child, Saito had been told repeatedly by his father, who had survived the tsunami that hit following the 1933 Sanriku Earthquake by climbing up an electric pole, to evacuate empty-handed if a large earthquake were to strike. There were numerous posters saying "It's an earthquake, there's going to be a tsunami, evacuate now!" on the walls of the Saito Seika office, and in evacuation drills held twice a year, members of the company followed their designated route to higher ground.

On March 9, 2011, just two days before the massive quake and tsunami hit, there had been a temblor in the city with a seismic intensity of 3, followed by a tsunami measuring 60 centimeters. On the morning of March 11, 2011, the company had just reviewed its tsunami evacuation manual, and reminded its employees to evacuate to higher ground in the case of a tsunami warning. This procedure review contributed to the smooth evacuation.

In March 2013, Saito, along with local volunteers, founded the Ofunato Tsunami Denshokan (Pass on tsunami lore to the next generation) -- a facility dedicated to passing down history and information on tsunami in the local area -- on the grounds of the company headquarters that had been rebuilt on higher ground.

The message Saito wants to convey is simple. **"Whether or not employees survive depend on their leaders' judgment,"** Saito says. **"The top executives of companies with operations in coastal areas must be able to tell their employees to evacuate even if it means abandoning the workplace."**

The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare says that as of the end of March 2015, there have been 2,172 cases across 14 prefectures in which the families of those who were killed in the earthquake and tsunami while at work were awarded workers' compensation. According to the Fund for Local Government Employees' Accident Compensation and the National Personnel Authority, as of the end of March 2015, 297 civil servants were certified as having died while carrying out public duties. This means that at least 2,469 people died from the 2011 disasters during work.

Despite the unprecedented magnitude of the disasters, there have been cases of surviving families suing employers over the deaths of employees, resulting in companies paying vast amounts of money, either because of court rulings or settlements. What has separated employers who are found responsible for such payments from those who are not is whether they were seen to have made the effort to gather disaster-related information and to instruct evacuation based on that information.

In the case of a damages suit brought against the operator of Joban-Yamamoto driving school in Yamamoto, Miyagi Prefecture by the family members of 25 students and one staff member there, the Sendai District Court ruled in January that the operator had allowed the shuttle to take students from the school on its regular route despite hearing tsunami warnings issued from fire trucks, and ordered the payment of more than 1.9 billion yen in total. The school, located 750 meters from the ocean, did not have a disaster manual, nor had it carried out any evacuation drills.

In a case involving employees of Shichijushichi Bank's Onagawa branch in Onagawa, Miyagi Prefecture, who were killed by tsunami despite having evacuated to the roof of the bank some 10 meters high, the Sendai High Court on April 22 denied the bank's legal responsibility. The presiding judge added, however,

"In order to prevent the loss of human life under current circumstances in which we cannot reliably predict tsunami heights, it is necessary to be prepared for unforeseen tsunami and to make the effort to evacuate people to safe places immediately after an earthquake."

Some companies, meanwhile, have taken the lessons learned from the 2011 disasters to implement clear measures that put lives first.

At Yakuodo Co., which is based in the Iwate Prefecture town of Yahaba and operates drugstores in five Tohoku region prefectures, nine employees were killed from the disasters on March 11, 2011.

Subsequently, the company installed satellite cell phones at its eight coastal drugstores to allow communication with employees in the case of an emergency. Each of its stores is required to come up with emergency action checklists, which must be reported to headquarters on the 11th of every month.

In November 2011, the convenience store chain Circle K Sunkus Co., headquartered in Tokyo, installed an alarm system that it says "will help protect both employees and customers." Whenever a tsunami warning or mudslide warning is issued, it is transmitted to the cash register terminal aurally and visually.

In order to minimize losses in times of disaster, business continuity planning (BCP) -- a practice that clarifies the methods through which damage surveys will be carried out, as well as how resources, equipment, and production means will be secured after a disaster that began in the United States in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks -- have gained momentum in Japan since the 2011 disasters.

According to a survey of around 5,000 companies nationwide carried out by the Cabinet Office in January 2014, of the 2,196 companies that responded, 53 percent of major companies said they had finished compiling BCPs, as opposed to 27 percent in fiscal 2009; while 25 percent of mid-sized companies said the same, as opposed to 12 percent in fiscal 2009.

Furthermore, an increasing number of corporations have begun to incorporate safety measures into their BCPs. At one production hub in Iwate Prefecture, the guidelines for handling major disasters is condensed into one sheet of paper, which is distributed to all workers; they clearly stipulate that workers "save their lives before equipment and facilities." Meanwhile, a waste disposal operator in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, established its first BCP in 2012, which instructs workers who encounter a disaster at a client's office to evacuate, even if the client says that it's safe, if the conditions do not meet the company's own conditions for safety.

"It's the small to mid-sized companies that face huge management risks when they lose personnel," says Osamu Yamaguchi, a senior consultant at InterRisk Research Institute & Consulting, Inc., "so it's important to delineate the respective roles people should play in the initial stages after a disaster, and to conduct numerous drills."

A mid-sized seafood processing company in Minamisanriku, Miyagi Prefecture, lost 90 percent of its assets, including a factory, in the 2011 disasters. It has resumed its operations further inland, however, and credits the fact that all its employees survived as the reason it was able to bounce back. The company's president says, "Even if you've lost property, as long as you have your people, you can stay positive."

May 10, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Where are the manuals for nuke disaster compensation?

May 11, 2015

6 power companies lack manuals for nuclear disaster compensation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150511p2a00m0na008000c.html>

Six of 12 power companies surveyed by the Mainichi Shimbun have still not created manuals for compensating victims of nuclear disasters, despite the government urging them to do so for more than five years, it has been learned.

Furthermore, out of the six companies that have manuals, only one created or updated it after the Fukushima nuclear disaster. This shows that as the government's review of the compensation system fails to make progress, work on compensation manuals by power companies has also stalled.

After the 1999 JCO criticality accident in Tokai, Ibaraki Prefecture, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology created an operation manual for nuclear compensation in December 2009. It includes the steps taken between a nuclear disaster and agreements on compensation, and informs nuclear companies that they are expected to be in communication with parties relevant to compensation even before a disaster has happened. The manual was distributed to power companies, and in March 2010 a briefing was held for them.

The ministry manual calls on each power company to create its own compensation manual. "Organize the system, procedure, document style and other details for compensation procedures to allow it to be done properly, and share this information across your organization in a form like a manual," the ministry manual says.

It also reads, "It is desirable to have the manual updated after a regular period like two to three years." It says the technology ministry will "provide support for creating the manuals."

The Mainichi Shimbun surveyed 12 businesses including nine major power companies with nuclear power plants and received answers from all of them by this April. The companies that said they had created manuals were Tohoku, Kansai, Shikoku, and Kyushu Electric Power Co., The Japan Atomic Power Co. and Japan Atomic Energy Agency. Tokyo Electric Power Co. responded that the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred while it was putting together its manual, and it has been dealing with compensation for the disaster without a manual.

While a Diet decision on the Nuclear Damage Compensation Facilitation Corporation Act of August 2011 called for an utter renewal of the nuclear accident compensation system in about a year's time, serious discussions have yet to begin. In January this year, it was finally decided that the Japan Atomic Energy Commission would be the site of the discussions.

Among companies that had not created a manual yet, Chubu Electric Power Co. said, "We will consider it, while taking into account factors like the national government's policy," while Kyushu Electric Power Co., which had created a manual, said, "We recognize the need to reflect the (Fukushima) disaster in our manual, but the national government has not organized its policy."

Meanwhile, this year Shikoku Electric Power Co. created a compensation manual without waiting for the national government to review the compensation system. In response to the Mainichi Shimbun survey, it said, "Taking into account the Fukushima disaster, we defined that compensation procedures should account for the scale of a disaster's damage and the situation under which it occurred, and work for the convenience of disaster victims."

Kansai Electric Power Co. responded to the survey but did not answer whether it has updated its compensation manual.

The technology ministry's department on nuclear disaster compensation said it did not have a complete understanding of the state of power companies' compensation manuals. A representative said, however,

"We do not consider the review of the compensation system and the restarting of nuclear power plants to be related."

May 11, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Mos Burger

May 6, 2015

Mos Burger denies speculation its foods use radiation-tainted sauces

By Stephanie Chao, The China Post

May 6, 2015, 12:03 am TWN

<http://www.chinapost.com.tw/taiwan/national/national-news/2015/05/06/435318/Mos-Burger.htm>

TAIPEI, Taiwan -- Mos Burger announced yesterday that their chili sauce powder and spice mix meat sauce both originate from Saitama Prefecture (埼玉縣) and Tokyo, respectively, shooting down media speculation that the popular Japanese fast-food chain has been importing sauces from radiation-stricken areas.

In response to the findings of a Ministry of Health and Welfare (MHW, 衛福部) investigation, and subsequent media reports, Mos Burger said that the two sauces were handled by an affiliate, Magic Food Mos Food Industry (Magic Food, 魔術食品). It imported Mos Burger's chili sauce powder from Green Spice Seasoning in Saitama, while the spice mix meat sauce was produced at the Tokyo-based Maruta Food System.

The popular fast-food chain stated that the sauces were not imported from radiation-stricken areas. Mos Burger's statement also claimed the company had always adhered to the MHW's Food Sanitation and Safety standards when inspecting its suppliers.

The MHW's Food and Drugs Administration (FDA, 食藥署) said that Magic Food had been importing its "No Brand Sauce" from at least one of the five radiation-stricken Japanese prefectures last month. 504 kilograms of goods were stopped at customs and did not make it onto shelves, according to the FDA's report.

The FDA's report into food products that breach safety regulations said that Magic Food has been importing the two sauces, which were produced by Kohbai Foods (紅梅食品工業). While Kohbai Foods labeled its products as "Originating in Tokyo," FDA officials discovered that the factory is actually located in Tochigi Prefecture (栃木縣), one of the prefectures restricted by Taiwan.

Health officials deemed that Magic Foods had provided false customs declarations, and have to decided to impose a fine on the company, which they said will range between NT\$30,000 and NT\$3 million.

The FDA also announced that all Japanese food imports will need to include official origin statements starting from May 15. This is in response to a previous food scandal, when Japanese food products were found to have been imported from radiation-stricken areas in the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster.

Nuclear still the cheapest, according to METI

May 11, 2015

Nuclear remains cheapest power source despite Fukushima meltdowns: government

Kyodo

A panel of nuclear experts on Monday largely approved a government report saying that atomic power remains the cheapest source of electricity despite the rising safety costs triggered by the 2011 Fukushima core meltdowns.

Despite an expected glut in solar power, the government is looking to make nuclear power account for 20 to 22 percent of Japan's electricity supply by 2030, underscoring its policy of sticking with atomic power even though the majority of the public remains opposed to restarting its idled reactors.

According to the latest estimate of power generation costs by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, atomic power would cost at least ¥10.3 per kilowatt-hour in 2030 — cheaper than power derived from fossil fuels, natural gas, wind and solar energy.

That's higher than the ¥8.9 projected in 2011 and is based on a projection that costs for plant decommissioning and compensation from a severe accident would jump to ¥9.1 trillion from the ¥5.8 trillion estimated in 2011, reflecting the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

METI also said additional safety measures required to run a nuclear reactor would cost an average of ¥60.1 billion.

But the increase in overall generation costs is limited because the probability of a nuclear accident would decrease after utilities complete their safety measures, it said.

In the report, the ministry also estimates that coal-fired power will cost ¥12.9 per kwh and liquefied natural gas ¥13.4 per kwh, compared with earlier projections of ¥10.3 and ¥10.9, respectively.

Wind power would cost up to ¥34.7, solar power up to ¥16.4, geothermal power ¥16.8, and hydropower up to ¥27.1 per kwh, the report said.

In its national energy policy adopted last year, the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe pledged to reduce reliance on nuclear power and promote renewable energy as much as possible, while standing by nuclear as a key power source, citing the importance of a stable electricity supply to economic growth.

Japan is expecting a glut in solar power because utilities refuse to upgrade their power grids to purchase all the energy as mandated under the feed-in tariff system. A study has found that seven of the nation's utilities lack the transmission network capacity to accept all of the solar power energy that suppliers plan to generate, METI says.

Combined, they can only accept 58 percent of the total, METI said. METI began looking into their transmission capacities after five utilities decided to cap their clean energy intake, revolting against the government's plan to increase generation of renewable energy in light of the Fukushima disaster.

Under the feed-in tariff system, utilities are obliged to purchase all electricity generated from such sources as solar, wind and geothermal power at fixed rates for a set period.

But the system ran into a roadblock after new suppliers flooded the solar power business, prompting the utilities to suspend signing power-purchasing contracts in September amid fears that overcapacity could cause blackouts.

Currently, all of Japan's commercial nuclear reactors remain offline to pass a beefed-up safety screenings based on new, more stringent regulations drafted after the Fukushima meltdowns. The government is planning to restart reactors that have met the post-Fukushima safety requirements.

KEPCO wants to raise the price of electricity

May 12, 2015

Kepeco to raise household electricity rate by 8.36%

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/05/12/business/economy-business/kepeco-raise-household-electricity-rate-8-36/#.VVIM6pPwmic>

Kyodo

Kansai Electric Power Co. will raise the amount it charges households for electricity by an average of 8.36 percent starting June 1, industry minister Yoichi Miyazawa said Tuesday.

Higher imported fossil fuel costs are weighing on the firm's earnings in the absence of nuclear power following the 2011 triple meltdown at Tepco's crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant, Miyazawa said.

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry has judged the margin of the markup should be trimmed from the average 10.23 percent rise originally sought by the utility, reflecting recent drops in crude oil prices and other factors.

Miyazawa added the rate will be set at 4.62 percent during the four months through September to ease the burden on households. To keep the bill hike smaller than initially proposed, Kansai Electric will slash executive compensation and boost efforts to streamline business.

The ministry is expected to approve the rate hike soon.

Kansai Electric, which relied heavily on nuclear power to generate electricity before the Fukushima crisis, initially sought to raise prices starting in April. But its plan was delayed as discussions within the government dragged out on whether the proposed hike was appropriate.

All of Japan's commercial reactors were offline by September 2013 amid heightened safety concerns in the wake of the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 plant. They remain idled pending the nuclear regulator's safety review, based on more stringent requirements.

Kansai Electric President Makoto Yagi told a press conference in Osaka the company plans to lower the rate when its nuclear plants go back online.

The utility, which serves Osaka and neighboring areas, last raised prices for household electricity by 9.75 percent in May 2013.

Hokkaido Electric Power Co. also raised its electricity prices last year.

Kepeco's commitment to reducing costs questioned

May 14, 2015

EDITORIAL: We need to hear Kansai Electric's vision for future power sources

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201505140039>

Kansai Electric Power Co. will raise its electricity rates for households in June. The standard monthly rate of 8,058 yen will go up to 8,220 yen.

The increase comes only two years after the last increase. In May 2013, the utility jacked up its power charges by nearly 10 percent.

Kansai Electric attributed the increase to swelling fuel costs due to the expansion of thermal power generation forced by the continued shutdown of its nuclear power plants.

But **how much has the company done to cut costs to avoid a rate hike during this period?**

The utility, during the government's review of the rate hike plan and public hearings over the issue, failed to provide persuasive arguments that it was committed to cost reductions.

One aspect of the company's operations that has cast doubt over its seriousness to cut costs concerns executive pay.

At the time of the previous increase, the government asked the utility to lower the average annual remuneration of the board members to 18 million yen. But Kansai Electric kept it at 21 million yen until the end of last year. After being criticized for failing to cut its executive salaries, President Makoto Yagi promised on May 12 to lower the average to 16 million yen.

The utility initially hoped to raise its power charges by more than 10 percent in April. But the government limited the hike to 8.36 percent, saying the company could do more to boost its cost efficiency.

An increase in electricity rates has a direct impact on people's livelihoods. The utility needs to demonstrate that it has made every effort to slash costs. That is a basic premise.

Since the catastrophic accident at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which led to a shutdown of all nuclear reactors in Japan, it has been impossible to resume nuclear power generation at pre-disaster levels.

Nuclear power accounted for half of Kansai Electric's overall power output before the accident. **The utility now should make more serious efforts to wean itself from its dependence on atomic energy.**

In spite of this, the company has said it will keep using nine of the 11 reactors it owns.

It appears that Kansai Electric is proverbially **waiting for the storm to pass** by pinning its hopes for earnings recovery on eventual restarts of its reactors.

Last month, the Fukui District Court issued an injunction to prevent restarts of two reactors at Kansai Electric's Takahama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture. The court cited safety concerns in issuing the injunction in response to a request from local residents.

There is strong opposition to plans to bring offline reactors back on stream, especially in areas around Fukui Prefecture.

The utility should take more seriously the changes in the social environment caused by the Fukushima triple meltdown.

Kansai Electric's latest business plan also calls for greater efforts to build state-of-the-art thermal power plants with higher fuel efficiency and introduce renewable energy sources for power generation.

If it is serious about pursuing these goals, we suggest the company lay out a vision for its future power sources before the government's policy debate on the nation's future energy mix is concluded.

In its long-term growth strategy unveiled in 2010, the company pledged to raise the share of non-fossil fuel power sources, mainly nuclear energy, to a level of 60 to 70 percent in 2030. The target must now be reconsidered as a result of the disaster that unfolded in March 2011.

If the company sets clear numerical targets for lowering its dependence on nuclear power in 10 or 20 years, more constructive debate on its business plans will be possible.

The power retail market is slated to be fully deregulated next spring, which will allow households to freely choose their suppliers of electricity.

As the power market for industrial consumers has already been liberalized, more than 5,000 companies and local governments terminated their contracts with Kansai Electric, which raised the rates, and switched to new power suppliers by the end of March.

Unless it is willing to reform its management policy and structure in response to the changes of the times, Kansai Electric could lose many more customers.

--The Asahi Shimbun, May 14

Another lawsuit against TEPCO from "difficult to return" zone residents

May 14, 2015

'Difficult-to-return zone' residents to bring class-action suit against TEPCO, gov't

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150514p2a00m0na010000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Residents of a Fukushima town district designated as a "difficult-to-return zone" due to high levels of radiation from the ongoing disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant are set to file a class-action lawsuit against the government and plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO).

The lawsuit will be the first class-action suit brought by residents of a difficult-to-return area, defined as an area with a yearly cumulative radiation dosage of over 50 millisieverts.

Around 100 residents of the Tsushima district of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, are preparing to sue the national government and TEPCO for failing to lay down a plan for decontamination and robbing the residents of their hometown. Although it has yet to be decided how much in damages the plaintiffs will demand, the lawsuit is set to be filed with the Iwaki branch of the Fukushima District Court as early as this summer.

Tsushima district is a forested, mountainous area some 30 kilometers northwest of the Fukushima No. 1 plant, where rice and tobacco cultivation, forestry and dairy farming were common and some 1,400 people lived prior to the disaster.

By filing the lawsuit, **the plaintiffs hope to show that the farmland, local traditions, and community bonds they'd nurtured over generations have been ripped away from them and not been recovered. They will seek damages for the emotional suffering they've experienced and demand decontamination to return their hometown to its pre-disaster state.**

Failure to see significant progress from the alternative dispute resolution (ADR) system -- set up as a system through which Fukushima nuclear disaster victims can settle out of court with TEPCO -- is one of the reasons Tsushima residents decided to file the suit. In March 2014, the ADR center suggested a compromise in which the monthly 100,000 yen per person TEPCO pays to victims of the disaster for emotional pain is raised to 150,000 yen. However, the ADR center's reconciliation recommendations are not legally binding, and TEPCO has refused to comply with the proposal on the grounds that it would be unfair to residents of other municipalities.

"My distrust of the government has grown as it continues to turn a blind eye to TEPCO's rejection of the proposed compromise," says a Tsushima district resident who plans to join the lawsuit. "I decided to

participate in the suit in order to make (TEPCO and the government) take responsibility, including the responsibility to decontaminate."

The Ministry of the Environment still has not announced a plan for decontamination in difficult-to-return zones.

According to a lawyer for the plaintiffs, another class-action lawsuit has been filed by some 340 residents of the Miyakoji district of Tamura, Fukushima Prefecture, located 20 to 30 kilometers from the stricken nuclear plant and once designated as a "zone preparing for evacuation in case of emergency," demanding 3.7 billion yen in damages for destroying the community. The upcoming Tsushima case, however, is the first to be brought by residents of a difficult-to-return zone.

May 14, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Kepeco's price hike approved by Govt.

May 15, 2015

Government approves 8.36% price hike for Kepeco

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/05/15/business/corporate-business/government-approves-8-36-price-hike-kepeco/#.VVdD9pPwmic>

JJI

The government on Friday approved hiking electricity rates for Kansai Electric Power Co.'s household subscribers by an average of 8.36 percent, effective June 1.

Kansai Electric will, however, limit the hikes to 4.62 percent on average for the first four months to lessen the burden on customers during the summer, when air conditioners cause electricity bills to swell.

Kansai Electric will become the second utility after Hokkaido Electric Power Co. to carry out a second round of full-fledged rate hikes since the March 2011 nuclear crisis began at Tepco's crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant, leading to a prolonged spell without atomic energy.

Kansai's first round of hikes, in May 2013, averaged 9.75 percent. It then applied for government approval for another set of increases last December, saying its earnings had deteriorated mainly because of delays in the restart of the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at its Takahama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture.

The government will call on the regional power supplier to cut the rates in the event that idled reactors are restarted, officials said.

Let's worry about it before it's too late

May 16, 2015

Are forces of darkness gathering in Japan?

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2015/05/16/commentary/forces-darkness-gathering-japan/#.VVhLq5Pwmif>

by Jeff Kingston

Special To The Japan Times

Certainly it's worse in China, South Korean security recently beat demonstrators and Spain faces a blanket gag rule, but are concerns about the anti-democratic forces of darkness in Japan unduly alarmist? How bad can it be if protestors in Hibiya Park can carry placards depicting Prime Minister Shinzo Abe as Adolf Hitler?

Bad enough, alas. New York Times Tokyo bureau chief Martin Fackler, among others, recently implicated Team Abe in getting Shigeaki Koga, a prominent Abe critic, axed from Asahi TV's "Hodo Station" program. "I am afraid that media organizations' self-restraint is spreading and, as a result, accurate information is not reaching the public," Koga said at a press conference, claiming he was the victim of a political vendetta and corporate media timidity.

Mindful of the orchestrated attacks on the Asahi's news organs and fearful of right-wing reprisals, self-censorship is a growing problem. Columbia University's Gerald Curtis told me about the recent cancellation of a planned television interview that was to take place in New York. The local correspondent informed him that the Japanese network's management in Tokyo nixed the interview because it was going to assess how Abe has handled the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, and this topic was deemed too sensitive.

Curtis says the worrying lesson here is that "the government doesn't have to muzzle the press if the press takes it upon itself to do the muzzling."

But the government is taking no chances.

Conservative Abe cronies were appointed to NHK's top management last year, and Katsuto Momii, a man without any media experience, was named chairman. He later declared to the press, "When the government is saying 'Right' we can't say 'Left.'"

Since Momii began promoting this curious vision at NHK, staff have complained that managers are strictly insisting on wording that hues to government views on controversial topics such as Yasukuni Shrine, disputed territories and the "comfort women." To ensure conformity, NHK now publishes an internal censorship manual, called the "Orange Book," banning the use of the term "sex slaves" and other phrases identified as problematic. NHK insiders told me that some recalcitrant staff suffered career derailments because they didn't toe the line, including a group that openly called on Momii to step down.

There is no smoking gun, and it could be a routine staff rotation, but an apparent casualty of the purge is NHK's "News Watch 9" anchor Kensuke Okoshi, who has spoken out against nuclear power and committed other "transgressions."

Controversy erupted last summer when Naoki Hyakuta, a best-selling writer and conservative on history issues, was handpicked by Abe to serve on NHK's board of governors. Hyakuta criticized Okoshi's on-air comments about ethnic Korean residents in Japan that were aired July 17, 2014. Okoshi said: "The first-generation Korean residents were those who were forcibly brought to Japan or moved to the country to seek jobs after the annexation of Korea in 1910. They had a lot of difficulties establishing their foundations for living."

At the subsequent NHK board of governors meeting, Hyakuta reportedly asked: "Is it acceptable to say ethnic Korean residents are those who were forcibly taken by Japan? That is wrong."

The acting chair informed Hyakuta that as a governor, comments about the content of an individual program violated the broadcasting law. Hyakuta has since resigned his position, complaining he wasn't able to have any impact, but one can imagine that NHK staff felt his presence, and indeed Okoshi is no longer a newscaster despite being one of the most respected in the business.

"The systematic suppression of the press and freedom of speech by the Abe government and its functionaries is very, very disturbing in terms of its effects on the future course of Japan and its democracy," says Ayako Doi, a journalist based in the United States who is currently an associate fellow of the Asia Society. In her view, things have gotten significantly worse under Abe. She cites the Liberal Democratic Party's summons of Japanese media executives, the Japanese consul general in Frankfurt's visit to the editors of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, and a Foreign Ministry official's visit to publisher McGraw-Hill in New York to ask for changes in the descriptions of Japan's comfort women system of sexual slavery written in a U.S. history textbook.

"They have become more numerous, blatant and unapologetic," she says, adding that the government is targeting both Japanese and non-Japanese critics alike.

Japan Times columnist Gregory Clark says the atmosphere of intimidation has become exceptionally "ugly," attributing it to a "right-wing rebound and revenge."

"Something strange is going on," he says, citing recent attacks on progressive media. "Particularly given that Tokyo keeps talking about its value identification with the West."

Well-placed sources in Washington previously told me that even overseas the Japanese government actively disparages Abe's critics, something that Doi isn't surprised by.

"It seems that under the Abe government, efforts to silence critics of his policies and interpretation of history have become systematic," she says. "It now appears to be a concerted effort orchestrated by Kantei (the prime minister's office)."

Japan's right-wing media also engages in trans-Pacific intimidation. For example, a rightwing pundit slammed the National Bureau of Asian Research's Japan-U.S. Discussion Forum, making groundless accusations about an anti-Japan bias. He also attacked the Japan Foundation's Center for Global Partnership for sponsoring a research project regarding Sino-Japanese relations and history issues. This research project was deemed a waste of Japanese taxpayers' money and some of the researchers were subject to defamatory attacks on their professional integrity. But it would be a sad day for Japanese democracy if the right wing gets to set the research agenda, pick the scholars and decide what they should conclude.

Clark himself was publicly defamed for his alleged anti-Japanese views because he raised some questions about government and media representations concerning the North Korean abductions of Japanese nationals. Following that, he says his university employer received a cascade of threatening letters demanding he be sacked.

"Requests to write articles for the magazines and newspapers I had long known dried up," Clark says. "Invitations to give talks on Japan's lively lecture circuit died overnight. One of Japan's largest trading companies abruptly canceled my already-announced appointment as outside board director with the vague excuse of wanting to avoid controversy."

Lamentably, he added, "You cannot expect anyone to come to your aid once the nationalistic right-wing mood creators, now on the rise, decide to attack you. Freedom of speech and opinion is being whittled away relentlessly."

Exposing such orchestrated attacks and highlighting the dangers of self-censorship are all the more important in contemporary Japan because, as Doi puts it, media freedom is “sliding down a slippery slope” and it’s important to “speak out before the momentum becomes unstoppable.”

Jeff Kingston is the director of Asian Studies, Temple University Japan.

Looks like intimidation

from the blog "Nuclear-free by 2045?"

May 19, 2015

The Asahi Shimbun Goes Soft on the Nuclear Village

http://nf2045.blogspot.fr/2015/05/the-asahi-shimbun-goes-soft-on-nuclear.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed:+NuclearFreeBy2045+%28Nuclear+Free+by+2045?%29

Former high-level Japanese bureaucrat Shigeaki Koga has gained notoriety for his courageous criticisms of the chilling atmosphere that has come over the Japanese media since Shinzo Abe returned to power and proclaimed to the world in 2012 that “Japan is back.” From where? Going where? No one could tell what this ridiculous statement meant, but it now seems clear it means that Japan is heading in the direction of the recent changes observed in *The Asahi Shimbun* and *TV Asahi*. These and other media outlets have been intimidated by government officials, and by third parties doing their bidding, into toning down their coverage of policy changes that the Abe government is trying to implement—such things as revising the constitution, passing the TPP free trade agreement, and restarting nuclear power plants.

The effect of this intimidation seemed to be on display in a recent *Asahi Shimbun* news report that really functions as an editorial because of the way it frames the issue it covers. *The Asahi* used to be known for running critical reports that held TEPCO and the government to account, but now it has produced a report which, right from the headline, sets up a biased and false premise. The headline reads: Proponents, foes of nuclear energy content with preaching to the converted.

The article sets out with the seeming intent to be fair and balanced, with some mild jabs at nuclear proponents, but the balancing act itself leaves the reporting completely neutered. The writer has nothing newsworthy to say about energy policy or the problems of nuclear energy. All we have here is the unproven and misleading allegation in the headline that proponents and foes of nuclear energy are content with preaching to the converted their “versions of the truth.” There is no truth here. It’s all relative, don’t ya see?

Later in the article, the writer states, “... all the two sides had in common was their unwillingness to discuss the issue of nuclear energy with the other camp,” which is true enough, but it was odd to see this journalist implying that there was something unusual or wrong with this situation. Throughout the article, he completely misses the point that the two sides exist to convey their message not to “the converted” nor to “the other camp” but to the public, the vast majority of whom don’t identify with either side too strongly.

Both sides are engaged in a public information campaign, and they would only be defeating their own purposes if they invited the opposite side to their information meetings. It would be like Toyota giving

Honda half of its time on television commercials. The nuclear issue is not a publicly subsidized election campaign with candidates obliged to participate in debates with opponents. Besides, debates seldom happen in Japan during political campaigns anyway, so why suggest that specific interest groups have a duty to offer the public the same?

The writer might have noted the imbalance of power that was obvious in what he wrote about the financing of the two sides' information campaigns. The pro-nuclear side has been given \$376,000 by the nuclear lobby, not a huge sum compared to what is spent in a day to deal with the Fukushima Daiichi ruins, but it is \$376,000 more than what was given to the anti-nuclear lobby. There should be a very clear message evident in the very fact that one side needs to be given public funds to convince the public of its worth, while the other side is financed by volunteers and stirred into action without needing to be hired propagandists.

This disparity just makes it more absurd to suggest that the anti-nuclear lobby has some obligation to debate with the other side and work out some kind of compromise. There have been, in fact, many instances of nuclear opponents showing up at public information meetings, but as soon as their numbers grew too large or their objections too vocal, they were barred from participating. These information meetings are known as *setsumeikai*, or explanatory sessions. Information is designed to flow in one direction only, so the public, and anti-nuclear groups, are not meant to have any input.

In addition to these flaws in the report, the writer quotes some ridiculous illogic from the pro-nuclear side, but fails to question the absurdity of it. For example, a quote from a 1999 JCO report (JCO runs nuclear fuel facilities) on the Tokaimura criticality accident stated:

While attitudes toward nuclear energy have hardened due to the accident that resulted in two deaths, there is also an imbalance because there is societal acceptance of car accidents that result in 10,000 fatalities a year," the report said. General magazines will very rarely publish articles promoting nuclear energy.

Equating other kinds of risk assumption to the risks imposed by nuclear energy is an obvious red herring (distracting and irrelevant analogy), but what is much more amusing is the suggestion that magazines should feel obliged to publish articles promoting nuclear energy. The very word "promotion" suggests a message which must be paid for in some way. There is no eager community of readers and writers who would volunteer to enthusiastically share stories about the wonders of nuclear energy. Nuclear energy is not like surfing or hip-hop music. It is not a hobby that people devote their free time to. Promotion of nuclear energy can be done only by paid propagandists. The suggestion that one kind of private enterprise should voluntarily promote another kind of enterprise is evidence of the sort of narcissistic thinking that nucleocrats engage in: "we know our shit is wonderful, so why do we have to spend all this money to get people to sing our praises?"

In any case, if one is anti-nuclear, there is no compromise possible in which one would say it's alright to have a little bit of nuclear. There is absolutely no reason to hope for anything to come from public discussions with the pro-nuclear lobby. There is this demand that they be "mature and reasonable" by coming to the table to work out a compromise, but this demand itself is an insidious tactic that aims to legitimize that which should not be allowed.

Thus, it was delusional of this journalist to write an opinion piece claiming that opponents of nuclear energy are obliged to engage in debates with the nuclear industry. If a gang of thugs moves into a town and sets up casinos, opium dens and brothels, and manages to convince a segment of the population that the economic stimulus is worth the social disruption, then the people opposed to this intrusion are under no obligation to debate the legitimacy of what has been imposed on them. For them, the whole enterprise is reprehensible, so the act of debating the right of the intruders to be there is the beginning of making

their presence legitimate. And I'm not making this point as an exaggerated comparison. When people allow a radioactive waste factory (often falsely referred to as a "power plant" or an "energy center") into their communities, they are permitting an environmental crime.

The final blow delivered by the author came in the insinuation that a nuclear opponent (not named in the article) who gave a lecture was unreliable because he "admitted that he had no experience in specialized research on radiation." He was quoted as saying, "Even an ordinary citizen like myself can understand that something fearful is occurring just by studying a little," but these words are framed in a way that suggests he should be dismissed as an amateur. The act of asking whether he had done specialized research on radiation was a way of suggesting that ordinary citizens should just leave everything to the state-sanctioned experts, that they could never educate themselves enough to have a say in these matters. The more I thought about this report, the more perplexed I became, but then it occurred to me that maybe there is something going on here that I didn't see at first. Perhaps this is an elaborate act of inter-textual communication, an appeasement of critics and a satire of the sort of news reporting that they like. It is so bad that it could also be seen as a cry for assistance, a coded message from the Asahi Shimbun that tells the world, "Help. We are being held hostage. This is what government and right-wing pressure tactics have led us to write."

Sources:

Satoshi Otani, "Proponents, foes of nuclear energy content with preaching to the converted," *Asahi Shimbun*, May 7, 2015.

Jeff Kingston, "Are Forces of Darkness Gathering in Japan," *The Japan Times*, May 16, 2015.

Tepco: More bid-rigging?

May 19, 2015

Five companies raided over alleged bid-rigging for Tepco contracts

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/05/19/business/corporate-business/five-companies-raided-alleged-bid-rigging-tepco-contracts/#.VVw_pEbwmic

JJI

The Fair Trade Commission raided the offices of five companies on Tuesday, including NEC Corp. and Fujitsu Ltd., amid allegations they rigged bids for maintenance contracts with Tokyo Electric Power Co. The firms, which also include Fuso Dentsu Co. and Oi Electric Co., are suspected of breaching Japan's anti-monopoly laws by colluding to drive up the price of telecommunications equipment maintenance contracts to unreasonable levels, sources familiar with the matter said.

The result was increased electricity fees paid by Tepco customers.

In 2013, the commission issued a cease-and-desist order to more than 40 companies involved in bid-rigging for power cable installation projects.

However, the move appears to have done little to prevent further breaches, with sources saying Tepco faced criticism for failing to adequately address the issue.

In the latest case, the five companies are suspected of having held a number of secret meetings to decide their respective bids and successful bidders for maintenance contracts for Tepco's internal communications networks over the past few years, the sources said.

The market for such contracts is estimated at several billion yen annually.

It is understood the internal communications networks are used by power generation facilities and substations to help ensure stable electricity supply. Network equipment including wireless antennas require regular maintenance work to withstand natural disasters.

Officials at NEC, Fujitsu and Oi Electric said the companies would cooperate with the commission's investigation. An official at Fuso Dentsu confirmed a raid has been carried out.

May 19, 2015

NEC, 4 others suspected of rigging bids for TEPCO orders

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150519p2g00m0dm071000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Japan's antitrust watchdog on Tuesday raided offices of NEC Corp., Fujitsu Ltd. and three other companies over suspected rigging of bids for orders from Tokyo Electric Power Co., sources close to the matter said.

The Japan Fair Trade Commission alleges the five companies selected the lowest bidder and fixed bid prices before tendering bids over several years for TEPCO orders for electric power security communication equipment to check for power supply troubles, the sources said.

In a past bid-rigging scandal involving TEPCO, the watchdog ordered 36 companies in December 2013 to pay a total 740 million yen (\$6.17 million) in fines for rigging bids for power transmission cable.

Extend compensation to businesses?

May 20, 2015

TEPCO may have to pay nuclear compensation to businesses longer

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/05/20/national/tepc-may-have-to-pay-nuclear-compensation-to-businesses-longer/#.VVw_D0bwmic

JJI

The Abe administration and the ruling coalition are working to extend compensation payments by Tokyo Electric Power Co. to businesses affected by the March 2011 nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 plant by one year, according to officials.

In response to strong pressure from the firms affected, the end of compensation payments to businesses that were hit by falling sales or that were forced to suspend operations will be February 2017, instead of the February 2016 limit planned by Tepco, the officials said Tuesday.

This will be included in a set of proposals from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's task force for accelerating reconstruction of the areas struck by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, which will be compiled by the end of this month at the earliest.

The administration is then expected to decide formally on the extension by the end of June.

As of the end of March, Tepco was due to pay a total of ¥465.5 billion in compensation to businesses affected by the nuclear crisis.

Late last year, the program's termination was extended by one year from the initial date of February 2015. Attention has been focused on whether a further extension will be approved to support reconstruction in disaster-hit areas.

TEPCO has over 17,000 tons of uranium. Sell some?

May 19, 2015

Tepco looking to sell some uranium stockpiles to cut costs

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/05/19/business/corporate-business/tepcos-looking-sell-uranium-stockpiles-cut-costs/#.VVw9nEbwmic>

Kyodo

Tokyo Electric Power Co. is planning to sell part of its uranium stockpiles for nuclear power generation in the current business year to cut costs amid uncertainty over the restart of idled nuclear plants, a company document obtained by Kyodo News showed Monday.

Tepco has not consumed uranium since the 2011 nuclear crisis started at its Fukushima No. 1 complex that eventually resulted in all of Japan's nuclear reactors being taken offline amid safety concerns. By reducing the stockpiles, the utility is seeking to slash costs for managing them as it faces funding difficulties stemming from the nuclear crisis.

According to the document, Tepco aims to reduce the amount of uranium to levels prior to the Fukushima disaster by the end of fiscal 2015 through March. The company estimated in the paper it can secure ¥12.3 billion (\$103.13 million) by selling around half of the planned amount.

The utility is hoping to restart by October its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant, located on the Sea of Japan coast in Niigata Prefecture, but the outlook remains unclear due to the ongoing process for safety screening by the regulator and local reluctance to give approval for the resumption.

Major utilities including Tepco procure uranium, which could be diverted to military use, under long-term contracts from overseas suppliers in Canada and elsewhere.

As of the end of March, Tepco had a total of 17,570 tons of uranium (tU), equivalent to the amount used at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant for 10 years, compared with 16,805 tU at the time of the nuclear disaster in March 2011.

The amount would increase to 19,317 tU in fiscal 2015 if the company does not sell some of the stockpile. The utility will likely return it to the suppliers or pay for the costs of uranium enrichment in kind, while it will also consider terminating uranium purchase contracts and reducing purchase volumes to streamline its business, according to the document.

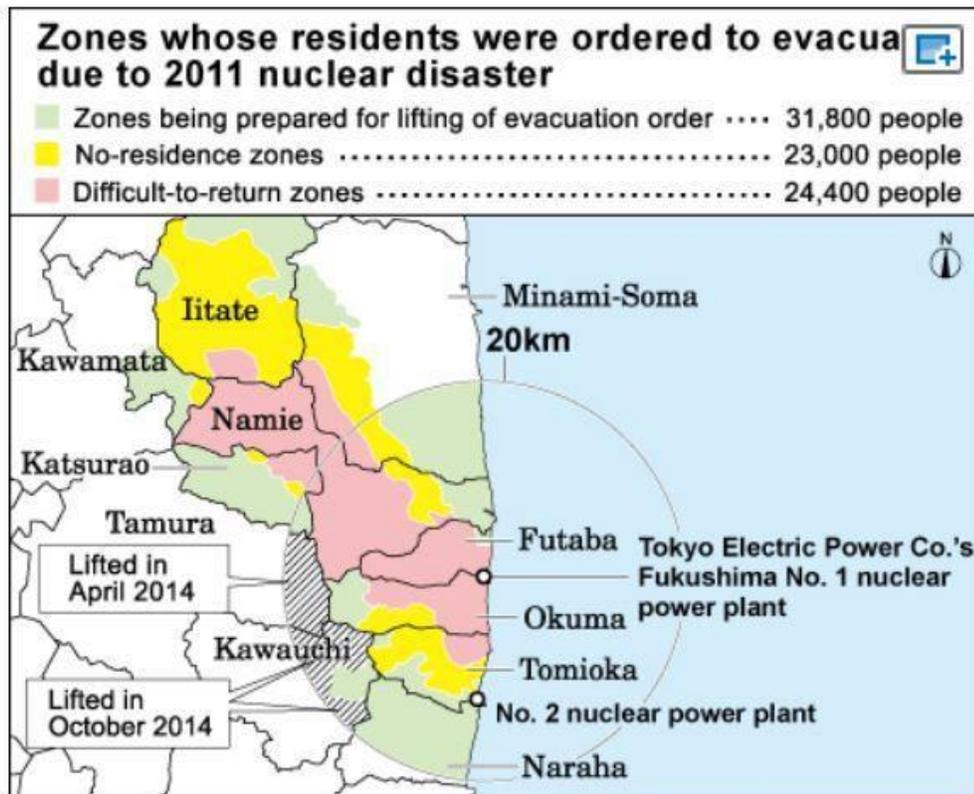
Japan Atomic Power Co. has also taken the rare step of selling some of its uranium, apparently to raise money to repay loans amid its faltering business conditions.

Stopping TEPCO compensation for 55,000 evacuees

May 19, 2015

Ministry plans to end TEPCO compensation to 55,000 Fukushima evacuees in 2018

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201505190055>



The Asahi Shimbun

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The government will instruct Tokyo Electric Power Co. to terminate compensation payments to 54,800 evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2018, regardless of radiation levels in their hometowns, sources said.

The new compensation plan of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is based on the assumption that decontamination work will lower radiation levels and enable the government to lift evacuation orders in those areas, the sources said May 18.

Currently, the homes of about 80,000 evacuees are located in three zones designated by the government in terms of severity of radiation contamination.

Around 31,800 evacuees' homes are in "zones being prepared for the lifting of evacuation order," while 23,000 people have fled their homes in what are now "no-residence zones."

TEPCO currently pays each of these 54,800 evacuees 100,000 yen (about \$834) in compensation a month.

The new plan will affect evacuees from these two zones.

The remaining 24,400 people have homes located in “difficult-to-return zones,” where there are no prospects of lifting the evacuation orders. TEPCO has paid a total of 14.5 million yen to each of these evacuees.

The government’s current guidelines on compensation stipulate that payments should end one year after evacuation orders are lifted.

Under the new plan, the government and ruling parties assume that the evacuation period for people in the first two zones will end “six years after the March 2011 nuclear accident.” That assumption is based on another assumption that decontamination work will be completed by March 2017 and evacuation orders can be called off by that time.

As a result, compensation payments for people from the two zones will end in March 2018. Each of the evacuees will have received a total of 8.4 million yen during the seven years since the accident started at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The current compensation system allows evacuees to receive additional compensation payments if their evacuation periods are extended. Some critics say evacuees are hoping for a continuation of evacuation orders so that they can receive more money.

But the new plan will terminate compensation payments for the two zones in 2018 without exception. If the evacuation order is lifted five years after the nuclear accident, the evacuees from the area can still receive compensation for two more years, even though they are qualified for only one additional year under the current system.

Adoption of the new plan will make it easier for the government to work out support measures for people who return to their hometowns in the two zones, the sources said.

“The lifting of evacuation orders will proceed,” a government official said. “We will be able to construct houses and attract plants and firms (to the areas) more positively.”

However, it is not clear whether radiation levels will drop as expected by March 2018.

Even if evacuation orders remain in place because of delays in decontamination work, the compensation payments will still end in 2018 for the two zones, the sources said.

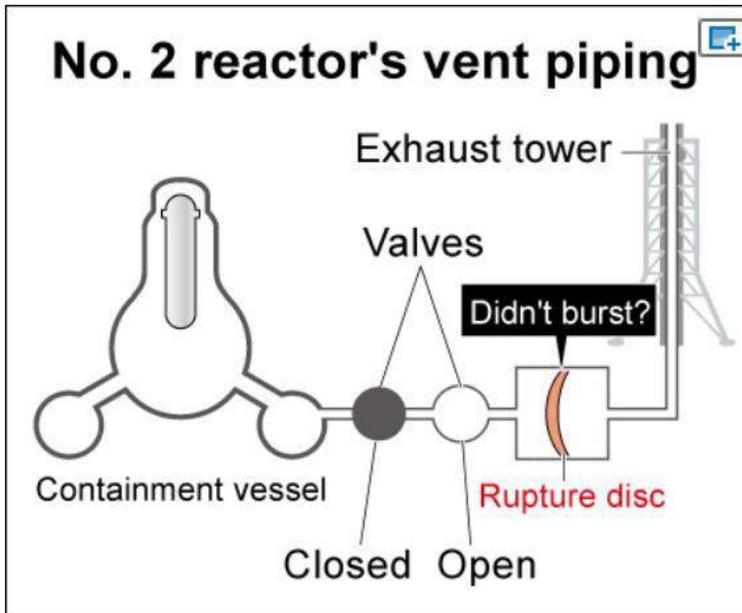
(This article was written by Nobuyoshi Nakamura and Noriyoshi Otsuki, a senior staff writer.)

Venting system apparently failed

May 21, 2015

TEPCO robot finds Fukushima No. 2 reactor pressure venting system failure

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201505210037>



The Asahi Shimbun

By MASANOBU HIGASHIYAMA/ Staff Writer

The venting system designed to release pressure inside the containment vessel of the No. 2 reactor at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant likely failed during the 2011 disaster, the operator of the facility said May 20.

The discovery was made by a robot deployed last October by Tokyo Electric Power Co. to a room in the plant where the venting pipes from the reactor pass.

The magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake that triggered towering tsunami struck on March 11. On March 13 and 14, as the pressure inside the No. 2 reactor was rising, workers at the plant opened valves in its venting system. When the valves are opened, the pressure is supposed to rupture a special disc farther down the pipes that allows it to vent.

TEPCO, until now, was never able to confirm whether the effort was successful.

The robot revealed that the radiation levels around the rupture disc were relatively low, between 0.08 and 0.30 millisievert per hour. Similarly, radiation levels around the valve near the containment vessel were also low, between 0.15 and 0.70 millisievert per hour.

However, a significant amount of radioactive material was found to have been directly released from the damaged containment vessel.

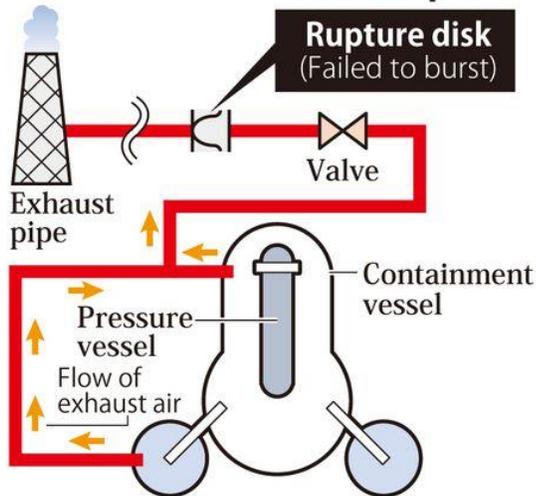
By contrast, strong radiation levels higher than 10 sieverts per hour were detected in areas around the exhaust tower where the pipes of the venting systems for both the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors release their pressure. The readings confirm that the No. 1 reactor's venting system performed as designed.

TEPCO believes that the pressure inside the containment vessel of the No. 2 reactor was not high enough to break the rupture disc when the workers opened the valves, thus the pressure never exited through the exhaust tower.

The company suspects the hydrogen explosion at the No. 3 reactor building caused some of the valves in the No. 2 reactor to close, causing the failure.

Faulty part may have caused Fukushima nuke plant venting failure

Venting at No. 2 reactor at Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant



<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150520p2a00m0na011000c.html>

Venting of the No. 2 reactor at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant may have failed due to a part inside the pipes failing to operate, it was learned from the results of an investigation by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) on May 19.

During the March 2011 disaster at the Fukushima plant, the No. 2 reactor no longer had power for its cooling system and pressure inside it rose to abnormally high levels. Plant operator TEPCO attempted to vent the reactor to lower the pressure, but the venting did not go smoothly. The company has been investigating what went wrong with the venting in order to clear up the cause of the disaster.

The part that may have failed to operate was a "rupture disk," located inside a pipe leading from the nuclear reactor's containment vessel to an exhaust pipe. Meant to keep radiation from leaking outside, the disk is supposed to break after a certain level of pressure is applied to it. However, in its investigation TEPCO found no evidence of radioactive contamination inside the pipe around the rupture disk, suggesting that the disk did not rupture and the vented gas was trapped in front of it.

Radioactive gas is thought to have leaked directly from the No. 2 reactor's containment vessel, and it is estimated as having leaked the most radiation out of the No. 1 through 3 reactors.

More Fukushima disaster findings revealed

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150520_20.html

May 20, 2015 - Updated 07:22 UTC+2

Tokyo Electric Power Company says it is highly likely it had failed to vent a vessel containing one of the reactors at its Fukushima Daiichi plant in the days after the March 2011 disaster.

TEPCO attempted to vent the Number 2 reactor container to release water vapor and radioactive materials and prevent it from being damaged.

The reactor suffered damage 4 days after the accident, as the pressure inside did not drop. The damage is thought to have caused the release of a massive amount of radioactive materials, forcing most plant workers to temporarily evacuate.

TEPCO has been investigating the accident, focusing on dozens of points that had remained unconfirmed. The finding on the venting of the Number 2 reactor is one of the 4 points the utility revealed on Wednesday.

TEPCO now says the venting procedure may have failed because in its investigation no high levels of radiation were detected in piping connected to a device called a "rupture disk". Water vapor and radioactive materials were to pass through the disk after venting.

This was the first time for the likelihood of the venting having failed to be substantiated by the actual situation at the site.

TEPCO says it will continue to investigate how the radioactive release occurred at the Number 2 reactor. It also says it will continue on-site investigations and find out the details of the situation more closely, and use the findings to secure the safe decommissioning of the reactors.

Japan appeals to WTO

May 22, 2015

Japan takes South Korea to WTO over Fukushima-related food import restrictions

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/business/AJ201505220017>

REUTERS

GENEVA--Japan launched a trade complaint at the World Trade Organization on May 21 to challenge South Korea's import bans and additional testing requirements for Japanese food after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

South Korea expressed regret at Japan's action and said its ban on some Japanese seafood was necessary and reflected safety concerns.

Japan says several measures taken by South Korea violate the WTO's sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) agreement and Seoul has failed to justify its trade restrictions as required, the WTO said in a statement.

Under WTO rules, South Korea has 60 days in which to deal with Japan's concerns in bilateral talks. After that, Japan could ask the WTO to adjudicate on the matter.

"In upcoming talks with Japan, we plan to explain fully that the import ban is necessary for people's safety, and actively deal with Japan over the issue they raised based upon WTO's dispute settlement procedures," South Korea's trade, agriculture, foreign affairs and other related ministries said in a joint statement. Details of Japan's complaint were not immediately available, but Japan has repeatedly raised the issue in committee meetings at the WTO, where it has also voiced concerns about Fukushima-related trade restrictions imposed by Taiwan and China.

Japan's representative told the WTO's SPS committee in March that radioactive levels in Japanese food had declined substantially since the accident. It noted that the United States, Australia, the European Union, Singapore and Vietnam had all lifted or eased their Fukushima-related restrictions.

South Korea extended its ban on Japanese fishery imports in September 2013 to cover imports from eight Japanese prefectures, including Fukushima.

Last October, the Japanese representative at the WTO committee said contamination levels in more than 99 percent of food items were below standard limits, and strict measures prevented the sale or export of any food exceeding those limits.

South Korea's representative told the same meeting that its restrictions were in line with the WTO rules, but Japan had not provided it with sufficient data for an objective and science-based risk assessment.

Japan's representative also cited an assessment from the International Atomic Energy Agency in September 2014, which found its measures to deal with contamination were appropriate, according to minutes of the WTO committee.

The average annual value of South Korean imports of Japanese fish and seafood was \$96 million in 2012-2014, less than half the average of \$213 million in 2006-2010, according from data from the International Trade Centre in Geneva.

Concerns about contaminated food

May 21, 2015

Japan food exports to Taiwan contain cesium

<http://www.beyondnuclear.org/food/2015/5/21/japan-food-exports-to-taiwan-contain-cesium.html>

May 21, 2015

In the wake of the continuing Fukushima catastrophe, countries such as Korea and China are concerned that contaminated food is being exported from Japan. In a recent report by SimplyInfo.org, data from Taiwan showing food imports (primarily green tea) from Japan have contained radioactive cesium levels below Taiwan's limit of 370 Bq/kg, but above Japan's limit of 100 Bq/kg. The monitoring program in Taiwan is spot-checking these imports, so this contaminated tea was discovered in only a fraction of food coming from Japan, meaning additionally contaminated food could have been missed. In addition, Taiwan had already banned food from areas in Japan considered most contaminated, so this food was imported from areas in Japan considered "safe". Taiwan tested teas that were harvested after the Fukushima catastrophe began. However, in 2011 and 2012, the US Food Drug Administration only tested tea varieties that would have been harvested in 2010, thereby having escaped contamination, making the FDA tea tests completely meaningless.

This unsettling discovery demonstrates that **people in other countries are being sold food that is contaminated above Japan's allowable limit, but below that of the receiving country**—a concern that has been expressed time-and-again by Fukushima Fallout Awareness Network (FFAN) of which Beyond Nuclear is a coalition partner. While the allowable limit of radioactive cesium in Japan is 100 Bq/kg, in Taiwan it is 370 Bq/kg, and in the U.S. it is 1200 Bq/kg with **no real explanation as to why, say, a pregnant woman in the U.S. should be allowed to ingest 12 times the radioactive poison of a pregnant woman in Japan.** These inconsistent limits may not make biological sense, but they do make sense when taken in cont ext of this statement by ICRP (International Commission on Radiological Protection--the body which generates statements governments rely on to set radiation exposure standards.) **“There may be a situation where a sustainable agricultural economy is not possible without placing contaminated food on the market. As such foods will be subject to market forces, this will necessitate an effective communication strategy to overcome the negative reactions from consumers outside the affected areas.”** This is the price of the continued use and catastrophic meltdowns of nuclear power.

Japan has filed a complaint with the WTO over Korean Fukushima-related import bans and additional testing requirements, demonstrating that **countries trying to protect themselves from contaminated food could be facing international adjudication through the WTO.** Japan told the WTO in October 2014 “more than 99 percent of food items were below standard limits, and strict measures prevented the sale or export of any food exceeding those limits.” But since **measurement of food is so spotty**, both from the importer and exporter, a statement like this is not only meaningless, but deceptive. Further, **if every country's contamination limits are different, in reality, there are no standard limits, no matter what the WTO or Japan contends.**

If the Trans-Pacific Partnership is approved, these penalties could get a lot worse (link to Part 1 of a 5 part FFAN series on the TPP and contaminated food from Japan) and could include taxpayer compensation for corporate lost revenue due to such disputes.

But the radioisotope cesium isn't the only concern. **There is also strontium.** Strontium-90 is much more difficult to measure than cesium-137. To avoid this inconvenience, strontium is often assumed or calculated to be in a ratio with cesium-137 such that a certain amount of measurable cesium would have a known accompanying smaller amount of strontium-90. Originally for contamination in Japan, strontium content was thought to be 10% of whatever the cesium-137 content was. However, after testing food in Japan, researchers have discovered that the initial ratio of strontium to cesium-137 is *more than two times* the amount of cesium-137. More importantly, it also means that the various country limits set for radioactive cesium in food may no longer protect from the increased health impact of the strontium-90 that may be lurking in imports from Japan.

Premature lifting of evacuation orders

May 22, 2015

LDP wants to let evacuees move back to areas tainted with 50 millisieverts or less by March 2017

JJI

A team from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party is requesting that Fukushima's nuclear evacuees be allowed to return to parts of the prefecture **where the annual radiation dose is 50 millisieverts or less by March 2017.**

The proposal to prematurely lift the nuclear evacuation orders was made Thursday by the LDP's Headquarters for Accelerating Reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake. The conservative party will submit this and other related measures to its leader, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, later this month after consulting with coalition partner Komeito.

The LDP's proposal covers two of the three restricted areas around the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, which tainted much of the prefecture during the three core meltdowns triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

One of the areas has an estimated annual radiation dose of 20 millisieverts or less. It has been designated as an area where residents can prepare for evacuation orders to be lifted.

The other has an estimated annual radiation dose of between 20 and 50 millisieverts.

The 55,000 or so registered residents in the two areas are only allowed entry for a handful of activities, including short visits and business.

The third restricted area, which won't see its evacuation status lifted by March 2017, is the most heavily polluted and is estimated to have an annual radiation dose beyond 50 millisieverts. The area, which has about 22,000 registered residents, remains a no-go zone.

The LDP team said the government should take steps to pave the way for a smooth transition in the two less-polluted areas by **accelerating decontamination work and rebuilding infrastructure.**

Tokyo Electric Power Co. is paying ¥100,000 in consolation money to each displaced resident in the two areas every month. **The payments are to be terminated one year after the evacuation orders are lifted.**

The LDP team proposed that Tepco continue making the payments until March 2018, regardless of when the evacuation orders are lifted for the two areas.

Last year, Japan lifted evacuation orders in parts of Tamura and the village of Kawauchi that had been included in the least-polluted of the three areas. The proposed uniform expiration rules for the consolation payments should also apply to Tamura and Kawauchi residents, said key headquarters official Shinji Inoue, former state minister of the environment.

The LDP team also said the two years through fiscal 2016 should be designated as a period of intensive assistance to help residents restore their independence in their hometowns.

The government should create a new assistance organization for that purpose, the team said, urging the government to instruct Tepco to compensate a wider range of businesses damaged by the nuclear disaster.

The team also said disaster-affected municipalities should cover a portion of the costs for some reconstruction projects. **So far, the central government, which had placed responsibility for both promoting nuclear energy and overseeing the industry under the same ministry for decades, has been footing the entire bill.**

No place for complacency, says IAEA

May 25, 2015

IAEA report on Fukushima slams lack of tsunami preparedness despite awareness of threat

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/05/25/national/iaea-report-fukushima-debacle-slams-lack-tsunami-preparedness-despite-awareness-threat/#.VWLTDObwmic>

Kyodo

VIENNA – The International Atomic Energy Agency criticized Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Japanese regulatory authorities for their failure to prevent the 2011 Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster despite knowing the risk of large tsunami hitting the facility, according to a copy of an IAEA report.

The U.N. nuclear watchdog said in the final report on the nuclear disaster triggered by a huge earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, obtained Sunday, that “the Fukushima Daiichi NPP (nuclear power plant) had some weaknesses which were not fully evaluated by a probabilistic safety assessment, as recommended by the IAEA safety standards.”

The paper, compiled by around 180 experts from 42 countries, is set to be submitted to the IAEA’s annual meeting in September after its board examines the 240-page summary in June.

The report addressing the causes and consequences of the Fukushima disaster as well as lessons learned is expected to serve as a reference for nuclear safety measures worldwide.

The IAEA said a new approach applied between 2007 and 2009 postulated a magnitude-8.3 quake off the coast of Fukushima that could lead to tsunami of around 15 meters hitting the No. 1 plant and inundating the main buildings.

Despite the analysis, Tepco, the old Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, which oversaw Japan’s nuclear industry at that time, and other organizations did not act, deciding instead that “further studies and investigations were needed.”

“Tepco did not take interim compensatory measures in response to these increased estimates of tsunami height, nor did NISA require Tepco to act promptly on these results,” the report says.

Prior to the accident, there was not sufficient consideration of low probability, high consequence external events which remained undetected. This was in part because of the basic assumption in Japan, reinforced over many decades, that the robustness of the technical design of the nuclear plants would provide sufficient protection against postulated risks,” it says.

As a result, Tepco did not implement a sufficient safety assessment as recommended by the IAEA and lacked protection for the emergency diesel generators, battery rooms and other vital systems against tsunami-caused flooding, the paper adds.

“The operators were not fully prepared for the multiunit loss of power and the loss of cooling caused by the tsunami. Although Tepco had developed severe accident management guidelines, they did not cover such an unlikely combination of events,” the report says, also pointing to the lack of appropriate training for workers at the plant.

The IAEA called on countries that use, or plan to use, nuclear power to make continuous efforts to improve safety based on new findings and to be prepared to cope with natural disasters more severe than those predicted when nuclear power plants were designed.

“There can be no grounds for complacency about nuclear safety in any country. Some of the factors that contributed to the Fukushima Daiichi accident were not unique to Japan,” the report warns.

New president for Japan Atomic Agency

May 27, 2015

New atomic agency chief grilled

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150527_14.html

May 27, 2015 - Updated 00:32 UTC+2

The new president of the Japan Atomic Energy Agency has been grilled on nuclear plant management.

Toshio Kodama, a former vice president of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, took up the post of agency president in April. He met with the commissioners of Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority, or NRA, on Tuesday.

NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka referred to the troubled Monju fast-breeder reactor the agency operates in Fukui Prefecture.

The authority has effectively banned test runs at Monju since May 2013, following a series of problems, including missed safety checks, at the reactor.

Tanaka noted there's still no prospect of lifting the ban. He asked Kodama whether agency officials understand the Monju reactor has many security issues that differ from those affecting light-water reactors. He suggested the agency should overhaul its management practices.

He also spoke about the agency's delayed efforts to make plutonium and other highly radioactive waste solid and more stable at a spent nuclear fuel-reprocessing plant in Ibaraki Prefecture, north of Tokyo.

An NRA commissioner said agency officials should seriously consider how best to dispose of nuclear waste and decommission nuclear facilities after 20 or 30 years.

Kodama told reporters the authority's assessment was tough but understandable. He said his organization must follow the NRA's recommendations.

High costs fo renewables as an excuse for nukes

May 27, 2015

Nuclear power crucial as renewable energy too costly, ministry says

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201505270040

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The high cost of renewable energy means Japan has no choice but to rely on nuclear power to provide between 20 and 22 percent of its energy by 2030, according to an industry ministry report. That would be a small drop in the reliance on nuclear power from the levels before the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The shift away from nuclear energy to renewables, including solar power, will generate “pressure for drastic rise in energy cost,” stated the report released May 26. The ministry, a staunch supporter of nuclear energy, concluded it is the least expensive method of power generation.

While nuclear energy should provide between 20 and 22 percent of Japan's electricity, renewable energy should account for 22 to 24 percent in fiscal 2030.

About 27 percent of Japan's electricity was provided by nuclear power on a yearly average in the decade up to the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The proposal also said that nuclear power was required to keep power costs at a manageable level for corporations and households and also to enable Japan to reduce greenhouse gases to levels set by advanced economies in the West.

The draft report was released by an expert committee at the Natural Resources and Energy Agency headed by Masahiro Sakane, a senior adviser at Komatsu Ltd. It will be finalized at a meeting of the committee in early June and adopted as the government's official energy-mix plan in July at the earliest after going through a public-comment phase.

All the nation's reactors were shut down after the disaster, and hurdles remain high for the government to restart many of them due to strong public opposition and safety concerns of local governments.

In its Strategic Energy Plan released in April 2014, the government underscored its intention to push for reactor restarts but said “dependency on nuclear power generation will be lowered to the extent possible.”

At a news conference April 26, the industry minister Yoichi Miyazawa said that high energy costs and other concerns “will be all solved by increasing the ratio of nuclear power.”

The minister emphasized that the 20-22 percentage scenario was the minimum possible reliance on nuclear energy.

While the Strategic Energy Plan projected that renewable energy must account for far more than 20 percent of Japan's future plan, the draft report pointed out that solar and wind power output are particularly unstable.

The proposal states that Japan should rely on just 7 percent of energy from solar power and 1.7 percent from wind power.

During the committee sessions, Yukari Takamura, a professor of international law at Nagoya University, and two other members submitted opinion papers that asserted the discussions at the committee do not fully address the need to reduce nuclear energy and increase dependency on renewable energy.

But the figures in the draft proposal are likely to be approved in the committee's next meeting in early June.

(This article was written by Tomoyoshi Otsu and Kenichiro Shino.)

See : http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201504280045

IAEA blames TEPCO and Japanese government

May 29, 2015

IAEA blames TEPCO's poor preparations for Fukushima disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201505290052>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The U.N. nuclear watchdog squarely puts the blame for the Fukushima nuclear crisis on the plant operator's inadequate preparations against natural disasters and severe accidents.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. failed to carefully consider the risks of an earthquake and tsunami in advance, the International Atomic Energy Agency states in its latest report.

Although it had been estimated before the accident that a possible magnitude-8.3 quake off Fukushima would spawn a 15-meter tsunami, for example, TEPCO had not taken any steps to protect against such an event. In fact, the utility had estimated the highest possible tsunami at just 5.7 meters.

On March 11, 2011, towering tsunami waves measuring up to 15.5 meters smashed into the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant following the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake.

The IAEA will hold a meeting in June on the report, which was compiled by about 180 experts from 42 countries. It is then expected to formally present the document to its members at its plenary session in September.

The report begins with IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano pointing out TEPCO had insufficiently prepared for a major earthquake leading to a nuclear accident.

He also notes that some factors behind the nuclear crisis are not unique to Japan, and that learning lessons from the Fukushima crisis and patiently ironing out problems is the key to a better safety culture.

The report also criticizes the now-dissolved Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, which told TEPCO to take protective measures against a massive tsunami in the future and not immediately.

As the Fukushima crisis progressed, meltdowns occurred at the No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3 reactors at the plant. TEPCO had not considered a scenario in which the power supply and cooling functions would be lost simultaneously at more than one reactor, according to the report.

Also, while TEPCO had created a manual on how to respond to a severe accident, the company had not given workers proper training that would have enabled them to address the situation worsening over time. In addition, inadequate equipment was in place to deal with emergencies.

The report also lays into the Japanese government as its standards and policies in safety assessments and responses to severe accidents were at a lower level than in other countries.

And it says Japan had failed to formulate a plan to protect evacuating residents from radiation if a nuclear accident and a major natural disaster occurred simultaneously.

(This article was written by Toshio Kawada and Shunsuke Kimura.)

May 25, 2015

IAEA report on Fukushima slams lack of tsunami preparedness despite awareness of threat

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/05/25/national/iaea-report-fukushima-debacle-slams-lack-tsunami-preparedness-despite-awareness-threat/#.VWLTDObwmic>

Kyodo

VIENNA – The International Atomic Energy Agency criticized Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Japanese regulatory authorities for their failure to prevent the 2011 Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster despite knowing the risk of large tsunami hitting the facility, according to a copy of an IAEA report.

The U.N. nuclear watchdog said in the final report on the nuclear disaster triggered by a huge earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, obtained Sunday, that “the Fukushima Daiichi NPP (nuclear power plant) had some weaknesses which were not fully evaluated by a probabilistic safety assessment, as recommended by the IAEA safety standards.”

The paper, compiled by around 180 experts from 42 countries, is set to be submitted to the IAEA’s annual meeting in September after its board examines the 240-page summary in June.

The report addressing the causes and consequences of the Fukushima disaster as well as lessons learned is expected **to serve as a reference for nuclear safety measures worldwide.**

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Despite the analysis, Tepco, the old Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, which oversaw Japan’s nuclear industry at that time, and other organizations did not act, deciding instead that “further studies and investigations were needed.”

“Tepco did not take interim compensatory measures in response to these increased estimates of tsunami height, nor did NISA require Tepco to act promptly on these results,” the report says.

Prior to the accident, there was not sufficient consideration of low probability, high consequence external events which remained undetected. This was in part because of the basic assumption in Japan, reinforced over many decades, that the robustness of the technical design of the nuclear plants would provide sufficient protection against postulated risks,” it says.

As a result, **Tepco did not implement a sufficient safety assessment as recommended by the IAEA and lacked protection for the emergency diesel generators, battery rooms and other vital systems against tsunami-caused flooding,** the paper adds.

“The operators were not fully prepared for the multiunit loss of power and the loss of cooling caused by the tsunami. Although Tepco had developed severe accident management guidelines, they did not cover such an unlikely combination of events,” the report says, also pointing to the lack of appropriate training for workers at the plant.

The IAEA called on countries that use, or plan to use, nuclear power to make continuous efforts to improve safety based on new findings and to be prepared to cope with natural disasters more severe than those predicted when nuclear power plants were designed.

“There can be no grounds for complacency about nuclear safety in any country. **Some of the factors that contributed to the Fukushima Daiichi accident were not unique to Japan,**” the report warns.

About Japan's energy mix draft

June 1, 2015

Some experts demanded less use of nuke power

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150601_26.html

Jun. 1, 2015 - Updated 10:58 UTC+2

In a discussion about the final draft plan on Japan's future energy sources, several experts have called for using less nuclear power.

The 14-member panel endorsed on Monday the draft for Japan's energy plan for fiscal 2030. It aims to set the country's nuclear power dependence at 20 to 22 percent of total energy.

Earlier, three of the panel members lodged a written objection against the panel's draft plan. They said it failed to meet Japan's policy to reduce as much as possible its reliance on atomic energy.

Their paper said the ratio is based on the scenario the operational lifespan of Japan's nuclear reactors will be extended beyond their standard of 40 years.

The experts said the use of renewable energy, set at 22 to 24 percent in the draft, should be raised to at least 30 percent by introducing more solar and wind power.

During Monday's meeting, some members proposed that renewable energy be available for use when nuclear plants cannot provide sufficient energy.

Others said the use of nuclear power should be reduced to meet public expectations. They said **priority should be attached to safety**, and existing power plants be replaced by new state-of-the-art nuclear facilities.

Industry ministry officials overseeing the panel said that **no plan is in place to build new nuclear reactors or replace old ones with new ones.**

They said some of the plants will be put into use beyond the operational lifespan, but with greater safety levels and higher operating rates.

The plan was ultimately endorsed by the panel members. The final draft proposes that once the plan is officially adopted it **be reviewed every 3 years.**

Govt. panel endorses energy mix draft plan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150601_24.html

Jun. 1, 2015 - Updated 09:33 UTC+2

A panel of experts on Monday endorsed the final draft plan submitted by industry ministry officials on Japan's electricity needs in the future.

The key issue is the balance of nuclear power, fossil fuels and renewables.

The plan indicates nuclear power should contribute 20 to 22 percent of total energy by fiscal 2030. The figure was about 28 percent before the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2011.

The plan also calls for Japan to more than double its reliance on renewable energy sources to up to 24 percent.

Renewables accounted for about 10 percent of total supply in fiscal 2013.

Ministry officials say they will collect comments from the public. They will officially decide on the energy plan as early as July.

Greenpeace on IAEA's report of Fukushima accident

Source : Greenpeace

<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/news/Blogs/nuclear-reaction/IAEA-Fukushima-Daiichi-accident-report/blog/53055/>

Greenpeace releases confidential IAEA Fukushima-Daiichi accident report

Blogpost by Justin McKeating - 1 June, 2015 at 13:30 Add comment

The International Atomic Energy Agency report fails to accurately reflect the scale and consequences of the Fukushima disaster.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's Board of Governors meets on June the 8th to discuss its confidential Fukushima-Daiichi Accident Summary Report. The report describes itself as 'an assessment of the causes and consequences of the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan that began on 11 March 2011.'

Greenpeace has received a copy of the report and we made it public last week. We've also conducted an initial analysis of the report and our findings are not good.

Yukiya Amano, the IAEA Director General says the report is 'an authoritative, factual and balanced assessment, addressing the causes and consequences of the accident, as well as lessons learned.'

Yet our experts find it to be full of inaccuracies, uncertainties, and that it fails to address several highly important issues. We've sent our findings to Mr Amano.

Here are some examples.

- The IAEA admits that radiation monitoring was not working properly in the days immediately after the Fukushima disaster began.
- Despite this uncertainty, the report downplays the health risks to the disaster's many victims.
- This means that the estimates of the levels of radiation the people of Fukushima were exposed to cannot be trusted.
- The IAEA's analysis of the new safety regulations in Japan are superficial at best, and they offer no evidence in the report that the Japanese nuclear industry is operating to the global highest standards of nuclear safety.
- The reality is that there are major flaws in nuclear regulation in Japan with seismic and other threats to nuclear plants safety ignored or underestimated.
- The report dismisses the environmental impact of the disaster on animal life despite scientific investigations finding measurable effects on the region's fauna.
- The report fails to acknowledge the uncertainties that still surround the causes of the disaster. Much of the critical systems inside the reactors that melted down have not yet been inspected.

These are just some of our initial findings. There are more to come.

(You can read our full analysis of the report here. The five part IAEA report is here: part one, part two, part three, part four, part five.)

So we see, as we saw in the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the IAEA trying to create a narrative that minimizes the health and environmental impacts of Fukushima, while emphasizing that lessons are being learned, including in making nuclear safety regulation more effective.

In short, the IAEA is moving to protect the nuclear industry instead of the people whose lives have been destroyed by the Fukushima disaster and those who may be affected by future nuclear accidents.

This is not a surprise, a central role of the IAEA is to promote the global expansion of nuclear power. The fact that all commercial nuclear reactors in Japan – 43 in total – remain shutdown is a direct challenge to the IAEA's mission. That is the context in which the IAEA report must be seen.

After four years, the disaster in Fukushima is still unfolding and will take many decades to address. If the work to clean up the massive damage done is to be carried out effectively and future accidents avoided as much as possible, the IAEA must demonstrate that it can change the way it operates and quickly.

The IAEA at present serves only the interests of the nuclear industry and its drive for profit at the expense of the people who have pay the ultimate price for nuclear power's failures.

Greenpeace is calling on Mr Amano and the IAEA to suspend their consideration of the report's findings. An open and transparent process must be established that considers the views of the people of Japan, as well as independent scientists. We stand ready to meet with representatives of the IAEA to discuss our serious concerns.

Justin McKeating is a nuclear blogger for Greenpeace International, based in the UK.

Durability in doubt but hose not replaced

June 2, 2015

Hose leaking radioactive water not replaced

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150602_13.html

Jun. 2, 2015 - Updated 02:46 UTC+2

Officials at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant say a hose that leaked radioactive water was left untended **even though its durability was in doubt.**

The leak of highly radioactive wastewater was detected on Friday. Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, estimates that **7 to 15 tons of water leaked from a crack in the hose, some into the plant's port.**

Water sampled from 4 locations inside the port turned up the highest levels of radioactive substances since monitoring began 2 years ago.

Company officials say the crack in the hose was caused by stress from excessive bending that went beyond the permissible level set by its maker.

TEPCO had been replacing the same type of hose at other parts of the plant due to doubts about its durability.

But the one that leaked was left untouched since it was placed at a site where workers were busy building a wall of frozen soil around the nuclear complex to keep groundwater from seeping into the reactor buildings.

No clear rules for patrols were in place at the site. **A worker passing by happened to notice the leak.**

TEPCO plans to speed up work to replace the hoses with stronger ones. It also plans to draw up a new manual to ensure proper monitoring when the hoses are used.

Will South Korea lift the ban?

June 2, 2015

S.Korea agrees to talks over food import ban

Jun. 2, 2015 - Updated 05:53 UTC+2

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150602_20.html

Japan's fisheries minister has expressed hope that South Korea will lift its ban on fishery imports from areas affected by the 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

South Korea has banned all imports of fishery products from 8 Japanese prefectures, including Fukushima, since September 2013.

On Tuesday, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters that South Korea informed Japan last Friday that it will agree to bilateral talks in Geneva, Switzerland, based on a World Trade Organization agreement. Japan requested the meeting last month.

Hayashi said under the WTO rules, negotiations should start within 30 days of a request.

He added that the government will step up efforts to get South Korea to lift the ban, even as a date for the talks is being arranged.

TEPCO lies again on wastewater handling

June 3, 2015

NRA not informed of tainted water transfer

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Jun. 3, 2015 - Updated 13:53 UTC+2

The operator of the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant is facing censure for transferring wastewater that was possibly more radioactive than it originally stated. The company failed to notify Japan's nuclear regulator of the change.

In May, officials found that water sampled at 4 sites at the plant's port briefly exceeded levels of radioactivity seen previously in the 2 years since monitoring began.

It's believed the contaminated water came from a cracked and leaking hose inside the plant. The water from the hose flowed into a channel that led to the port.

Initially, Tokyo Electric Power Company said the hose contained wastewater that was a byproduct of treating contaminated rainwater.

But on Wednesday it was revealed at a meeting of the Nuclear Regulation Authority that **the utility had begun adding other highly radioactive wastewater to the water since mid-May.**

TEPCO says that as a result the wastewater in the hose was likely more radioactive than it initially declared.

Some of the water in the hose was groundwater mixed with extremely highly contaminated water that had pooled in the plant's basement.

The hose cracked from being bent beyond the operational limit set by the maker. The utility had also failed to replace the hose despite questions about its durability.

NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka condemned the utility for its utter failure to control the wastewater. He ordered the company to continue monitoring and reporting on its handling of wastewater.

TEPCO lies again on wastewater handling (2)

June 4, 2015

NRA rebukes TEPCO for failure to contain radioactive Fukushima water

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201506040105>



Rows of tanks holding contaminated water at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Japan's nuclear watchdog had harsh words for Tokyo Electric Power Co. over its failure to implement a comprehensive strategy to plug leaks of contaminated water at its crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"(TEPCO) has failed to manage (contaminated water) properly," said Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, at a regularly scheduled meeting on June 3. "It lacks a strategic approach in addressing the contaminated water issue."

Tanaka's remarks followed the recent revelation that an estimated 7 to 15 tons of highly radioactive water leaked from a hose that was used to transfer contaminated water from storage tanks to a treatment facility. The leak was discovered on May 29.

The incident was just the latest in a spate of similar mishaps that have plagued the plant.

TEPCO announced on June 1 that the escaped water contained 1.1 million becquerels of beta ray-emitting radioactive materials per liter. The radioactive water apparently made its way to the sea through a ditch, according to the company.

The leak likely occurred because the condition of the hose had deteriorated. In the part where the water escaped, the hose was bent at a far sharper angle than is allowed under regulations, the company said. TEPCO said it did not replace the hose with a more durable one even though it was aware of the potential danger that could result from aging. **It had not checked the hose since installing it in October 2013.** Tanaka rebuked the utility for failing to replace it, saying, "(TEPCO) should be held deeply responsible." An official with the NRA who investigated the incident also revealed at the meeting that **TEPCO had failed to notify the authorities before the leak that the tanks holding water that was scheduled for treatment included highly contaminated water.**

The heavy contamination resulted from tons of groundwater making contact with melted nuclear fuel in the reactor buildings.

Utilities and NRA at odds over faults

June 4, 2015

Nuclear watchdog, plant operators wide apart on risks of faults

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201506040129>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Electric utilities and the nation's nuclear watchdog are at odds over the "science" used to calculate the risks of underground faults at nuclear power plants.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority sticks to the principle that has been applied since before the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster: Faults should be considered "active" unless they are scientifically confirmed to be inactive.

Utilities are banned from operating or constructing reactor buildings and other important facilities directly above active faults.

But the companies, which have applied for NRA approval to restart reactors across the country, say the NRA's methods are "unscientific" and have provided no solid evidence to back its claims about active faults. The utilities said the authority should listen to the opinions of other experts.

Indeed, the limited amount of reliable data in surveying faults beneath nuclear power facilities has prolonged the periods for the NRA's safety screenings of the idle reactors.

But a senior NRA official said the utilities tend to deny the existence of active faults and underestimate the effects of such structures.

"They are still trying to only gather data favorable to them and present to authorities the minimum possible impact," the official said.

In May, an expert panel of the NRA said the possibility of the Shika nuclear power plant in Ishikawa Prefecture standing directly above active faults was real.

The judgment effectively bans Hokuriku Electric Power Co. from restarting the No. 1 reactor at the plant. If the company cannot overturn the NRA's decision, it will have to decommission the reactor.

Under stricter safety standards introduced in July 2013, faults that have possibly shifted during the past 120,000 to 130,000 years are defined as active, the same as in the older criteria.

The new regulations also require utilities to estimate the largest possible shaking that could hit their facilities based on data concerning active faults and other geological features, and reflect the results in their earthquake-resistance measures.

But there is no clear proof that the geological faults beneath the Shika plant are active. The four panel members said it is most "reasonable" to consider the faults as active.

The committee is expected to soon compile its draft report.

One focus of the debate surrounded a sketch of the geological structure under the nuclear plant made at the time of its construction.

The NRA noted that the cross-section of the underground soil shows a wavy stratum on bedrock--a structure typical of an active fault.

The panel attempted to examine whether newer strata were affected by the fault to make a more accurate decision. But the newer layers were scraped away for the construction of the plant. And a photo taken before they were removed was too blurry to be of much help.

The committee examined the geologic formation around the removed layers but could not find any strata clearly showing when the fault moved.

Hokuriku Electric is arguing that the drawing provides zero evidence of the existence of an active fault. For Tohoku Electric Power Co.'s Higashidori nuclear power plant in Aomori Prefecture, a report by an expert panel of the NRA said it is impossible to make a clear judgment on whether some faults running under the plant are active.

The NRA also said in its draft report released in May that faults beneath the Mihama plant in Fukui Prefecture, operated by Kansai Electric Power Co., are highly likely inactive. But the NRA said it will continue studying the relation between the faults under the facility and nearby active faults, as well as other factors.

The authority worked out a draft examination report in May concerning the safety screening of Shikoku Electric Power Co.'s Ikata power plant in Ehime Prefecture.

The Median tectonic line, a huge active fault, runs near the facility. A 480-kilometer section of the line would likely affect the nuclear plant during seismic activity, experts say. But there is no established method to estimate the effects of such a huge active fault.

Before compiling the draft report, the NRA and Shikoku Electric spent more than a year discussing the likely impact on the nuclear plant in a possible earthquake based on two scenarios: smaller faults move separately or they shift as a large, single structure.

Kazuki Koketsu, a seismology professor at the University of Tokyo's Earthquake Research Institute who used to be involved in safety screenings of nuclear facilities, said that making a definitive decision on the activeness of faults is a tricky business.

"There are many factors that make it difficult to accurately estimate fault activities, so a prediction could later prove wrong," Koketsu said. "The related parties should recognize that meeting the minimum standards does not ensure safety."

Pro-nuke Aomori Governor re-elected

June 7, 2015

Aomori's pro-nuclear Gov. Shingo Mimura returned for fourth term

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/06/07/national/politics-diplomacy/aomoris-pro-nuclear-gov-shingo-mimura-returned-for-fourth-term/#.VXRfBkbwmos>

Kyodo

AOMORI – Aomori Gov. Shingo Mimura cruised to a fourth term in office Sunday by defeating a candidate backed by the Japanese Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party, according to Kyodo News projections.

Mimura, 59, supported by the local chapter of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito, the LDP's junior coalition partner, secured **broad support in the prefecture, including from labor unions in the power industry.**

During his campaign, the governor signaled that he would adhere to the existing nuclear policy in the prefecture, which hosts a fuel reprocessing plant and other nuclear facilities.

Mimura also promised to battle the prefecture's depopulation woes by creating jobs and expanding welfare. Aomori has the second-highest rate of population decline in the nation.

His challenger, doctor Susumu Otake, 64, campaigned for closing all nuclear facilities in Aomori, saying the prefecture, famous for its apples, should withdraw from the nuclear power and nuclear fuel reprocessing businesses altogether.

A nuclear fuel-reprocessing plant in the village of Rokkasho plays a key role in the nation's plans to recycle its hoard of spent nuclear fuel.

Not passing on savings from reactors to be decommissioned to customers

June 7, 2015

Five utilities still booking costs for retired reactors

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/06/07/national/five-utilities-still-booking-costs-for-retired-reactors/#.VXRfk0bwmos>

JJI

Five of the nation's major power utilities are still factoring in expenditures for reactors due to be decommissioned when calculating their prices, and delaying the return of savings to customers, Jiji Press has found.

Thus, **the electricity bills issued by Tokyo Electric Power Co. and its counterparts in the Chubu, Hokuriku, Chugoku and Kyushu regions include fees for idle nuclear reactors, including maintenance,** sources said.

In contrast, Kansai Electric Power Co. narrowed the size of its price hike to account for a drop in reactor-related costs.

According to Tepco, which decided in January last year to scrap the No. 5 and No. 6 reactors at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant, its power rates are based partly on nonexistent costs, such as those related to the two scrapped units.

Reducing costs allows a utility to cut rates if it reports them to the industry ministry, though Tepco has no plan to do so now, officials said.

Chubu Electric, which in March saw the No. 1 reactor at Japan Atomic Power Co.'s Tsuruga plant in Fukui Prefecture slated for decommissioning, has seen its payments for buying electricity from the reactor fall. **Chubu Electric, however, also has no immediate plans to pass the savings on to customers**, the utility said. Hokuriku Electric, which also bought electricity from the Tsuruga plant, has maintained the same rate calculation framework as before the decommissioning decision. The same with Chugoku Electric and Kyushu Electric, which have decided to decommission the No. 1 reactor at the Shimane plant in Matsue and the No. 1 reactor at the Genkai plant in Saga Prefecture, respectively.

Utilities are not required to immediately reflect savings from reactor decommissioning in their power bills.

The five utilities have not clarified their savings from the decommissioned reactors, but said the surge in thermal power generation costs caused by the March 2011 Fukushima disaster has had a greater financial impact.

Kansai Electric, which raised rates in June, slashed the margin of that hike by ¥9.6 billion per year after taking into account the decommissioning of the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at Fukui Prefecture's Mihama nuclear plant, and of the Tsuruga reactor.

Kepeco had been paying ¥8.4 billion a year to purchase electricity from the Tsuruga reactor and ¥2.2 billion to finance repair costs for the two Mihama reactors.

Does Govt. want to force evacuees to go back?

June 9, 2015

Plan to end rent subsidies for some Fukushima evacuees under fresh fire

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150609p2a00m0na006000c.html>

A plan to end rent subsidies for some evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster has come under fresh fire, as it emerged that **those subsidies are costing at most 8.09 billion yen this fiscal year.**

The evacuees under consideration for having their subsidies cut -- at the end of fiscal 2016 -- are voluntary evacuees living in homes other than temporary housing structures built for evacuees. The total Fukushima Prefecture relief budget for disaster evacuees this fiscal year, including non-voluntary evacuees, is over 28.8 billion yen, so the subsidies being considered for being cut account for less than 30 percent of the relief budget.

One expert knowledgeable about evacuees says, "The reason that a plan to end these subsidies has arisen even though the financial burden is not large **may be that government officials want to try and force voluntary evacuees to return to their homes, without respecting evacuees' own judgments on the matter.**" Voluntary evacuees are people who evacuated from areas outside of those where the government ordered evacuations. Until November 2012, Fukushima Prefecture did not allow them to use emergency

temporary housing set up for evacuees in the prefecture, and many voluntary evacuees moved outside of the prefecture.

According to the Fukushima Prefectural Government, for this fiscal year it allocated about 20.73 billion yen for the temporary homes of non-voluntary evacuees within the prefecture, and 8.09 billion yen for those of evacuees outside the prefecture. The evacuees outside the prefecture include non-voluntary evacuees, but the exact numbers are not known. A Fukushima Prefectural Government official says, "Non-voluntary evacuees have been using compensation for their lost real-estate to buy homes, and most of the people getting rent subsidies outside of Fukushima Prefecture are probably voluntary evacuees." Within the prefecture, voluntary evacuees live in around 300 homes, which are not temporary housing structures, but subsidies for their rent are included in the "out-of-prefecture" budget, so the 8.09 billion yen covers all voluntary evacuees from the prefecture.

According to the Cabinet Office, as of April 1 this year, there were evacuees living in 18,742 homes in Fukushima Prefecture other than temporary housing structures, and according to the Fukushima Prefectural Government, evacuees were living in around 10,000 such homes outside of the prefecture. Both numbers include voluntary and non-voluntary evacuees. Neither the Fukushima Prefectural Government nor the central government has yet released exact figures on the number of homes for voluntary evacuees other than temporary housing built after the disaster, nor have they released exact numbers for the total rent paid for them.

Currently, evacuee homes are set to be subsidized until the end of March 2016, with a decision on whether to extend this to be made soon after discussions between the Fukushima Prefectural Government and the Cabinet Office. A plan to end subsidies for voluntary evacuees would extend the deadline for one more year, to the end of March 2017, after which voluntary evacuees would no longer receive them. Although Fukushima Prefecture has money budgeted for subsidizing voluntary evacuees, this money is in effect all paid for by the central government. Tokyo Electric Power Co. has expressed reluctance to pay for voluntary evacuees' rent, and so far the central government has not billed them for such.

Meanwhile, this fiscal year's Fukushima Prefecture budget for radiation decontamination measures is 64.39 billion yen, up 13.35 billion yen from the previous fiscal year. The Ministry of the Environment released an estimate in December 2013 that the total costs for decontamination and mid-term storage for radioactive waste would be 3.6 trillion yen.

June 09, 2015(Mainichi Japan)

Sharing Fukushima lessons with IAEA

June 10, 2015

Japan to share Fukushima experiences with IAEA

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Jun. 10, 2015 - Updated 18:16 UTC+2

The Japanese government has expressed readiness to share with members of the world nuclear monitoring agency lessons it learned from the nuclear disaster in Fukushima in 2011.

The board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency held a meeting behind closed doors in Vienna on Wednesday to discuss a comprehensive report on the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The report was co-produced by 180 experts from over 40 countries. It blames Japan's excessively firm belief in the safety of its nuclear power plants for its unpreparedness for the 2011 disaster, which was triggered by a massive earthquake and tsunami.

The ambassador for the Permanent Mission of Japan to the International Organizations in Vienna, Mitsuru Kitano, stressed Japan's responsibility to share experiences and lessons learned from the disaster.

He pledged to ensure the safety of nuclear power.

He also briefed participants on the Japanese government's handling of the disaster. He added that it is most important that **transparency** is secured when sharing the information.

The IAEA plans to draw lessons from the Fukushima disaster to improve the safety of power plants across the globe.

It is to examine opinions of member states in submitting a final report when the agency convenes a general assembly in September.

35 reactors by 2030?

June 11, 2015

Japan needs 35 nuclear reactors operating by 2030, says industry minister

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201506110038

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Japan needs about **35 working nuclear reactors by 2030** to achieve the government's long-term energy strategy to return the country's dependence on nuclear energy to slightly under the level it was before the 2011 Fukushima disaster.

That many would be required for nuclear energy to provide between 20 and 22 percent of the country's electricity, said industry minister Yoichi Miyazawa at a Lower House committee session on economy and industry.

Currently, there are 43 nuclear reactors in Japan with three more under construction, but none are actually operating.

After the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011, the government limited the operational life of nuclear power reactors to a maximum of 40 years in principle, with an extension of up to 20 years in exceptional cases.

If the 40-year principle was to be strictly applied to all the existing reactors, there will be only 23 operative reactors in 2030, meaning that 10 or so reactors would have to have their lifespans extended in order to reach the power target.

The three new reactors include those at two new nuclear power plants in Aomori Prefecture, Electric Power Development Co.'s Oma plant and Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Higashidori plant, while the other is the third reactor at Chugoku Electric Power Co.'s Shimane plant in Shimane Prefecture.

IAEA MEETING

Japan has strengthened safety measures against severe nuclear accidents and limited the operational lifespan of reactors through revisions of the nuclear reactor regulatory law, Ambassador Mitsuru Kitano told an executive meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna on June 10.

It was Japan's responsibility to share the experiences and lessons of the Fukushima disaster with other IAEA member nations, added Kitano, who is ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Japan to the International Organizations in Vienna.

At the meeting, the international nuclear watchdog unveiled **its report on the Fukushima disaster, which will be officially released at its general meeting in September.**

The report pointed out that **blind trust in nuclear safety** has prevented plant operator TEPCO from taking sufficient preparatory measures against tsunami and other natural disasters, while the government and its nuclear watchdog also failed to demand TEPCO take necessary safety steps prior to the accident.

While Kitano declined to comment on the government's opinion on the safety of nuclear power plants at the time the accident took place, he emphasized that Japan created a new nuclear watchdog, the Nuclear Regulation Authority, in 2012 to ensure its independence from the nuclear industry.

Greenpeace on IAEA report

Greenpeace releases confidential IAEA Fukushima-Daiichi accident report

<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/news/Blogs/nuclear-reaction/IAEA-Fukushima-Daiichi-accident-report/blog/53055/>

Blogpost by Justin McKeating - 1 June, 2015 at 13:30 10 comments

The International Atomic Energy Agency report fails to accurately reflect the scale and consequences of the Fukushima disaster.



The International Atomic Energy Agency's Board of Governors meets on June the 8th to discuss its confidential Fukushima-Daiichi Accident Summary Report. The report describes itself as 'an assessment of the causes and consequences of the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan that began on 11 March 2011.'

Greenpeace has received a copy of the report and we made it public last week. We've also conducted an initial analysis of the report and our findings are not good.

Yukiya Amano, the IAEA Director General says the report is 'an authoritative, factual and balanced assessment, addressing the causes and consequences of the accident, as well as lessons learned.'

Yet our experts find it to be full of inaccuracies, uncertainties, and that it fails to address several highly important issues. We've sent our findings to Mr Amano.

Here are some examples.

- The IAEA admits that radiation monitoring was not working properly in the days immediately after the Fukushima disaster began.
- Despite this uncertainty, the report downplays the health risks to the disaster's many victims.
- This means that the estimates of the levels of radiation the people of Fukushima were exposed to cannot be trusted.
- The IAEA's analysis of the new safety regulations in Japan are superficial at best, and they offer no evidence in the report that the Japanese nuclear industry is operating to the global highest standards of nuclear safety.
- The reality is that there are major flaws in nuclear regulation in Japan with seismic and other threats to nuclear plants safety ignored or underestimated.
- The report dismisses the environmental impact of the disaster on animal life despite scientific investigations finding measurable effects on the region's fauna.
- The report fails to acknowledge the uncertainties that still surround the causes of the disaster. Much of the critical systems inside the reactors that melted down have not yet been inspected.

These are just some of our initial findings. There are more to come.

(You can read our full analysis of the report here. The five part IAEA report is here: part one, part two, part three, part four, part five.)

So we see, as we saw in the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the IAEA trying to create a narrative that minimizes the health and environmental impacts of Fukushima, while emphasising that lessons are being learned, including in making nuclear safety regulation more effective.

In short, the IAEA is moving to protect the nuclear industry instead of the people whose lives have been destroyed by the Fukushima disaster and those who may be affected by future nuclear accidents.

This is not a surprise, a central role of the IAEA is to promote the global expansion of nuclear power. The fact that all commercial nuclear reactors in Japan – 43 in total – remain shutdown is a direct challenge to the IAEA's mission. That is the context in which the IAEA report must be seen.

After four years, the disaster in Fukushima is still unfolding and will take many decades to address. If the work to clean up the massive damage done is to be carried out effectively and future accidents avoided as much as possible, the IAEA must demonstrate that it can change the way it operates and quickly.

The IAEA at present serves only the interests of the nuclear industry and its drive for profit at the expense of the people who have pay the ultimate price for nuclear power's failures.

Greenpeace is calling on Mr Amano and the IAEA to suspend their consideration of the report's findings. An open and transparent process must be established that considers the views of the people of Japan, as well as independent scientists. We stand ready to meet with representatives of the IAEA to discuss our serious concerns.

Justin McKeating is a nuclear blogger for Greenpeace International, based in the UK.

Decommissioning needs full gov't support

June 15, 2015

Editorial: New technology to help resolve Fukushima nuclear crisis needs gov't backing

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20150615p2a00m0na007000c.html>

The Japanese government has once again revised the work schedule for decommissioning reactors at the triple-meltdown-stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. The last major change was in June 2013, and this one pushes back the removal of spent fuel rods from the fuel pools of the No. 1-3 reactors by as much as three years. The delay is due to unexpected difficulties preventing the escape of airborne radioactive contaminants during decontamination and wreckage clearing work.

Decommissioning reactors at the heart of one of the world's worst nuclear disasters is of course bound to be extremely difficult, and this reality is coming into sharp relief.

Progress on dismantling the Fukushima reactors has a direct bearing on both overall regional disaster recovery and when local residents will be able to finally return home. As such, we call on both the government and plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. to develop a reactor decommissioning strategy with a solid strategic foundation, and to thoroughly release information on the process.

The latest revisions to the decommissioning work schedule were based on the basic principle of putting the safety of locals and plant workers first. The first version of the work schedule was obsessed with speed. The result was a rash of worker injuries and deaths and other problems that ended up causing progress to be delayed. Rather than making speed top priority, it's more important to carefully and surely reduce the various risks related to the Fukushima plant.

The jobs with the highest priority under the work plan's latest iteration are the recovery of nuclear fuel rods from the fuel pools, and dealing with the vast quantities of radioactively contaminated water produced at the plant. Though these tasks are certainly important, the most difficult hurdle in the decommissioning process will be extracting the melted fuel from inside the stricken reactor vessels. Under the new schedule, this is set to start on just one of the reactors sometime in the year 2021. That's some six years away, but the path from here to there remains foggy at best. First of all, no one knows for sure exactly what state the fuel is in or even where it is in the reactor housings.

The method for getting the fuel out is also up in the air. At first, planners thought it best to fill the reactor vessels with water to suppress the intense radiation when the operation began. This fell by the wayside, however, when it turned out to be difficult to identify damaged spots on the reactor vessels and stop water from escaping. Now, an in-air removal method is being considered, though entirely new equipment will need to be developed to perform the operation in the highly radioactive environment while at the same time preventing contaminants from getting airborne.

There are a number of research institutes and universities across Japan that are receiving government support to invent the technology needed for this reactor decommissioning work. The "control tower" for these efforts is the Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp. (NDF), created by the government in August last year. The corporation is tasked with overseeing each project from basic research through to practical application, and to optimize the development process.

The NDF, however, has just 35 or so technical staff. It's an open question whether the NDF can exercise effective oversight for such a wide program with so few people. The government is trying to enhance the corporation's functions, but there have been no concrete measures forthcoming so far. At this rate, might the 30-40 year target to decommission the Fukushima reactors come under serious pressure?

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has said more than once that "the national government stands on the front lines" of the efforts to deal with the decommissioning work. Then **more than ever, the government must create a system to provide full and complete support for the technology research and development projects needed to finally bring the nuclear crisis to an end.**

TEPCO aware of large tsunami risk as early as 2008

June 18, 2015

Document shows Tepco was aware of need for tsunami measures in 2008: lawyers

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/06/18/national/crime-legal/document-shows-tepco-aware-need-tsunami-measures-2008-lawyers/#.VYKyUbw mou>

Kyodo

Tokyo Electric Power Co. was aware of the need to take anti-tsunami measures at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant before the 2011 crisis, contrary to its claims regarding such hazards there, lawyers for plaintiffs in a damages suit said Thursday.

Yuichi Kaido, one of the lawyers, told the Tokyo District Court that **an internal Tepco document dated 2008 shows the company “had clearly recognized as of that year that measures against tsunami were inevitable, contradicting the company’s explanations so far.”**

The operator of the radiation-leaking plant crippled by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami has claimed during the trial and in other venues that it was not able to predict the massive tsunami.

The lawsuit was filed in March 2012 by more than 40 Tepco shareholders seeking to have former and current company directors pay around ¥5.5 trillion in damages to the company for their failure to prevent the crisis.

Tepco has demanded the claim be dismissed.

The internal document, which was compiled for a company meeting held at Fukushima No. 1 in 2008, says **measures against tsunami hazards are “inevitable as we cannot help but expect bigger tsunami than currently projected” given the opinions of academics and the government**, the lawyers said.

According to a report compiled in 2012 by a Diet-appointed panel that investigated the Fukushima nuclear disaster, Tepco projected in June 2008 that after an earthquake the plant could be hit by 15.7-meter waves. The internal document was produced three months after that, but the utility did not take specific measures against tsunami.

The document is another piece of evidence supporting the investigative panel’s report that called the world’s worst nuclear crisis since Chernobyl in 1986 a “clearly man-made disaster” caused by the company.

The lawyers claimed that Tepco apparently tried to avoid spending massive amounts of money on boosting the plant’s preparedness against disasters.

Fukushima No. 1 lost nearly all of its power sources and consequently the ability to cool its reactors after it was hit by the magnitude-9.0 earthquake and huge tsunami on March 11, 2011.

Reactors 1, 2 and 3 suffered core meltdowns while a hydrogen explosion rocked the building housing the No. 4 unit.

TEPCO aware of large tsunami risk as early as 2008 (2)

June 18, 2015

Document shows TEPCO recognized risk of huge tsunami at Fukushima plant in 2008

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201506180062>

June 18, 2015

By ODAKA CHIBA/ Staff Writer

Tokyo Electric Power Co. in 2008 recognized the “indispensable” need for countermeasures against a towering tsunami at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, but it ended up doing nothing, an internal document showed.

The document was disclosed on June 18 by TEPCO, operator of the Fukushima plant, at the request of its shareholders who have filed a lawsuit against the utility's executives. The plaintiffs are demanding that company executives be held responsible for the nuclear crisis at the plant that was triggered by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

"It is indispensable for us to develop measures against a higher tsunami than currently estimated," the document says.

The plaintiffs argue that the document proves that TEPCO executives at the time could foresee the possibility of a huge tsunami striking the nuclear plant. They say the utility in 2008 estimated a 15.7-meter tsunami could hit the plant based on earthquake predictions by a governmental organization. But TEPCO said its 2008 estimate could not be "a factor that inevitably forced them to take concrete countermeasures because there were differences of opinion, even among experts, on how to estimate a quake."

The in-house document was distributed during a TEPCO meeting held on Sept. 10, 2008, to discuss countermeasures at the Fukushima nuclear plant against earthquakes and tsunami.

Akio Komori, a managing executive officer and director of the plant at that time, attended the meeting. The document says it is "difficult to completely deny" the government findings on a possible earthquake and tsunami, and that the company had "no choice but" to raise the maximum height in its estimates for tsunami.

According to the shareholders suing the TEPCO officials, the document includes a sentence that says, "This contains sensitive information and must be returned."

In another document submitted to the Tokyo District Court by TEPCO in the lawsuit, the company says, "The (2008) document just mentioned the possibility of some sort of anti-tsunami measures required in the future and did not point out any specific risk of tsunami."

TEPCO gets more money from banks

June 24, 2015

Struggling TEPCO to gain additional funding from 3 national megabanks

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201506240089>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

In a show of confidence, the nation's top three banks and other financial organizations who have been funding embattled Tokyo Electric Power Co. **have agreed to extend 280 billion yen (\$2.26 billion) in loans to the utility for the fiscal year.**

The entities concluded that TEPCO, the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, has been successful in cutting costs.

The utility has secured a pretax profit and been in the black for two years in a row, even without the restart of its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture.

TEPCO plans on becoming a holding company in the next fiscal year comprised of three subsidiaries that will split its fuel supply and thermal power generation, electric power transmission, and electricity retailing into separate businesses.

Shareholders will vote on the plan at their meeting on June 25.

The banks and other lending institutions have expressed support for the plan, saying they believe the utility's decision to separate its power generation and transmission businesses before its competitors do so will strengthen its ability to compete in the industry after power deregulation is introduced nationwide.

TEPCO had been asking the banks and other financial bodies for funding to help with debenture redemption and capital investments.

For the two years starting this fiscal year, it said it needs a total of 1.3 trillion yen to fund the projects. The company also plans in fiscal 2016 to issue its first debenture since the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

However, TEPCO has been unable to significantly improve its profitability without the restart of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant, as its ongoing cost-cutting efforts have limits.

History must be handed down to posterity

June 23, 2015

COMMENTARY: Don't let nuclear disaster be forgotten like great Fukushima monk

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/column/AJ201506230010>

By TOSHIHIDE UEDA/ Senior Staff Writer

YUGAWA, Fukushima Prefecture--A chance to visit a historic Buddhist temple in this northeastern village and learn about a great monk underscored the importance of passing down the history of the Fukushima nuclear disaster correctly to future generations.

My breath was taken away in April by the graceful and well-rounded look of the seated figure of Yakushi Nyorai (Bhaisajyaguru), the principal object of worship at Shoji temple and a national treasure designated by the central government.

Tradition says the statue dates from the first half of the ninth century in the early Heian Period (794-1185).

Yugawa, a farming village in the Aizu Basin, has slightly more than 3,000 residents and is the smallest of all municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture. Shoji temple stands behind a settlement in the village. Despite the fine weekend weather with cherry petals fluttering in the air, only a handful of visitors could be spotted in the area, which, apparently, couldn't have been more remote from the "garment" of tourism. In 1996, three statues preserved at the temple--the seated Yakushi Nyorai figure and the standing statues of its two attendant bodhisattvas, Nikko Bosatsu (Suryaprabha) and Gakko Bosatsu (Candraprabha)--became the first works of sculpture from the Tohoku region to be designated national treasures.

Nine other Buddhist figures at the temple have been designated “important cultural properties” by the central government.

I wondered how the statues survived more than a millennium in this rural temple.

Shoji officials said the temple was opened by an erudite monk, Tokuitsu by name, in the early Heian Period. Tokuitsu, a monk of the Hosso sect of Buddhism, is honorifically referred to as a “saint” or a “bodhisattva.”

MONK HELPED BUDDHISM FLOURISH

I felt ashamed that I had never known earlier about Tokuitsu. I don’t remember ever having heard the monk’s name mentioned in school classrooms.

The town of Bandai, east of Yugawa, lies at the foot of Mount Bandaisan, the famous volcano. Experts say the town was the locale of a major center of Japan’s Buddhist culture for some time beginning in the early Heian Period.

Tokuitsu led Buddhism to take root in this area. While the years of his birth and death are unknown, tradition says he studied at Nara’s Todaiji temple and elsewhere before he had a temple built at the foot of Mount Bandaisan around 807. The site of remains of Enichiji temple in Bandai, which has been designated a “historic site” by the central government, is where he did so.

The town government of Bandai restored the Kondo (golden hall) and the Chumon (middle gate), structures that formerly stood at Enichiji temple, on the temple remains in 2008 and 2009, respectively. I was told the town government is also weighing follow-up plans, such as making replicas of Buddhist statues lost from the temple, including a figure of Yakushi Nyorai, and designing street architecture along a former approach to the temple.

I visited the town’s Bandaisan Enichiji Shiryokan museum, part of the Enichiji remains complex. Historical documents show that Tokuitsu opened a number of Buddhist temples, most of them in the Aizu district in the west of today’s Fukushima Prefecture. He also opened others in present-day Ibaraki, Tochigi, Gunma and other prefectures. Fifty or more temples are said to have legends associated with Tokuitsu.

Enichiji was at the center of the flourishing Buddhist culture of Aizu, and at one point it purportedly had 300 monks, several thousand armed warrior monks and 3,800 branch temples.

Tokuitsu’s name has survived to this day primarily because he had a major doctrinal argument with Saicho, his contemporary who opened the Tendai sect of Buddhism. The argument purportedly lasted for more than four years. Tokuitsu also criticized the Shingon sect of Buddhism, which Kukai established around the same time.

I was curious to know how a monk of such erudition became more or less forgotten.

One thing that came to mind is that “official history” is written by the central authority.

Emperor Kanmu, who moved Japan’s capital to Kyoto, did not allow Nara’s major temples, which constituted a big political force, to relocate to Kyoto. Instead, he protected new sects of Buddhism initiated by Saicho and Kukai.

Tokuitsu, on the contrary, was a polemic from the Hosso sect of Nara Buddhism. And he was based in Aizu, far removed from the capital.

Another misfortune of siding with the “underdog” befell Enichiji temple in later history.

Historical documents show that the temple sided with the Taira warrior clan when the latter fought the Minamoto warrior clan toward the end of the Heian Period. The chief of Enichiji’s resident monks was killed in a lost battle against Kiso Yoshinaka, a member of the Minamoto clan. When warlord Date Masamune invaded Aizu during the age of warring states in the 16th century, he set fire to the temple, which burned down except for Kondo hall.

Upon the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan's new government issued orders to separate Buddhism and Shinto in a drive to end their syncretism, and anti-Buddhist movements rose among the public. Enichiji temple was decommissioned amid that trend in 1869, which put a temporary end to more than a millennium of its history.

HUB OF BUDDHIST CULTURE REVIVED

It was the town's residents who revived Enichiji temple.

"Enichiji was the cradle of Aizu's culture," said Miyuki Suzuki, head of the Enichiji museum. "The local people had a burning desire to bring the temple back to existence."

A movement for rebuilding the establishment culminated in the 1913 revival of a new Enichiji, which stands outside the old Enichiji site to this day.

"It is essential to hand down history in a proper way to posterity," said Bandai Mayor Genichi Igarashi, who has led the restoration efforts at the old Enichiji site.

The consequences of the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant are being written on new pages of history day after day in Fukushima Prefecture. The central government and power utilities, in the meantime, are steadily moving ahead with their plan to restart Japan's nuclear reactors, all of which currently remain idled.

Such a move could box up the history of the nuclear disaster within the bounds of Fukushima Prefecture and send it off to obscurity, just like Tokuitsu's name was left to fade on the terrain of Aizu.

The Fukushima disaster should be part of an "official history" to be shared in a proper way by the entire globe. And it is up to every single one of us to write it.

* * *

The author, based in Fukushima, wrote on other issues.

Fondness for the 'earth' guided Fukushima couple displaced by nuke disaster

'Wishful thinking' of nuclear insiders must not be allowed to be reborn

Depopulated areas in Fukushima learned bitter lessons from dams

Utilities running a shell game in relying on nuclear power over renewable energy

Fukushima battling utilities' 'no more green energy' decision

In age of LEDs, utilities thinking in incandescent-bulb mode

Fukushima's micro-hydropower ambitions face challenges

Fukushima alive with seeds of industrial innovation

Radioactive pollution endangers cultures of Tohoku mountain communities

Abnormal changes in small birds and the role of science

Disaster-hit Tohoku communities search for a renewable way

Have the utilities already forgotten the lessons of 3/11?

June 29, 2013

EDITORIAL: Utilities compromise their futures by rejecting anti-nuclear proposals

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201506290030>

During recent general shareholders' meetings, Japan's nine electric utilities with nuclear power plants rejected all proposals by stockholders for a departure from reliance on nuclear energy.

We want to ask their executives, who insist on the need to restart their idled nuclear reactors: "Do you really believe management will be OK that way?"

The power retail market will be liberalized next spring, whereupon each household will be allowed to decide which company they will be purchasing electricity from. **Management policies that have hardly changed from what they were before the Fukushima nuclear disaster of 2011 could face the exacting eyes of consumers when they make their selections.**

The city governments of Osaka and Kyoto, which have major stakes in Kansai Electric Power Co., submitted proposals calling for a phaseout of nuclear power during a shareholders' meeting of the Osaka-based utility, which relied on nuclear energy for 50 percent of its power supply before the Fukushima disaster.

One proposal called for keeping nuclear reactors offline as long as spent nuclear fuel disposal methods remain undecided. Another called for aggressive measures to introduce alternative energy sources that will replace nuclear power.

They were both reasonable proposals made from the standpoint that problems should not be put off and pushed on future generations.

But Kansai Electric's management called for a rejection of the proposals, reiterating that the utility will seek early restarts of its reactors on the basic premise that safety will be ensured. One of its executive vice presidents was bold enough to say that the utility would, in the mid- to long term, have to build new nuclear reactors or replace existing ones.

Things were much the same at other regional utilities.

Chugoku Electric Power Co. reiterated its intention to push its plan to build a nuclear plant in Kaminoseki, Yamaguchi Prefecture. Kyushu Electric Power Co. stressed its determination to seek a prompt restart of its Sendai nuclear plant in Kagoshima Prefecture, whereas Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, also made clear it wants to continue with its nuclear power operations. It has been only four years since the Fukushima nuclear disaster caused suffering among local residents and induced a collapse of the "safety myth" about nuclear power generation. **We are only left to gape at the brazen way a return to nuclear power is being sought, as if the lessons of the disaster have been forgotten.**

Behind the tough stance of the utilities is the central government, which defined nuclear power as an "important base-load power source" when it endorsed a Basic Energy Plan last year. Earlier this month, Tokyo approved a draft plan to have nuclear energy account for between 20 and 22 percent of Japan's total power supply in fiscal 2030. Achieving that goal would require the operation of existing nuclear reactors beyond the standard service life of 40 years or the building of new reactors.

The use of nuclear energy has been promoted in postwar Japan as a "national policy managed by the private sector." One could say that **the utilities are compromising themselves by believing that they only have to follow the central government, whatever the public may think of them.**

Nuclear power operations are obviously turning into a business segment with uncertain future prospects. Sixteen of Japan's fleet of 43 nuclear reactors have been in service for more than 30 years, which means their operators will soon have to decide whether to keep them alive or decommission them. Extending their service lives is expected to cost the companies hundreds of billions of yen (billions of dollars) because safety regulations were strengthened after the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

We also wonder how exactly the utilities intend to win the understanding of residents and local governments in adjacent areas if they ever plan to build new reactors. We can hardly believe the utilities, which are only looking toward the central government, have the determination or any blueprints to do so. "I can only have the impression that you are going to commit a double suicide with nuclear power," one stockholder said during Kansai Electric's shareholders' meeting.

Members of the utilities' management should rethink the wisdom of continuing with their old ways.

--The Asahi Shimbun, June 28

Closed-door sessions have negative effect

July 3, 2015

Experts slam closed-door nuclear briefings

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150703_31.html

Jul. 3, 2015 - Updated 11:11 UTC+2

A panel of experts has criticized Japan's industry ministry for discussing its new policy for disposing of high-level nuclear waste in closed-door sessions.

The ministry-appointed experts said at a meeting on Friday their call for information disclosure on the basic waste disposal policy has fallen on deaf ears.

They also said that holding sessions behind closed doors could have a negative impact on the issue.

The government decided in May to select prospective sites for burying high-level radioactive waste from nuclear power plants and to ask local authorities for their cooperation in building the facilities.

The new policy was implemented following 13 years of failed efforts to solicit candidate sites due to strong safety concerns.

The ministry said it decided to hold closed-door briefings so that local government officials would feel free to speak out.

The ministry had held briefings in 39 prefectures by the end of June. They were attended by nearly 70 percent of local authorities nationwide. But some refused to attend to protest the closed-door policy.

The head of the panel, Hiroya Masuda, said **the ministry must convince local authorities that the briefings don't necessarily indicate candidacy for waste disposal sites.**

Deregulation of power sector

July 5, 2015

Electricity and gas liberalization

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2015/07/05/editorials/electricity-and-gas-liberalization/#.VZlBZkbwmic>

The Diet last month enacted two bills to finalize the liberalization of the electricity and city gas industries. The government should do its utmost to ensure not only fair treatment of all entrants into the markets but also the stable supply of electricity and city gas to consumers.

Under a revision of the Electricity Business Law, the culmination of the liberalization of the power industry will come in April 2020, when power transmission and distribution sections will be separated from the nation's nine major power firms, which now enjoy regional monopolies. An earlier stage of reform started in April when the Organization for Cross-regional Coordination of Transmission Operations was established to facilitate power transmission between western and eastern Japan in case of an emergency. OCCTO's establishment was prompted by the experience of what happened in the wake of the March 2011 crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. Moving power to disaster-hit eastern Japan was made difficult by the difference in the frequency of electricity between the two regions.

In April 2016, retail sale of electricity to households and other small-lot users will be opened to new entrants. Since the gradual liberalization of electricity sales began in 1995, businesses from various other sectors have been selling electricity to large-scale users such as plant operators and have already taken a market share worth 3 million kilowatts of electricity — equivalent to the output capacity of three nuclear power plants combined.

To help push the liberalization of electricity retail sales for small-lot users, OCCTO will work to increase competition among power suppliers beyond traditionally demarcated service areas. It will also make it easier to transmit electricity generated from renewable energy sources such as wind and solar facilities over long distances, for example between eastern and western Japan.

Currently 1.2 million kW electricity can be transmitted between the country's western and eastern regions. OCCTO plans to eventually increase the capacity to 3 million kW by beefing up frequency conversion facilities. Major power firms have already started a project to raise the capacity to 2.1 million kW by the end of fiscal 2020.

Liberalization of the gas industry will follow deregulation of the power sector. A revision of the Gas Business Law will liberalize the gas retail market in 2017 at the earliest and will spin pipe management divisions off the major city gas firms in Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka in April 2022 so that new entrants to the business can have better access to gas pipes.

These changes will facilitate not only the entry of new businesses into the electricity and gas markets but also help power and gas companies enter each other's markets. It is hoped that increased competition will result in lower electricity and gas bills for consumers and help initiate new services such as price discounts through the package sale of gas and mobile phone services, and coupon points accumulated through electricity purchases. Some new entities may attract eco-minded consumers by selling power from green sources.

Behind the decision by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry to separate power transmission and distribution sections from the major utility firms is the view that new entrants would face difficulty entering the market unless they can use transmission lines now effectively monopolized by the major firms under more equitable conditions.

Still, doubts remain as to whether the competition between the major firms and new entrants will be fair because the spun-off power transmission and distribution businesses will be under the umbrella of holding companies that also control the power-generating firms that will be spun off the major power

companies. A new committee that will be established to oversee transactions in the power and gas industries must keep a close eye on them and ensure the competition is fair.

The revised Electricity Business Law contains a supplementary provision that says that the power supply and demand situation will be reviewed when the separation of transmission and distribution sections from the major utilities is carried out and “necessary steps” should be taken in view of the situation. This means that depending on the supply and demand situation, the separation may be delayed. For example, major utilities might cite a delay in the restart of nuclear power plants — mostly idled in the wake of the Fukushima disaster — as an excuse to seek a delay of the separation. **The ministry should not allow the firms to link nuclear power generation to the implementation of the deregulation measure.**

The Abe administration, which is pushing for the reactivation of the idled nuclear power plants, plans to have nuclear power account for 20 to 22 percent of Japan’s electricity generation in 2030. But increased competition through deregulation can raise the cost of nuclear power relative to other sources of electricity. **Since liberalization of the power-sector is meant to promote market-based competition under equitable conditions, the government should be aware that any preferential treatment for nuclear power plants to keep them competitive would defeat the purpose of the deregulation measure.**

The government should also keep watch if liberalization of the power market causes any disadvantages to consumers. It needs to eliminate the possibility of major problems, such as power outages that could result from a lack of proper cooperation and coordination among power companies in the liberalized environment. In addition, electricity charges might rise unreasonably in areas where demand for power is low, such as small communities in mountainous areas. The government needs to take adequate steps when necessary to prevent the deregulation from having adverse effects on consumers.

Iran's Nuclear program: What's in it for Japan?

July 6, 2015

Influence of Iran's nuclear program on Japan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150707_03.html

Jul. 6, 2015 - Updated 23:27 UTC+2

World powers are working on the issue of Iran's nuclear program. Japan has high hopes for a resolution, as **Iran could be a stable source of crude oil and a large potential market for Japanese companies.**

Iran was once one of the main exporters of crude oil to Japan, and has the world's 4th largest reserves.

But European countries and the United States tightened economic sanctions against Iran, prompting Tokyo to withdraw from a project to develop Iran's Azadegan oil field. The field has one of the largest deposits in the Middle East.

Japan has cut crude oil imports from Iran by over half in the past 5 years.

In response to the sanctions, Iran threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, the world's most important route for crude oil shipments.

This prompted crude oil prices to rise and gasoline prices to jump in Japan.

Resolving the nuclear issue may also pave the way for Japanese firms to enter Iran's market, which has 78 million consumers and rich resources.

Ex-members sue JAEA over discrimination

July 5, 2015

4 retirees of gov't-linked nuclear body file damages suit over discrimination

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150707p2a00m0na015000c.html>

MITO, Ibaraki -- Four retired workers of the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA) filed a damages suit with the Mito District Court on July 6, demanding the government-affiliated nuclear organization pay a total of about 111 million yen in compensation for its **discriminatory treatment over their wages and job promotions.**

The four plaintiffs argue that they had received discriminatory treatment over their wages and career advancement partly because they pointed out safety problems with nuclear power. They are demanding about 110.8 million yen in damages, including their wage shortfalls as well as compensation for their pain and suffering.

The four retired from JAEA in the spring of this year. Among them is Kenji Komatsuzaki, 60, from Ibaraki Prefecture, who became a full-time, non-regular staff member at the nuclear organization after retirement. According to their complaint and other sources, the four plaintiffs had carried out activities such as distributing leaflets and holding symposiums at a labor union at the JAEA's predecessor Power Reactor and Nuclear Fuel Development Corp. (PNC) because **they were worried about nuclear-related health hazards and safety management systems at nuclear facilities, among other factors.** Responding to their activities, the then PNC labeled the four employees as those who "lack good sense," and gave them discriminatory treatment in wages and over personnel affairs, their complaint says.

According to the plaintiffs, the then PNC checked its staff's thoughts and beliefs over nuclear development and worked out a so-called "**hostility judgment chart**" that divided its staff into four ranks. Between fiscal 1980 and 1982, 32 employees were classified into the "A" rank, which represented employees that criticized the nuclear body most severely. The four plaintiffs were put in the "A" rank.

The plaintiffs emphasized, **"Because nuclear technologies are difficult to come by, there can't be good technological developments unless free speech is guaranteed on the job."**

The JAEA responded, "Because we have not received their complaint as of this moment and we cannot confirm its content, we would like to decline to comment."

[Click here for Japanese article](#)

Hokuriky Electric doesn't agree with experts' report

July 17, 2015

Hokuriku Electric doubts experts' assessment

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150717_36.html

Jul. 17, 2015 - Updated 13:04 UTC+2

The president of Hokuriku Electric Power Company has expressed doubt about an expert panel's draft report that could lead to decommissioning of one of the firm's nuclear reactors in central Japan.

Yutaka Kanai said on Friday that he believes his company conducted detailed surveys and proved that a fault under the No.1 reactor of the Shika plant is not active.

But he said it's disappointing that experts of the Nuclear Regulation Authority have not agreed.

Kanai said he thinks the experts did not comprehensively consider the firm's survey results, and made their conclusion based on hypothetical calculations and assumptions.

He said his company will consider presenting more data and give a thorough explanation to the NRA.

Executive Vice President Akizumi Nishino said the firm does not agree with the report and is not considering decommissioning the reactor.

The report says there's no clear evidence that the fault is active. But it says strata above its northwestern part may have moved during or after a period between 120,000 and 130,000 years ago.

No legal restrictions to this kind of contract

July 21, 2015

TEPCO gave 50 contracts to company tied to Kariwa mayor

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201507210034

By SATOSHI OTANI/ Staff Writer

KARIWA, Niigata Prefecture--The father of pro-nuclear Kariwa Mayor Hiroo Shinada is a director of a company that received contracts worth millions of yen for work at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co.

In addition, a gasoline stand run by Shinada's wife is frequented by TEPCO employees as well as workers at nuclear plant-related companies.

Shinada, 58, said there was nothing inappropriate about the business transactions.

"In this community, there is no one who has zero ties to the nuclear plant, but I have always clearly separated family business with my work as mayor," Shinada said. "I never asked the plant to provide work for the companies (with ties to my father and wife)."

Indeed, with a population of about 4,800, Kariwa as a whole depends on the nuclear power plant for much of its economic benefits. And there are no legal restrictions concerning contracts for nuclear plant work given to companies with ties to local mayors.

However, as mayor, Shinada also has the responsibility as representative of the village to make decisions on the safety of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa power plant.

In the three years since October 2011, after the disaster unfolded at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the company where Shinada's 84-year-old father serves as a director received at least 50 contracts worth about 50 million yen (\$402,000) for equipment inspection work at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, according to documents submitted to the Niigata prefectural government.

The company was a subcontractor for most of those contracts, but it did receive a few direct orders from TEPCO.

Shinada has called for a restart of reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant despite doubts continually raised by Niigata Governor Hirohiko Izumida about whether TEPCO has done everything possible to prevent a recurrence of the Fukushima nuclear accident.

"Having the nuclear plant in operation is the normal situation for this community," Shinada said. "It is the hope of the entire region for an early resumption of operations, and I believe there is a need for nuclear energy in Japan when thinking about the current supply of energy."

The company where his father is a director was established in 1980, soon after construction work began at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant. It initially handled meal catering services within the plant but began work on the plant site in 1989.

Shinada's father said he has served as director since the company was established and also owns company stock.

Kaichi Mitomi, 77, the Niigata prefectural assembly member elected from the district covering Kariwa, has been the company's auditor since the beginning.

"While we would like to refrain from commenting on specific contracts, in general, contracts are based on fair procedures that do not favor any particular company," a TEPCO official said.

The gasoline stand operated by Shinada's wife is located about 2 kilometers from the main gate of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant. Shinada said the stand sells gasoline to those at the plant and fuel oil used for lighting purposes within the TEPCO-operated plant.

Shinada was an executive of the company operating the stand until he became mayor. He has since turned over management to his wife.

Shinada was first elected mayor in December 2000 after serving three terms in the village assembly. He is now in his fourth term as mayor.

There have been other instances in Japan of companies with ties to local mayors winning contracts for construction work at nuclear power plants located within the community. But **there are no legal provisions prohibiting companies with ties to the mayors from winning such orders because those contracts are given by private-sector electric power companies.**

TEPCO's customer info system not ready

July 29, 2015

Delay in TEPCO's development of customer info system could affect electricity deregulation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150729p2a00m0na006000c.html>

A delay in the development by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) of a system to provide customer information, which is necessary when customers switch power companies, **could adversely affect the liberalization of retail electric power in April 2016**, it has been learned.

TEPCO Executive Vice President Hiroshi Yamaguchi told the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry at a July 28 meeting of a panel of experts deliberating challenges to electric power system reform that the company has lagged behind other utilities in the development of such a system.

Yamaguchi attributed the delay to a far larger number of customers in its service area than other power companies, and expressed concern that TEPCO may not be able to provide sufficient functions necessary for liberalization of electricity market by next April.

After the electricity deregulation, consumers can freely choose electric power companies from which they buy electricity.

In cases where customers in TEPCO's service area, including Tokyo, choose to buy power from another utility, TEPCO will be required to provide customer information such as their power equipment and past electricity consumption, to the other firm.

According to Yamaguchi's report to the ministry, TEPCO has 28 million individual and corporate customers in its service area, and assumes that up to 10 million of them will switch to other power suppliers.

TEPCO's development of relevant systems, including one to provide customer information to other utilities, is being delayed due to such a large number of customers and the need to renew in-house software and other systems when the company is to be split into a few entities simultaneously in April, according to Yamaguchi's explanation to the ministry panel.

TEPCO says that it will be able to conclude in late December this year whether the new systems can be put into operation in April 2016 as originally scheduled, while most of the other utilities expect that their new systems will be operational according to schedule.

2 years without any nukes - And now what?

July 30, 2015

EDITORIAL: Reflections on 2 years without nuclear power ahead of planned restarts

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201507300035>

Japan has survived without atomic energy for almost two years since all of the country's nuclear power reactors were taken offline in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear accident triggered by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster.

The country rode out summers and winters, despite surges in electricity demand for air-conditioning and heating purposes, with no major blackouts.

The triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which threatened the very survival of the Japanese state, has yet to be brought under control.

Opinion polls show that more than half of the general public is opposed to restarting nuclear reactors. The public's desire to keep the reactors offline, even at the cost of inconvenience, is due to the fact that people have learned how dreadful atomic energy can be.

However, the Abe administration is seeking a return to nuclear power. It is preparing to restart Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai nuclear power plant in Kagoshima Prefecture in August, and aims eventually to have atomic energy account for 20 percent or more of Japan's electricity mix in the future.

We oppose any return to nuclear power that comes without serious debate. Japan should make utmost efforts to avoid restarts, while at the same time taking care that doing so will not place an onerous burden on people's living standards. Our energy needs should be centered on renewable energy sources rather than nuclear power as the primary source of electricity.

POWER DEMAND ALREADY COVERED

The Asahi Shimbun published a series of editorials in 2011 calling for a society free of nuclear power.

We stated that all of Japan's nuclear reactors should be decommissioned, hopefully in 20 to 30 years, with priority given to aged reactors and high-risk reactors. The reactors to be kept alive should be selected on a "safety first" basis and limited to those necessary from the viewpoint of supply and demand.

We also stated that Japan should do its best to develop and spread the use of renewable energy sources while simultaneously pursuing measures for power saving and energy conservation. Thermal power generation could be strengthened as a stopgap measure, although steps should be sought in the long term so that a departure from nuclear energy does not contribute to global warming.

We also said Japan should push forward with power industry reform to encourage new entrants into the market while moving toward a decentralized energy society where wisdom and consumer choice play a greater role.

Our basic ideas remain the same. But the situation has changed over the last four years.

The most dramatic development is that the amount of electricity generated by nuclear reactors is now zero.

Nuclear reactors were up and running across Japan four years ago. They were subsequently taken offline one after another for regular inspections. Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture was reactivated temporarily, but no single nuclear reactor has been brought back online since September 2013.

Despite concerns that were raised, no serious power shortages occurred. Emergency power sources were raked up to stave off a crisis on some occasions, but there has always been sufficient supply to cover demand, partly because the practice of saving power has taken root in the public mind, and partly also

because capacities were enhanced at thermal power plants and regional utilities cooperated in supplying power to each other.

But it is too early to say that we have a solid foundation for keeping the number of active nuclear reactors at zero.

The clustered siting of power plants, whereby electricity is sent from large-scale power stations to faraway areas with heavy power consumption areas, has remained unchanged after the nuclear disaster. Systemic vulnerability is still an issue. And there is always the danger of unforeseen circumstances unfolding if a key thermal power plant were to malfunction during peak power demand.

SYSTEMIC VULNERABILITY PERSISTS

The current situation, where thermal power accounts for 90 percent of Japan's electricity, could hardly be called sustainable. As long as Japan relies on imports for its energy sources, the country will remain permanently exposed to the risk of variations in foreign exchange rates and prices.

We are also left to reflect on the extent to which the general public and the Japanese economy could tolerate additional increases in electricity rates. We have to avoid letting rate hikes, without detailed studies, have a serious impact on people's living standards and general economic activity.

The risk of a serious impact on people's lives has yet to be reduced to zero. Given the situation, it is difficult to totally rule out the option of restarting nuclear reactors as a last resort.

However, decisions on restarting individual nuclear reactors must be made with extreme care.

What kind of disadvantage could be averted by activating a particular nuclear reactor? Will a nuclear restart still be necessary after power demand has been covered by a mutual supply of electricity over broad areas? Persuasive explanations should be available from viewpoints such as these.

The nuclear reactor in question must be safe enough from the viewpoint of its geographical location.

Means must also be available to allow residents of adjacent areas to evacuate in an emergency. These are obvious preconditions for a nuclear restart.

The fact that we have got along without nuclear power has correspondingly heightened the hurdles for a restart.

Japan, under these circumstances, must develop renewable energy sources as quickly as possible and pursue a shift to a distributed system of electric power. Indispensable to that end are policy initiatives for guiding a switch to the new direction.

The central government should set a pathway for reform and focus its resources on upgrades on the power grid, disposal of nuclear waste and other efforts. There should also be organizational arrangement for pursuing the decommissioning of nuclear reactors, assistance to local governments that will lose revenue from the nuclear plants they host, and transitional measures for business operators associated with nuclear power generation.

FUKUSHIMA DISASTER THE STARTING POINT

The Abe administration, however, is heading in the opposite direction.

It initially said it would reduce Japan's dependence on nuclear energy as much as possible, but then changed course to maintaining nuclear plants, and left it all up to the Nuclear Regulation Authority to make all decisions on the safety of nuclear reactors ahead of any go-aheads for restarts.

The NRA is tasked only with screening procedures to ensure the safe operation of nuclear power plants. It is not in any way responsible for the entire policy.

The administration told local governments hosting nuclear plants that the central government will be responsible, but what precisely this entails remains to be seen. A mountain of unanswered questions remain about the Sendai nuclear plant, such as measures to ensure the safety of local residents and measures against potential volcanic eruptions.

The Fukushima nuclear disaster should be the starting point for reflecting on the issue of nuclear power generation.

We should think about ways to make the most of the fact that no nuclear reactor is active now.

--The Asahi Shimbun, July 30

TEPCO's profits

July 29, 2015

Tepco's quarterly profit triples as fuel prices plunge

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/07/29/business/corporate-business/tepcos-quarterly-profit-triples-as-fuel-prices-plunge/#.VboT2Pnwmos>

Bloomberg

Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the wrecked Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, said its first-quarter operating profit tripled as a drop in fuel prices helped cut costs.

Tepco, as Japan's biggest utility is known, posted an operating profit of ¥228.3 billion (\$1.85 billion) for the three months ending June 30, compared with ¥70.7 billion a year ago, the company said in a statement Wednesday.

The company benefited from a more than 45 percent plunge in liquefied natural gas prices after crude oil fell to a record low. More than a third of Tepco's power generation capacity comes from LNG, compared with 14 percent from oil and 8 percent from coal.

Factoring in the impact of a weaker yen, the plunge in oil prices alone boosted current profit by ¥276 billion, Tepco said.

"With the drop in the price of crude and a minimization of costs, the operating profit is in the black for the second year in a row," the company said in the statement.

Tepco spent 35 percent less on LNG purchases in the first quarter, while consumption of the fuel fell by 5 percent. The company's spending on crude oil rose by 7.5 percent, while its use was up 25 percent, the company said.

The utility's purchases of coal rose 4.9 percent to 1.75 million metric tons, resulting in a 3.9 percent increase in spending on the fuel.

Indonesia was Tepco's largest crude supplier last year, while Australia was the top coal provider.

Total sales dipped 1.1 percent to ¥1.55 trillion as the company generated 6 percent less capacity in the quarter.

Japan's power consumption dropped 1.8 percent in the quarter from a year earlier, the fifth straight quarterly decline, to 189 terawatt hours, according to industry figures. That's the lowest quarterly use since 2000.

With Tepco struggling to win approval to restart its nuclear reactors, the drop in fuel costs provides relief.

In June, the price of LNG imported into Japan dropped to \$7.60 per million British thermal units, the lowest level in two years. Power utilities with a high ratio of LNG will see an increase in profits, Syusaku Nishikawa, an analyst at Daiwa Securities Co., said by e-mail.

Tepco's first-quarter net income was ¥203.3 billion, compared with a net loss of ¥173 billion a year ago. The company's net income is influenced by costs related to the payout to those affected by the Fukushima nuclear accident more than four years ago.

Govt. agrees increase in compensation

July 29, 2015

Fukushima compensation increased to ¥7 trillion

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/07/29/national/fukushima-compensation-increased-%C2%A57-trillion/#.VbiN9_nwmou

Reuters

The government has approved an increase in compensation payments for the Fukushima nuclear crisis to ¥7.07 trillion as tens of thousands of evacuees remain in temporary housing more than four years after the disaster.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. will receive ¥950 billion more in public funds on top of the ¥6.125 trillion agreed earlier, the utility and the government said Tuesday.

The increase, which was agreed following a request by Tepco, adds to the taxpayers' bill for the disaster.

Tepco has faced a stream of legal cases seeking compensation over the triple meltdown at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Electricity bills for households have also risen 25 percent since the catastrophe as the country resorted to importing more fossil fuels with the gradual shutdown of all reactors for safety checks and upgrades.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government and Tepco, which was bailed out by taxpayers in 2012, are undertaking an unprecedented decontamination project to lower radiation levels in towns closest to the plant, although some areas will likely remain off-limits for decades.

Inside the plant, Tepco has struggled to bring the situation under control and it is estimated removing the melted fuel from the wrecked reactors and cleaning up the site will cost trillions of yen and take decades to complete.

The government plans to revoke evacuation orders for most people forced from their homes by the disaster within two years as part of a plan to cap compensation payouts and speed up reconstruction.

TEPCO included in JPX-Nikkei Index 400?

July 31, 2015

Fukushima-tainted Tepco to join JPX-Nikkei Index 400 'shame gauge'

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/07/31/business/financial-markets/fukushima-tainted-tepco-join-jpx-nikkei-index-400-shame-gauge/#.VbsmGfnwmos>

Bloomberg

A stock index showcasing Japan's best companies is about to include one of its most controversial: the utility behind the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl.

The JPX-Nikkei Index 400 picks firms with the best operating income, return on equity and market value to shame executives of those it excludes into boosting profit and shareholder returns.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. will be added when the gauge changes its constituents next month, according to Nomura Holdings Inc., Daiwa Securities Group Inc. and Mizuho Financial Group Inc. Surges in earnings and share price sent the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 power plant into contention for a place.

Inclusion in the government-inspired shame index means the world's largest pension fund, which is estimated to own more than half the assets tracking the measure, would buy more of a company's shares. Adding Tepco raises questions about the quality of a gauge devised as a badge of honor for the 400 stocks chosen each year.

"There's much debate on whether Tepco is suitable for an index of good companies, but if you abide by the rules, you can't exclude it," said Keiichi Ito, chief quants analyst at SMBC Nikko Securities Inc. in Tokyo.

"Many investors don't own the stock, so the effect on the share price could be big."

JPX-Nikkei 400 constituents are picked based on three-year average return on equity, which measures how efficiently capital is used, and cumulative operating profit, each accounting for 40 percent of the selection criteria. Market value makes up the remaining 20 percent. About 10 firms can also be replaced based on corporate-governance standards, such as providing English-language results and appointing at least two independent outside directors.

Tepco jumped from 973rd last year to 280th under the selection criteria, according to analysis by Mizuho. The utility's market value rose to ¥1.1 trillion (\$8.62 billion) as of the June 30 calculation date, about 60 percent higher than a year before, as shares jumped on optimism Japan will restart its nuclear plants. Three-year average return on equity is about 12 percent, compared with minus 29 percent a year earlier. Cumulative operating income over the three years also turned positive, buoyed by two years of profit. Core meltdowns at three reactors in Tepco's Fukushima No. 1 station in March 2011 forced the evacuation of about 160,000 people and rendered some areas uninhabitable for decades. The company has faced radiation leaks at the Fukushima site, questions over the hiring and treatment of workers there, and has been accused of having a lax safety culture that allowed "man-made" failures to occur before and after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

"People wouldn't expect a company like Tepco to be in an index that's supposed to represent dynamic Japan," said Jonathan Allum, a strategist at SMBC Nikko Capital Markets Ltd. in London. "The index isn't quite what it's cracked up to be."

This is the second reassessment of the shame gauge's constituents since the index started last year. In the first, Panasonic Corp. was among 31 companies added, while fellow consumer-electronics manufacturer Sony Corp. was dumped.

This year, Toshiba Corp. may be removed after its \$1.2 billion accounting scandal. The company must correct earnings stretching back six years after an internal probe revealed managers overstated profits under pressure from executives.

"Toshiba's financial data are wrong, so they're not even at the starting line" for selection, Japan Exchange Group Inc. Chief Executive Officer Akira Kiyota told reporters on Tuesday in Tokyo, suggesting the bourse won't be lenient on the 140-year-old manufacturer.

Lixil Group Corp. may meet the same fate, according to Hayato Nagayoshi, chief quantitative analyst at Mizuho Securities Co. The housing-materials maker's position is in doubt after it reported accounting

irregularities at its German unit. McDonald's Holdings Co. (Japan) will probably also be dumped, say brokerages including Bank of America Corp.'s Merrill Lynch unit and Daiwa Securities Group Inc., after food scandals prompted restaurant closures and led to losses.

Toshiba must go, and Tepco shouldn't even be considered given its troubles, according to Ayako Sera, a Tokyo-based strategist at Sumitomo Mitsui Trust Holdings Inc.

“Investors will lose faith in the JPX-Nikkei 400” if Tepco gets in, Sera said. “They need to exercise discretion beyond quantitative criteria if they want to protect the integrity of the index.”

Three ex-TEPCO bosses indicted?

July 31, 2015

Ex-TEPCO execs to face mandatory indictment given panel decision

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150731p2g00m0dm078000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- An independent judicial panel of citizens said Friday it has decided that three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. merit indictment over the 2011 nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, setting the stage for them to face mandatory prosecution.

Given the decision by the Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution, the Tokyo District Court will pick lawyers to serve as prosecutors and the three, including Tsunehisa Katsumata, 75, chairman of TEPCO at the time of the disaster, will be indicted on charge of professional negligence resulting in death and injury. The other two are former vice presidents, Sakae Muto, 65, and Ichiro Takekuro, 69.

July 31, 2015 (Mainichi Japan)

See also

Judicial review panel votes to indict ex-TEPCO execs for 3/11 disaster

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/07/31/national/judicial-review-panel-votes-indict-ex-tepco-execs-311-disaster/#.VbslF_nwmou

Kyodo

An independent judicial panel of citizens said Friday it has decided that three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. merit indictment over the 2011 nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, setting the stage for them to face mandatory prosecution.[...]

Residents happy with panel's decision

July 31, 2015

Residents hail indictment decision

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150731_80.html

Jul. 31, 2015 - Updated 09:36 UTC+2

The leader of the residents, Ruiko Muto, has praised the panel's decision.

Muto said she believes a court will determine who was responsible for the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster and give a fair judgment.

She said that 110,000 people are still unable to return to their homes. She added that **having the former executives face a criminal trial will help prevent a recurrence and create a society in which people can live in peace.**

The residents' lawyer, Hiroyuki Kawai, also said that if the former officials had escaped indictment, the real cause of the accident would have been covered up forever.

He expressed hope that the trial will find out more about what caused the nuclear accident.

TEPCO declined to comment on the decision or the criminal complaint that led to it.

But it said in a statement that it wants to renew its heartfelt apology to the people of Fukushima and many others for causing trouble and concern.

The firm said it will do its utmost for compensation, plant decommissioning and decontamination, based on the principle of seeking reconstruction of Fukushima. It added that it is fully resolved to improving the safety of nuclear power plants.

Three ex-TEPCO bosses indicted

July 31, 2015

3 former TEPCO executives face criminal trial over Fukushima crisis

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201507310053>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. will stand trial over the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster after an independent judicial panel of citizens on July 31 again decided that mandatory indictments are warranted.

It will be the first time for TEPCO or government officials to stand formally accused of professional negligence resulting in death and injury in the nuclear crisis that was triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

The Tokyo No. 5 Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution for the second time rejected prosecutors' decision not to indict the three--former TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and two former vice presidents, Sakae Muto and Ichiro Takekuro.

Based on the committee's decision, three court-appointed lawyers will indict the three and serve as prosecutors in the trial.

After the crisis unfolded at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, residents and citizens groups filed criminal complaints with prosecutors against senior TEPCO and government officials.

They argued that the three TEPCO executives failed to fulfill their responsibility to implement necessary safety measures at the plant before the disaster, leading to the deaths of hospital patients during the evacuation and other tragedies.

In September 2013, the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office decided not to indict the three former TEPCO executives.

The inquest committee handed down its first decision in July 2014, calling for indictments, but the prosecutors office again said there was not enough evidence to charge the three.

That led to the committee's second examination of the case.

A decision for mandatory indictment requires approval from at least eight members of the 11-member committee.

A chance to "take a fresh look" at 3/11

August 1, 2015

EDITORIAL: Trials of ex-TEPCO bigwigs a chance to take fresh look at disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201508010028>

Three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. will stand trial over their criminal responsibility for the 2011 disaster at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

For the second time, the Tokyo No. 5 Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution has rejected an earlier decision by prosecutors not to indict the three, setting the stage for the forced prosecution of these three individuals.

They will be accused of professional negligence resulting in the deaths of people who were in hospitals when the disaster happened and other tragedies.

A report issued by the Diet's Fukushima nuclear accident investigation committee states, "It is clear that the accident was a man-made disaster."

But **no government officials or TEPCO employees have been punished, either politically or administratively. In other words, no one has been held accountable for the nation's worst nuclear accident.**

Many Japanese citizens still feel that justice has not been meted out with regard to that harrowing disaster. **Many are also concerned that a similar accident may occur again if nobody is held responsible for what happened in 2011.**

A second decision by the independent judicial panel of citizens to demand the criminal prosecution of the three former TEPCO executives should be viewed as indicative of the disturbing and disquieting feelings among many citizens.

The system of **forced indictment through the judgment of citizens** was introduced in 2009, along with the “saiban-in” citizen judge system. Until that time, public prosecutors monopolized the power to decide whether to indict a suspect. The new system is intended to ensure that public opinion is reflected in the process of criminal prosecution, at least to a certain degree.

In reversing public prosecutors’ decision not to indict the suspects on grounds that there is no compelling case for holding them liable for negligence, the panel of citizens made a grave decision to force trials of the three individuals.

The court should, of course, consider carefully and fairly whether the former TEPCO executives should be held liable for the misfortunes of disaster victims from the viewpoint of evidence submitted.

At the same time, one question that needs to be asked is how TEPCO implemented measures to protect the nuclear plant from a possible tsunami and ensure the plant’s safety.

Collectively, the trials will offer a great opportunity to take a fresh look into the accident from a perspective that is different from those of the investigation committees set up by the government and the Diet.

There have not been many opportunities for people to talk about the disaster in public. But the three former TEPCO executives will probably be given opportunities to speak in the courtroom. The court can also order submission of specific pieces of evidence.

Future public debate on issues concerning nuclear power generation will benefit greatly if the trials uncover unknown facts in the process, such as chronological changes in the utility’s decisions concerning safety measures for its nuclear power plants and the ways the government and other public organizations influenced the company’s policy.

The nation’s judiciary has a long history of handing down rulings related to nuclear power generation. But in most of the past cases concerning the construction and operations of nuclear power plants, the courts ruled against opposing local residents.

The question is whether all these court rulings in favor of nuclear power were influenced in any way by the perception that there is no way to stop the expansion of electricity production with atomic energy based on the government’s energy policy.

The judiciary’s attitude to nuclear power generation has also been called into question by the accident. In considering the criminal liabilities related to the Fukushima nuclear disaster, which has caused an unprecedented scale of damage, are the traditional criteria, like “specific predictability,” sufficiently effective?

The trials should prompt the judicial community to have more in-depth debate on this question.

We strongly hope the trials will be conducted in a way that lives up to people’s confidence in the judicial system.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Aug. 1

TEPCOs indictment makes sense for citizens

August 1, 2015

TEPCO execs' mandatory prosecution reflects the sense among regular citizens

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20150801p2a00m0na008000c.html>

A judicial review board's July 31 announcement that three former Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) executives should be indicted over the 2011 Fukushima nuclear plant meltdowns reflects existing "sense among ordinary people," and emphasizes the weight of responsibilities that have been placed on the senior officials of the plant operator.

The Tokyo No. 5 Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution dismissed the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office's decision to drop cases against TEPCO's former chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata, 75, and two former vice presidents, Ichiro Takekuro, 69, and Sakae Muto, 65 -- claiming that such a decision neglected the significance of the disaster and was based on a false understanding.

Since the committee is made up of 11 citizens, however, its judgment differs from regular prosecution standards. As such, court-appointed attorneys serving as prosecutors are believed to face difficulties in making a good case -- and lengthy trials are expected.

"The committee's report clearly says that the TEPCO executives could have predicted (the disaster)," commented an attorney from a group of lawyers that filed for a review to the committee on behalf of disaster victims. "We have a bright outlook for the trials."

Perhaps the biggest game-changing factor for the public prosecutors' earlier decision not to indict the three former executives was the committee's conclusion that the responsible parties for a nuclear power plant should take into consideration the possibility of a disaster exceeding all expectations, insofar as a nuclear plant accident would result in irreversible effects.

The report emphasized that the TEPCO executives were responsible for preparing for a possible nuclear disaster at the Fukushima plant even though the chance of such an accident was very small -- thereby imposing much greater due diligence on the former utility executives than had the public prosecutors. The fact that the committee referred to a shutdown of the plant to ensure safety was also a notable point. In order to hold someone criminally liable in cases of negligence, prosecutors must prove that the defendant could predict an accident and avoid its consequences. In the TEPCO case, **the utility's 2008 calculation based on projection by a government earthquake research body -- wherein the highest tsunami waves hitting south of the Fukushima plant were estimated to be 15.7 meters -- drew significant attention.** The focal point in the case was whether the utility executives acknowledged this estimate and were able to predict the massive tsunami.

The Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office had concluded that prior to the disaster, the officials could not have recognized the tsunami risk whereby the plant's main equipment would become submerged in water. The office claimed that the scale of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami had exceeded the projection by the government research body, and that the projection itself had low credibility.

In response to the public prosecutors' argument, the committee cited the 1986 Chernobyl disaster -- pointing out that a nuclear plant accident could discharge a huge amount of radioactive materials that would in turn affect the preservation of humanity. It went on to say **that parties involved in the operation of nuclear power plants "absolutely cannot ignore" estimates for the highest tsunami, and concluded specifically that the three executives could have predicted the disaster.**

Regarding the avoidance of consequences, the committee argued that the executives should have taken every measure possible -- including the suspension of plant operation -- at least during a

period when the utility was working on establishing appropriate tsunami prevention measures. "If the operation had been suspended, the disaster could have been avoided," the report said.

The committee slammed the conclusion wherein the public prosecutors had said that the nuclear accident was unpredictable, and that it could not have been avoided even with waterproof buildings or moving the plant up on higher ground. This was deemed as having "no persuasiveness," and it was concluded that the decision had been "based on a false understanding."

Meanwhile, the executives are facing a class-action suit filed by a group of TEPCO shareholders with the Tokyo District Court, in which the investors are demanding a total of some 5.5 trillion yen from the three, as well as from 24 other former and current TEPCO executives. The 15.7-meter tsunami estimate has also become the point of contention in this lawsuit, with the defendant claiming that the figure was scientifically groundless.

In the criminal trial, which will start as the three executives are facing mandatory prosecution, **the largest points of contention will likely be the scientific credibility of the estimate for tsunami -- as well as how such information was passed to the defendants.** Since court-appointed attorneys serving as prosecutors are allowed to conduct supplementary investigations for mandatory prosecution, they will likely consider interviewing earthquake and tsunami experts, as well as TEPCO employees who were involved in the calculation process.

A number of witnesses are expected to be summoned if the defendants plead not guilty, however, resulting in a prolonged trial.

August 1, 2015

Editorial: Decision to indict ex-TEPCO executives in court over nuclear accident is meaningful

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20150801p2a00m0na009000c.html>

A prosecution inquest panel concluded that the responsibility of former Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) executives who failed to take measures to prevent a nuclear accident at its tsunami-hit Fukushima nuclear plant should be clarified through a criminal trial.

The Tokyo No. 5 Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution recommended that former TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and two former vice presidents, Sakae Muto and Ichiro Takekuro, be prosecuted on charges of professional negligence resulting in death and injury. This was the second recommendation by the prosecution inquest panel, whose eleven members were selected from among members of the general public.

In 2008, three years before the disaster, TEPCO released its estimate that the atomic power plant could be hit by a tsunami up to 15.7 meters in height. The inquest panel determined that the three former executives failed to take necessary measures, and neglected their duty to prevent a serious accident, even though they knew of this possibility.

The panel's decision stated repeatedly that if a nuclear accident were to occur, it could be a serious disaster -- a position that is completely understandable.

The decision says that **in operating nuclear plants, top priority should be placed on safety measures rather than reducing expenses.** Citing nuclear plant accidents overseas, the decision emphasizes that TEPCO should have taken sufficient measures to protect the power station from tsunami, even though such disasters are extremely rare.

Even so, the point of contention in proving that the three committed professional negligence is whether or not they could have predicted and prevented the disaster. The panel's decision takes seriously the responsibility of the three as the top-ranking executives of the utility that operates the Fukushima plant. The decision recognizes that **the executives had been informed regarding the company's forecast that a higher tsunami than previously estimated could possibly hit the power station -- and concludes that they could have implemented countermeasures as a result.**

Prosecutors who had decided not to indict the three had deemed that they could not have specifically predicted the risks of tsunami hitting the plant because of the forecast's lack of reliability. However, the inquest panel dismissed this conclusion as unconvincing.

A court will judge whether the three have criminal responsibility for the nuclear disaster. However, it is of great significance that those representing citizens have concluded twice that the three should be brought to justice.

Several years have passed since the executive and legislative branches' investigative committees on the nuclear crisis were disbanded. Only part of TEPCO insiders' testimonies on the accident has been disclosed.

As such, many people who have been affected by the nuclear crisis are wondering why the accident was not prevented.

Even though the trial of the three former TEPCO executives is not aimed at clarifying the cause of the accident, it is hoped that testimonies provided by the three, as well as from witnesses, will help answer the many questions from disaster victims. During the hearings, moreover, the executives should sincerely describe the roles that they played in managing the utility.

The prosecution inquest panel's decision was in response to a criminal complaint filed by long-term Fukushima evacuees, including one who died during hospitalization. Many victims will pay close attention to the court proceedings, and the responsibility of court-appointed lawyers -- who will act as prosecutors during the trial -- is extremely heavy. Prosecutors should fully cooperate with the lawyers during the trial proceedings.

TEPCO's indictment: A sense of justice

August 1, 2015

Indictment of TEPCO trio encourages Fukushima nuclear accident victims

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201508010032>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Finally, there is a sense of justice in the air over who should take responsibility for the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

A July 31 decision by a citizens' panel to indict three former executives of plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. has given renewed hope to victims that they will get the answers they have been looking for. The decision to indict marked the second time an independent judicial panel of citizens has overturned earlier decisions by prosecutors not to indict.

For the first time, a criminal trial will be held to determine the responsibility of TEPCO executives for the disaster.

Ruiko Muto, 61, who heads a group pursuing the criminal responsibility of TEPCO and government officials, was overcome with emotion when she learned of the decision.

"Even today, 110,000 residents (in Fukushima Prefecture) cannot return to their homes," Muto said.

"Unless the truth is revealed, the victims will not feel rewarded for all the trouble they have been through."

With regard to the three former executives who were indicted, Muto said, "I hope they will reveal the entire truth in the courtroom as to why that accident happened."

Hiroyuki Kawai, who heads the team of lawyers working with Muto's group, said: "If this had ended with a decision not to indict, the real truth about the accident would have been forever buried in darkness. There is a major significance in the decision to indict based on the sense of justice held by ordinary citizens."

In its decision, the citizens' panel noted that in the years before the accident TEPCO's bottom line was worsening.

"There was concern that if measures were taken on work to deal with (a potential) tsunami at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the financial situation would be further hurt," the panel said.

Yuichi Kaido, another lawyer, said the latest decision took greater account of TEPCO's financial background.

"The contents were much deeper than the decision made by the first citizens' panel (in July 2014)," he said.

Many of those still trying to cope with the aftermath of the Fukushima accident were unsure whether they would see any immediate improvement in their day-to-day lives.

Reiko Hachisuka, 63, who lives in temporary housing in Aizu-Wakamatsu, Fukushima Prefecture, welcomed the decision to indict. She said many people will never be satisfied until responsibility for the accident is made clear.

An evacuee from Okuma, Hachisuka joined the Diet's Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission as a representative of disaster victims.

"Even if a few people are tried in court, that will not lead to an end to our lives as evacuees," she said.

Of the 110,000 Fukushima residents who fled their homes, about 45,000 currently live outside the prefecture.

"I hope everyone realizes there is no direct relationship between the court case and the rebuilding of Fukushima," Hachisuka said. "Nothing will be resolved by making a judgment about someone's responsibility. The problem is much deeper."

Yuichi Manome, 52, an official with the Iwaki city fishing cooperative, said, "Damage continues to be inflicted on Fukushima even today. I hope a clear decision is made in the court."

The Iwaki fishing cooperative resumed the harvesting of sea urchins on July 30 on an experimental basis.

Manome suggested that **the failure to clarify the responsibility of TEPCO executives helped fuel moves to resume operations at other nuclear plants.**

"Despite the magnitude of the accident, no one has been asked to take responsibility," Manome said. "That leads to the thinking that perhaps the accident never happened in the first place."

The Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office and TEPCO issued statements saying there would be no direct comment on the decision made by the citizens' panel.

Reviewing the NYT review

August 4, 2015

http://nf2045.blogspot.fr/2015/08/the-new-york-times-gloss-on-hiroshima.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed:+NuclearFreeBy2045+%28Nuclear+Free+by+2045?%29

The New York Times Gloss on Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Posted: 04 Aug 2015 11:44 PM PDT

Reviewing the review: Nagasaki: Life After Nuclear War, by Susan Southard reviewed by Ian Buruma in The New York Times, **July 28, 2015**

August 6th and 9th, 2015. Seventy years since the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan. The obvious things to say are being said elsewhere, so what follows is an analysis of some American coverage of the dreadful anniversary that has appeared so far.

As this anniversary rolls around each year, the question on everyone's mind, the aging elephant in the room, is whether an American president will ever visit the bombed cities and admit that, yes, maybe, possibly, WWII could have ended sometime around August 1945 without the atom bomb. And maybe the global existential dread of the following years could have been avoided if America hadn't scared Stalin into thinking the USSR was the next target. [1] But we may have to wait a long, long time for any words of contrition to be uttered by an American politician. Some officials may visit and go through the usual contortions to show sympathy and express hope that it may never happen again, but it is still impossible for American leaders to describe it as a war crime, or even as a strategic blunder that wasn't necessary to end the war with Japan. [2][3]

To get an idea of the present limits on American public discourse on this topic, it's interesting to note who gets to write about it in the perpetrator's paper of record, *The New York Times*, one week before the 70th anniversary. The *Times* could have told the story of its own reporter, William L. Laurence, who was on the payroll of both the *Times* and the Manhattan Project in the 1940s. He dutifully reported on all the information he had been privy to as soon as the bombs were dropped, then he passed on to the public the military's lies about the effects of radiation from the bomb blasts in New Mexico, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Journalists and authors who uncovered this gross breach of journalistic ethics have called for *The New*

York Times to apologize for its role as a state propaganda organ, and for Laurence's Pulitzer Prize to be revoked, but the issue has been studiously ignored by the *Times*. [4]

In the past two weeks leading up to August 6, 2015, the *Times* has run several articles about the 70th anniversary, but they have all been short on historical analysis and long on biographical sketches of survivors or scientists from the Manhattan Project. In the example discussed here, the honor of commemorating the occasion went to Ian Buruma, who in 2010 was ranked by the journal *Foreign Policy* as one of the "top 100 global thinkers." [5] He was described therein as a "classical liberal" in the political and economic sense of the term.

Included on the list were several members of the political and business establishment (Henry Kissinger, Bill Clinton, Madeleine Albright, Robert Gates, David Petraeus, Bill Gates, Sergey Brin, Larry Page, Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos...) and intellectuals who can be generally described as those who downplay what Western civilization has done to the "developing world" yet hold up Western liberal democracy and economics as the beacon of hope for those who are yet to experience the benefits (Niall Ferguson, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Steven Pinker, Malcolm Gladwell, Christopher Hitchens, Thomas Friedman, David Cameron...).

Conspicuously absent from the list are famous dissidents such as Noam Chomsky and Ralph Nader, as well as many others who are too far outside ideological boundaries to be included.

In the July 28th edition of *The New York Times*, Ian Buruma addressed the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombs by reviewing the non-fiction book *Nagasaki: Life After Nuclear War*. [6] He paid the obligatory respect to the victims and the peace movement, and he acknowledged the "barbarism" of the atomic bombings and the neglect of the victims during the censorship of the American occupation. The curious omission, however, was the avoidance of the one thing historians have become more certain of over the years: the bombs were not essential for bringing the war to a quick end.

More curious still is the way Buruma accuses the peace movement of being naively manipulated by both rightist and leftist politics. The atom bombs, defeat and the American occupation supplied both left and right in Japan with anti-American grievances, so Buruma asserts, without any explanation, that the peace movement was manipulated by the extreme right, as well as the left.

The problem here is that Buruma confounds two competing views of Japanese history as being one thing called "the peace movement." Most people who follow Japanese society think of the peace movement as leftist, against all forms of militarization, and very prone to denouncing Japan's wartime atrocities. In contrast, the views of conservative political parties and right-wing groups are never associated with anything one would call a peace movement. The real peace movement has in fact fought constant battles to portray Japan's wartime atrocities accurately in textbooks and museum exhibits.

Elsewhere in the review Buruma laments that monuments in Nagasaki Peace Park were donated by the likes of the Soviet Union, Poland, Cuba, the People's Republic of China and East Germany, and then he drops in the completely irrelevant sentence, "Whether the world would have been a safer place on the terms of the Soviet Union and its satellites is less clear." There is something strange about the placement of this statement here, and the implication that is attempted. First, was Nagasaki supposed to humbly accept these expressions of sympathy and shared hopes for a peaceful future, or was the city obliged to denounce the givers as insincere hypocrites? It's not as if the "peace movement" was so politicized that monuments from the USA and other Western countries would have been refused because of their ideology or past deeds. For some strange reason (it's so hard to imagine what it could be), their contributions are absent. Second, there is the inconvenient fact that the Eastern Bloc and China, for all their flaws, never used atom bombs in an act of war. That's just something that the cheerleaders of capitalism and liberal democracies have to live with. Finally, it is ridiculous to imply that the acceptance of a few peace

monuments meant that “the peace movement” was duped into supporting a world order based on “the terms of the Soviet Union.”

In a similar scaremongering slight directed at the peace movement, he added, “preaching world peace and expressing moral condemnation of nuclear bombs as an absolute evil are not a sufficient response to the dangers facing mankind.” He seems to suggest here that the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have to speak out on every other problem in the world before they should be taken seriously.

The dangers Buruma referred to were actually left unspecified, but it seems the point was made as a deflection to minimize responsibility for Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Supposedly, nuclear abolitionists are deluded if they are not fighting threats that lurk somewhere outside the influence of liberal democracies. One would normally think that the only other threat that comes close to the danger of nuclear war is ecological collapse, which is certain to come if current trends continue. But since this is a problem that has been created by the industrial revolution that rode along with classical liberalism, it goes unmentioned. It’s better to just refer vaguely to “dangers facing mankind.” By implication perhaps we are supposed to understand that this refers to the common euphemisms found in American discourse: “instability in the Middle East” or “saber-rattling” by Russia and China.

Finally, Buruma discusses Japan’s attitude toward its post-war liberal reforms. He refutes Southard’s claim that these were forced on Japan by an occupying nation, but again, the facts get in the way. Japan was an occupied nation and the new constitution was imposed in the absence of democratic representation. Most Japanese people may have liked the reforms, but it is an undeniable fact that they had no choice in the matter. Buruma wrote, “They didn’t have to be forced, for they cooperated quite willingly with the Americans who helped instigate them [the reforms].” But it depends on what you call “willing cooperation.” People tend to willingly cooperate in many circumstances where there are no alternatives. The fact remains that they were denied pride of ownership of these reforms because they had no voice in creating them.

What is more important here is that Buruma neglects the national pathology that arose from this lack of agency. It can’t be remedied as long as Japan remains saddled with its American-supplied constitution, occupied by American military installations and subordinate to American policy. The right feels the nation has been emasculated, and the left suffers from the delusion that Japan has been a pacifist country during an era in which the occupation never really ended. Japan has hosted American military bases, and colluded in, supported and profited from American wars ever since the Korean conflict in the 1950s. The left, and the new generation of protesters decrying the recent re-interpretation of Article 9 (which forgoes the use of force as a way to settle international disputes) is upset that Japan is parting from its post-war tradition of pacifism, but they seem unaware of how complicit Japan has been in American wars. In one sense, it will be a good thing if Japanese soldiers are asked to join the next one. In that case, military cooperation with America might become less popular than it is now, and politicians will finally be held accountable for aiding and abetting American strategic goals.

For someone who is considered a leading intellectual and a Japan specialist, Buruma’s discussion of Japanese history here is surprisingly facile and evasive. On the surface, the review is what passes these days as a compassionate think piece on one of the greatest atrocities of history, but on further reflection, it becomes apparent that the review actually serves up mostly backhanded compliments to the victims and the millions of people who have worked to eliminate nuclear weapons. This wouldn’t be the case if he had not decided to use this opportunity to deflect blame onto his ideological opponents from a bygone era and to chastise the anti-nuclear movement for being “politicized” and naïve about unspecified “dangers facing mankind.”

Notes

[1] Kate Brown, "The Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters," interviewed on *TalkingStickTV*, January 18, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6Ys8ii6r_M As early as September 1945, Soviet spies had found American contingency plans for targeting Soviet cities with atomic bombs, and this shock came on top of the Soviets' bitter feelings of betrayal and abandonment by America, a wartime ally that suddenly seemed to want to take maximum advantage of the USSR's devastation in the post-war era. See also Kate Brown's book *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters*, pages 97-98.

[2] Roger Goodman (director), "Hiroshima: Why the Bomb was Dropped," *ABC News*, August 1995. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-WnLNLe3sk> This documentary is an exceptional case in which a report produced for a mainstream American news channel gave comprehensive coverage of the decision to use the bomb. While leaving the question open for viewers to decide, the evidence presented strongly suggests that American motives were based on objectives beyond the war with Japan, which was sure to end soon thanks to the threat of Soviet involvement.

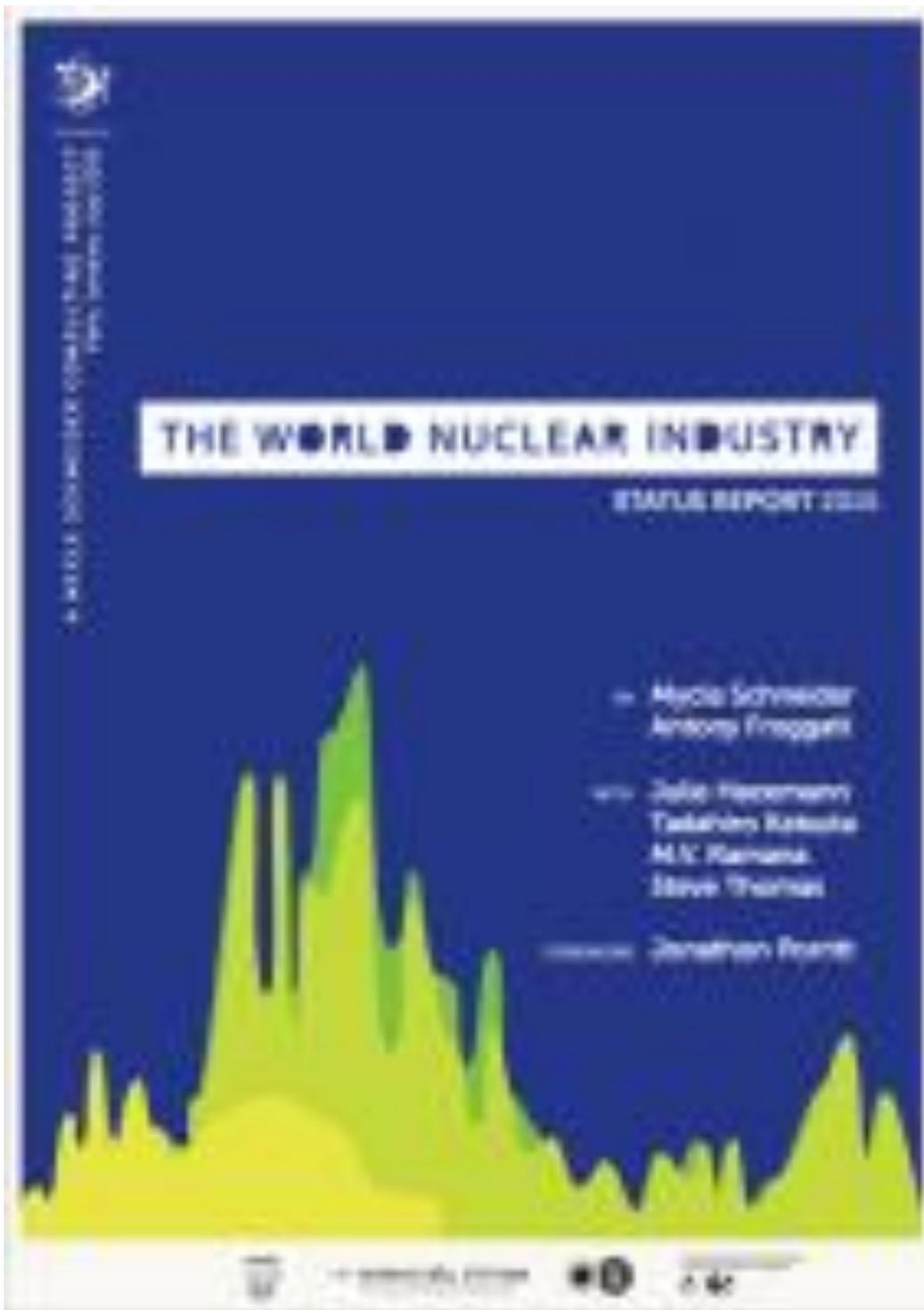
[3] William Burr (editor), "The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II," *National Security Archive*, George Washington University, August 5, 2005, updated August 4, 2015. <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb525-The-Atomic-Bomb-and-the-End-of-World-War-II/> This resource provides a wide range of primary sources that have been used by researchers to support their interpretations of the way America chose to end WWII.

[4] Amy Goodman and David Goodman, "Hiroshima Cover-up: How the War Department's Timesman Won a Pulitzer," *CommonDreams*, August 10, 2004. <http://www.commondreams.org/views/2004/08/10/hiroshima-cover-how-war-departments-timesman-won-pulitzer>

[5] ahughey, "The FP Top 100 Global Thinkers," *Foreign Policy*, November 23, 2010. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/11/23/the-fp-top-100-global-thinkers-5/>

[6] Ian Buruma, "'Nagasaki: Life After Nuclear War,' by Susan Southard," *The New York Times*, July 28, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/02/books/review/nagasaki-life-after-nuclear-war-by-susan-southard.html?_r=3&referrer=

Deconstructing the nuclear industry



<http://thebulletin.org/deconstructing-nuclear-industry8565>

Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists

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Deconstructing the nuclear industry

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Released on July 15, the World Nuclear Industry Status Report 2015 (*WNISR 2015*) is the latest independent assessment of nuclear energy trends in a series first published in 1992. This year's report comes at a time when most energy and environmental experts shy away from the words "nuclear renaissance" but some view nuclear power as an indispensable substitute for fossil fuels in global efforts to combat climate change. Current trends, however, suggest that a rapid ramp-up of nuclear power is unlikely, and that renewable energy is surging past nuclear power in many countries. Here are a few of the report's key findings:

Nuclear electricity generation. By mid-2015, 30 countries were generating electricity from nuclear power. Nuclear plants generated 2,410 net terawatt-hours of electricity last year, a 2.2 percent increase over the previous year but close to 10 percent below the 2006 historic peak—by comparison, solar power surged by 38 percent and wind by 10 percent. A surprising eight countries (China, Hungary, India, Russia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, and Taiwan) achieved their greatest nuclear production in 2014, but of these countries only China and Russia started up new reactors during the year. The gains in other countries were essentially a result of upgrading or better management at existing power plants.

Although nuclear electricity generation increased last year, nuclear energy's share of global commercial electricity generation has changed little over the past three years. In 2014, nuclear power was 10.8 percent of the global mix. As in previous years, the "big five" countries—the United States, France, Russia, South Korea, and China—generated more than two-thirds of all nuclear electricity in the world. The United States and France accounted for half of all global nuclear production, and France alone generated half of the European Union's nuclear power.

Construction starts and delays. *WNISR 2015* goes further and deeper than previous reports in analyzing the pace of nuclear power plant construction: the length of the process, the reasons for delays, the number of projects that have been cancelled or suspended, and how construction trends vary from country to country. These are limiting factors in any plan for a global scale-up of nuclear power.

The average construction time of the 40 units that started up in nine countries since 2005—all but one (in Argentina) in Asia or Eastern Europe—was 9.4 years, with a large range from 4 to 36 years. Construction starts plunged from 15 in 2010 to three in 2014. There are currently 62 reactors under construction, five fewer than a year ago, and at least three-quarters of these projects are facing delays. In 10 of 14 countries that are building new reactors, *all* projects are delayed, many by years. Five reactors that are "under construction" are projects that began more than 30 years ago.

For the first time, this year's report devotes a full chapter to Generation III+ reactors such as the Westinghouse AP1000, Rosatom AES-2006, and Areva EPR—advanced reactors designed to improve the safety and economics of nuclear power. These reactors are not proving easy to build: By May 2015, 18 next-generation reactors were under construction, but only two projects were still on schedule; the rest were running behind by two to nine years. This includes the AP1000s being built at the Summer and

Vogtle nuclear plants in the United States, which after only two years of construction are late by at least two years.

Generation III+ reactors were originally seen as a transition to even more advanced Generation IV reactors, but if Generation III+ reactors fail, the future for the nuclear industry looks bleak. Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) or radically new reactor designs, known as Generation IV and optimistically touted by some nuclear lobbyists as the key to de-carbonizing the global economy, are still decades away from commercial deployment. Meantime, existing nuclear plants around the world are edging toward retirement, with an average age that has been increasing steadily and now stands at 28.8 years.

Nuclear heavyweights. In both France and Japan, two of the three countries with the largest installed nuclear capacity (the United States is number one), the nuclear industry is in deep trouble. Although Japan still has 40 reactors that are counted as installed capacity, none of them operated in 2014. It was the first time in 50 years that Japan was without nuclear electricity for an entire calendar year. And no lights went out. As of today, it appears likely that two reactors, at most, will restart in Japan this year.

In France, long the world's role model for how to successfully develop nuclear energy, the National Assembly passed an energy bill that defines a target to reduce nuclear's share of the electricity mix from three-quarters to half by 2025. The French state-controlled energy group Areva—the self-proclaimed global leader in nuclear energy—went technically bankrupt after reporting massive losses for four years in a row. Credit-rating agencies have downgraded Areva's long-term debt to "junk," and the company's share price plunged to a record low earlier this month, a level 90 percent below its record high in 2007. Areva is the designated builder for the Hinkley Point C project, which was to be the United Kingdom's first new reactor in decades, and had planned to contribute 10 percent of the investment. That project is now in shambles. In addition to Areva's financial woes, the pressure vessels for the Flamanville (France) and Taishan (China) EPRs—the same European Pressurized Water Reactor design planned for Hinkley Point C—have "very serious" material defects, the French Nuclear Safety Authority told a parliamentary hearing in April 2015.

The rise of renewables. In the United Kingdom, electricity output from renewables (including hydropower) has overtaken the output from nuclear. Meanwhile, China, Germany, Japan, Brazil, India, Mexico, the Netherlands, and Spain generated more power from non-hydro renewables than from nuclear in 2014. Compared with 1997, when the Kyoto Protocol on climate change was signed, in 2014 there was an additional 694 terawatt-hours of wind power and 185 terawatt-hours of solar photovoltaics—each outpacing nuclear's additional 165 terawatt-hours.

What is spectacular is the extent to which the nuclear industry and many decision-makers are appearing to ignore the financial and technical realities of 2015, and the generalized move toward decentralized electricity generation and storage. The industry's track record of delays and cost overruns, coupled with the urgency of replacing fossil fuels with efficiency improvements and low-carbon sources of energy, do not bode well for the long-term future of the industry.

"We are not thinking of transporting nuclear weapons"

August 5, 2015

Japan defense chief says SDF could deal with nukes under security bills

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/08/05/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-defense-chief-says-sdf-deal-nukes-security-bills/#.VcHzgfnwmos>

by Reiji Yoshida

Staff Writer

Under the ruling bloc's security bills, the Self-Defense Forces would theoretically be allowed to transport, repair or store nuclear, chemical and biological weapons for a foreign or multinational force, Defense Minister Gen Nakatani told the Upper House on Wednesday.

But his statement came with an important caveat.

In reality, Nakatani emphasized, Japan would never actually carry out such an operation because the United States, Japan's main military ally, would not ask Tokyo to do so, given the "unique nature" of nuclear weapons and Washington's policy of not forward-deploying nuclear weapons in the Pacific. "It's true (that the bills) do not have any provisions to exclude particular items. However, the SDF would make an independent decision on what it would transport," Nakatani said.

"Japan has maintained the three nonnuclear principles (of not making, possessing or bringing nuclear weapons into the country). We are not thinking about transporting nuclear weapons," he said.

Still, Nakatani's remarks, made in response to a question from an opposition lawmaker, could create a stir and provide ammunition to Diet members who are against the security bills.

It could also further prolong difficult deliberations in the chamber on the legislation.

Kenzo Fujisue of the Democratic Party of Japan, the largest opposition force, noted that the three nonnuclear principles are not enshrined in law, and the security bills themselves do not include any of the assumptions explained by Nakatani during the session.

"There are no legal restrictions. Can we stop a runaway (government)? It should be restricted by law," Fujisue argued in the same Upper House session at the special committee on the security bills.

Under the legislation, the SDF would be allowed to provide logistic support to a foreign or multinational force engaging in a United Nations-authorized military mission, or to the U.S. military in the event that there was a situation that could lead to an armed attack against Japan if it wasn't confronted.

The bills would also allow the SDF to provide "ammunition" to such a foreign or multinational force, but not "weapons."

Japan isn't currently allowed to provide either ammunition or weapons because of war-renouncing Article 9 of the Constitution.

On Tuesday, Nakatani also caused a stir in front of the same committee. According to his definition, missiles are consumable "ammunition" and not "weapons." Thus under the bills, the SDF would theoretically be allowed to provide missiles to a foreign or multinational force.

According to Nakatani, powerful cluster bombs and depleted uranium shells are also "ammunition" because they are "consumable supplies."

During the same session, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said that cluster bombs and depleted uranium shells are not part of the SDF's weapons cache, thus it would be impossible to provide them to a multinational force.

Opposition lawmakers, however, have criticized the Abe government's apparent ambiguous definition of "ammunition."

The government has insisted the logistic support role is constitutional because it says a conceptual line can be drawn between SDF logistic support and "use of force" by the multinational force in question.

Article 9 of the Constitution stipulates that the Japanese people “forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.”

Opposition lawmakers have pointed out that logistics units always play a critical role in military operations and that it is impossible to separate “use of force” from potential logistics support by the SDF.

Security bills technically allow nuclear arms transport: minister

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150805p2g00m0dm085000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Government-proposed national security legislation would theoretically allow Japan to transport nuclear weapons in logistics support for foreign countries, Defense Minister Gen Nakatani said Wednesday.

During deliberations on the legislation in a House of Councillors panel session, Nakatani, however, immediately ruled out such a possibility citing the country's non-nuclear principles.

Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida also denied the possibility regardless of legal interpretation, telling the same panel, "Given Japan's policy and stance on nuclear weapons, Japanese would never transport nuclear weapons".

The three non-nuclear principles forbid Japan from possessing, manufacturing or allowing nuclear weapons on its territory.

Shinkun Haku, a lawmaker of the biggest opposition Democratic Party of Japan who questioned the ministers during the panel session, said the government should scrap the legislation which would pave the way for the SDF to carry nuclear arms, Haku said.

The security bills are aimed at expanding the role of the SDF abroad and strengthening Japan's security alliance with the United States.

Recent opinion polls indicate a majority of Japanese voters oppose the legislation, which opponents say would make it likelier for Japan to be involved in war.

Nakatani said enhancing the SDF's operations is more important than ever at a time China is stepping up its military assertiveness.

China's expanded maritime activity has become "a security concern for the region including Japan and for the international community," he said.

A-bomb survivors beg Abe to reconsider

Atomic bomb survivors implore Abe to withdraw unpopular security bills

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201508060050

August 06, 2015

By TAKASHI OKUMA/ Staff Writer

HIROSHIMA--Survivors of the atomic bombing here pleaded with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to drop the new security legislation following a ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of the devastation of the city. "It is a clear violation of the Constitution, and a majority of Japanese either oppose it or hold doubts about it," they told Abe.

Every year, representatives of hibakusha (atomic bomb survivors) meet with the prime minister after his attendance at the memorial ceremony held at Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park.

This year, the representatives of seven hibakusha groups asked Abe to retract the security bills now being deliberated in the Upper House. If the legislation becomes law, it will greatly expand the role of the Self-Defense Forces overseas.

The representatives also handed Abe a document detailing their requests, including the one to retract the bills.

"Some of the measures being pushed by the government go against the wishes of the hibakusha, and we cannot but hold fears and doubts. The best example is the security legislation," the document said.

Abe replied, "(The security legislation) will send the message that the Japan-U.S. security alliance will function in a complete manner, and that will prevent conflicts from occurring."

It was the second straight year that the hibakusha groups have asked the prime minister to rescind a major policy initiative.

Last year, the representatives of the seven groups called on Abe to retract the Cabinet decision made in July 2014 to change the government interpretation of the Constitution and lift the self-imposed ban on the exercise of the right to collective self-defense.

Will Abe's message help reconciliation?

August 7, 2015

EDITORIAL: Abe's war anniversary message should promote reconciliation

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201508070021>

A council of experts appointed to advise Prime Minister Shinzo Abe over his planned statement to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II submitted its report to him on Aug. 6. Abe will shortly issue his statement after considering the recommendations by the advisory panel. Commenting on the statement issued in 1995 by then Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of the war, Abe reiterated on Aug. 6 that his message will "carry on the positions (on related issues) of successive Cabinets as a whole." Murayama's statement expressed remorse and apology for Japan's colonial rule and aggression.

Abe's statement will be meaningless if it fails to strike a resonant chord in the people to whom it is addressed. We want him to clearly express his intention to "carry on" the spirit of the Murayama statement with his own words.

“After the Manchurian Incident, Japan expanded its aggression against the continent ... and caused much damage to many countries, mainly in Asia, through a reckless war,” the report states.

It also says, “Going against the dominant trend toward ethnic self-determination, (Japan) implemented colonial rule (over other Asian nations) with great severity, especially after the late 1930s.”

The report is a compilation of the opinions voiced by the experts tasked by Abe to offer advice on the statement he plans to issue.

Although it is not a draft of Abe’s statement, the report’s descriptions about the events leading to the war are largely reasonable.

After recklessly expanding its aggression, Japan surrendered by accepting the Potsdam Declaration.

Then, Japan accepted the rulings handed down by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, which tried Japan’s wartime leaders, and regained its sovereignty under the San Francisco Peace Treaty, signed in 1951. Since returning to the international community, Japan has been pursuing a pacifist path based on its own soul-searching about the war under the new Constitution.

This is the outline of Japan’s history during and after the war that has become an established view both in and outside Japan, although there may be disagreements over certain details.

But Abe has exhibited a desire to change this widely accepted historical narrative, saying there is no established definition of aggression.

The report by the personal advisers to Abe, however, clearly referred to Japan’s aggression.

Admitting one’s mistake is indispensable if one is to not make the same mistake again.

The Murayama statement, which candidly admitted Japan’s national policy mistake and expressed “deep remorse” and offered a “heartfelt apology,” has been welcomed internationally and served as a foundation for Japanese diplomacy since then.

It is debatable whether Abe needs to issue a new statement in view of the existence of the Murayama document.

As he has decided to go to the trouble of issuing a new message, however, Abe should make sure that it will not cause any new misunderstanding or mistrust between Japan and its neighbors.

As the Japanese leader, Abe has the responsibility to ensure that his statement will offer a view about Japan’s past that transcends his personal feelings, represents the collective sentiment of the Japanese people and wins the support of the international community.

To do so, Abe should focus on the following objectives:

The number of people in Japan and neighboring countries who had firsthand experiences of the ravages of the war is already small and dwindling. Abe’s statement should, first and foremost, resonate with the feelings of these people.

It is also important for Abe to make it clear that his statement is intended as a message for reconciliation to heal Japan’s seriously soured relations with China and South Korea.

The entire world is closely watching Abe’s decision as to what should be the core message of his statement.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Aug. 7

Editorial: Abe should give war anniversary statement aiding reconciliation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20150807p2a00m0na017000c.html>

A panel of experts discussing the content of a statement that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will issue on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II has compiled a report on the issue. Based on the report, the prime minister intends to issue a statement on Aug. 14, the day before the anniversary. The report covers four areas -- lessons that should be learned from the experiences of the 20th century, the path Japan has taken in the postwar period, the country's reconciliation with European, North American and Asian countries and a vision for the 21st century.

Of these issues, lessons that should be learned from the experiences of the 20th century are linked directly to the prime minister's historical perceptions, which form the core of his statement. The content of this section can generally be hailed as well-balanced.

The report points out that Western countries, having preceded other countries in technological innovation, went ahead with colonization in the 19th century, but that the brakes were applied on this colonization at the beginning of the 20th century.

The panel's document says that after the Manchurian Incident, Japan "expanded its aggression against the continent" despite the 1922 Nine-Power Treaty and the 1928 General Treaty for Renunciation of War as an Instrument of National Policy. It goes on to say, "Japan lost sight of the global trends, and caused much harm to various countries, largely in Asia, through a reckless war."

The document criticizes Japan's colonial rule, stating, "In the colonies, Japan acted counter to the tide of self-determination. Colonial rule became particularly harsh from the second half of the 1930s on."

As such, the report basically adheres to key words and phrases in a 1995 statement issued by then Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the war's end -- "a mistaken national policy," "its colonial rule and aggression," "tremendous damage and suffering" and "deep remorse."

The 16 members of the committee were selected privately by Prime Minister Abe. The panel was not tasked with determining the government's historical perceptions. The report also acknowledges that some members disagreed with the description of Japan's "aggression."

Still, it is of great significance that a panel that the prime minister set up as part of his efforts to draw up his statement put forth historical perceptions that are largely similar to those in the Murayama Statement. If the prime minister were to sidestep the content of the report in his statement, the Japanese public and the international community would find it quite unnatural.

The report contains inappropriate expressions regarding Japan's efforts to reconcile with South Korea. It says that despite Japan's efforts to reconcile with the country, South Korea "moved the goalpost." It is inadvisable for the panel to use such an emotional expression in criticizing South Korea's diplomatic stance.

A bigger issue, however, is the statement Prime Minister Abe will issue based on the report.

Judging from his past words and deeds, there is no reason to doubt Abe is working enthusiastically on the statement out of dissatisfaction with the Murayama Statement. Prime Minister Abe has avoided using the word, "aggression," as the Murayama Statement did, while stating that he basically respects the Murayama Statement.

A statement to commemorate the 70th anniversary is not a setting in which the prime minister should express his personal historical perceptions. It is a statement issued by the person responsible for governing Japan. Abe should recognize this and work out a statement that will contribute to Japan's reconciliation with its neighbors.

What material for Abe's speech?

August 7, 2015 (Mainichi Japan)

Recommendations for Abe war-end statement get mixed reaction in ruling coalition

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150807p2a00m0na016000c.html>

Senior figures of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) hailed an expert committee's recommendations for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's coming statement for the 70th anniversary of World War II's end as fair and balanced, but the response from some members of the LDP's junior coalition partner Komeito was more muted.

LDP Secretary-General Sadakazu Tanigaki praised the work of the private Advisory Panel on the History of the 20th Century and on Japan's Role and the World Order in the 21st Century, which submitted its recommendations to Abe on Aug. 6.

"It did an excellent job of analyzing where Japan went wrong in terms of the progress and problems in this country and the world in the 20th century," he said. "It's a balanced report."

LDP policy chief Tomomi Inada, meanwhile, stated, "We cannot reflect on what was done wrong if we don't understand what that is. That (the panel) debated the issue so thoroughly and put together this report has tremendous meaning."

One senior Komeito executive also had praise for the recommendations, saying, "It's a bit of a surprise, but they've really put together a decent report." The official added, however, that "the prime minister and our party have different ideas on the matter to start with," suggesting some anxiety about the coming statement among Komeito's ranks.

Komeito places particular importance on continuing the language and tone of the previous two war anniversary statements -- the 1995 Murayama Statement, and the 2005 Koizumi Statement. Party leader Natsuo Yamaguchi told an Aug. 6 news conference in Hiroshima, "(Abe's statement) cannot include major changes in meaning" from the past two. Yamaguchi met with Abe on July 7, and has had several consultations with members of the prime minister's inner circle to demand a reaffirmation of the content of the Murayama and Koizumi statements, as well as a Cabinet decision on the one Abe is to present this month.

Komeito had previously insisted that the statement include explicitly apologetic vocabulary. At his Aug. 6 news conference, however, Yamaguchi revealed that his party hadn't "insisted on the insertion of specific words. I think the prime minister and his associates are carefully considering the wording of the statement such that it's meaning does not change" from the past two. At an Aug. 7 meeting of the party's board, Komeito is expected to officially entrust Yamaguchi and other officials with the party's response to Abe's statement.

Opposition party figures, meanwhile, viewed the panel's recommendations for the Abe statement coolly. Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) Secretary-General Yukio Edano commented, "It looks like a compilation of opinions from many different perspectives," adding, "There have already been two excellent statements, one on the 50th anniversary of the war's end and one on the 60th. I don't really understand the idea behind issuing another one for the 70th anniversary."

Japan Innovation Party (JIP) leader Yoriyoshi Matsuno said of the recommendations, "The phrasing itself will become a diplomatic problem. Why is a statement even being released 70 years after the war?"

Social Democratic Party (SDP) Secretary-General Seiji Mataichi added his voice to the chorus of opposition criticism, stating, "We can't put faith in the report, which is in favor of the administration." On the coming statement, he added, "If it leaves out remorseful and apologetic language, it will likely damage Asian countries' trust in Japan."

August 7, 2015

Advisory report provides mix of material for Abe's war anniversary speech

An advisory panel to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Aug. 6 released a report characterizing Japan's military campaign from the 1931 Manchurian Incident in northeastern China through the end of World War II as "aggression," and also referred to Japan's past colonial rule. The report is clearly cognizant of the Aug. 15 statements by then Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama in 1995 and then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in 2005 on the 50th and 60th anniversaries of the war's end.

The report by the Advisory Panel on the History of the 20th Century and on Japan's Role and the World Order in the 21st Century, also made a positive assessment of postwar Japan in consideration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's resolve to issue a future-oriented 70th anniversary statement.

The advisory panel held an inaugural meeting in February in which each of its 16 members stated their own opinions and launched a full-scale debate at the second meeting in March. It focused on the annals of the world and Japan in the 20th century. A majority of the panel members said that Japan's military campaign during the war was aggression and that it is impossible for the panel to deny Japan's invasions. Others expressed dissent. The report notes that the international community has yet to reach a complete consensus on the definition of aggression under international law. In a footnote, the report says there are some objections among panel members against determining Japan's military moves after the Manchurian Incident as aggression.

Two members expressed reluctance to brand Japan's action as aggression. But panel Deputy Chairman Shinichi Kitaoka said at a news conference on Aug. 6 that the panel never thought of changing the text due to dissenting viewpoints. Kitaoka said at a symposium in March that the panel wants Prime Minister Abe to say that Japan invaded foreign territory.

While the Murayama Statement did not make clear the origin of Japan's military action in World War II, the report identified it as the Manchurian Incident because Emperor Akihito, in a New Year's message, declared that it is extremely important for Japan to fully learn the history of the war originating in the Manchurian Incident and think about the future direction of Japan.

The report went beyond the Murayama Statement, elaborating on misguided national policy at a certain period in the past. Takashi Shiraishi, president of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, said at the panel's meeting in May that Japan erred in national policy and that it would be better for Abe to frankly say so.

The report says that the war led to independence of colonized countries, but that it is not accurate to argue that Japan fought for the liberation of Asia, thus rejecting the historical perceptions of some scholars. The report went on to say that Japan made a fatal mistake by simultaneously clashing with nationalism in Asia and taking on major powers such as Britain and the United States, and did harm to the people of Asian countries.

Prime Minister Abe has repeatedly expressed willingness to issue a future-oriented statement, saying there is no need for him to issue an anniversary statement if it means saying the same things as in the Murayama and Koizumi statements. In speeches in Indonesia and the U.S. in April, he expressed "deep

remorse" over the war but made no mention of aggression. Panel Chairman Taizo Nishimuro told Prime Minister Abe in delivering the report on Aug. 6 that the panel expects the premier to accept it as a reference when he issues his 70th anniversary statement.

The report generally recited the past prime ministerial statements on Japan before and during the war but reflected Abe's desire to issue a future-oriented anniversary statement by referring to reconciliation with China and South Korea, proactive contribution to peace and other current challenges. The report mentioned a positive assessment in the international community of Japan's proactive contribution to peace evolving from the early 1990s, its rule of law, liberal democracy and respect for human rights -- phrases and words Abe frequently uses in his remarks.

During the advisory panel's debate, many panel members were critical of the failure of China and South Korea to positively accept Japan's apology in connection with Tokyo's strained relations with Beijing and Seoul, a sour spot in Abe's diplomatic policy. The report, referring to reconciliation with Europe and the U.S., says it is a big prerequisite for the aggressor to atone in a sincere manner, but it is also important for the victim to be tolerant to accept an apology.

On Sino-Japanese relations, the report says the two countries have failed to achieve reconciliation but pointed to past achievements including then Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's speech in 2007 hailing the Murayama and Koizumi statements as a juncture in Japan-China dialogue. On Japanese-South Korean relations, the report says that it is essential for Japan to approach South Korea with reason and heart to achieve reconciliation but that Seoul has "moved the goalpost" in the history issue in recent years. The report asks the South Korean government to work with Japan to achieve eternal reconciliation.

It is the first time for the Japanese government to set up such an advisory panel on anniversary statements by prime ministers. Abe backed the creation of such a panel to reflect historical perceptions of the public in his upcoming statement as national consensus.

Kitaoka told reporters on Aug. 6 that the report is reference material for Prime Minister Abe as he is prepared to issue a statement on history, postwar Japan and the reconciliation process with Japan's neighbors.

Below are the names and positions of the 16 members of the Advisory Panel on the History of the 20th Century and on Japan's Role and the World Order in the 21st Century:

Keiko Iizuka, head of International News Department at the Yomiuri Shimbun

Yukio Okamoto, president of Okamoto Associates Inc.

Shin Kawashima, professor at the University of Tokyo Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Shinichi Kitaoka, deputy chairman of the panel and president of the International University of Japan.

Yorihiko Kojima, chairman of Mitsubishi Corp.

Yoshiko Kojo, professor at the University of Tokyo Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Takashi Shiraishi, president of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies

Rumiko Seya, president of Japan Center for Conflict Prevention

Terumasa Nakanishi, professor emeritus at Kyoto University

Masashi Nishihara, president of the Research Institute for Peace and Security

Taizo Nishimuro, panel chairman and president of Japan Post Holdings Co.

Masashi Haneda, professor at the University of Tokyo

Yoshito Hori, president of Globis University

Kunihiko Miyake, visiting professor at Ritsumeikan University

Masayuki Yamauchi, professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo

Takao Yamada, special senior writer at the Mainichi Shimbun

August 07, 2015 (Mainichi Japan)

Abe's omissions fuel worry

Anxiety rises over Abe omitting non-nuclear principles from Hiroshima speech

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201508070062

August 07, 2015

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's omission of the "three non-nuclear principles" during his speech in Hiroshima on Aug. 6 has caused concerns that Japan may be about to ditch a long-held and highly cherished philosophy.

"We will make further efforts toward realization of a world without nuclear weapons," Abe did say in this year's ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombing of the city on Aug. 6, 1945.

But it's what he did not say that is causing anxiety, particularly among atomic bomb survivors. He failed to confirm the nation's three non-nuclear principles: Japan does not possess or produce nuclear weapons and also does not permit other countries to bring those weapons into Japan.

Only after the ceremony, when Abe met with representatives of atomic bomb survivors, did the prime minister say, "I pledge that, by firmly maintaining the three non-nuclear principles, we will continue to lead the efforts toward abolition of nuclear weapons and realization of permanent peace to prevent a recurrence of disasters brought by nuclear weapons."

As criticism spread over his omission at a widely reported ceremony attended by 55,000 people, Abe was forced to respond at a meeting of the Lower House Budget Committee on Aug. 7.

"It is a matter of course that (Japan will maintain) the three non-nuclear principles," he said. "The stance is not changing at all."

Abe also said he would confirm Japan's adherence to the non-nuclear principles in his speech in Nagasaki on Aug. 9.

Since the prime minister's participation became a regular fixture at the Hiroshima ceremony in 1994, it marked the first time that Japan's leader has not mentioned the intrinsic principles.

Abe has taken part in the ceremony three times, including during his first tenure as prime minister from 2006 to 2007. On all three occasions he has mentioned them.

In the evening of Aug. 6, a senior official of the prime minister's office backed Abe.

"We have strongly said our efforts (toward realization of a nuclear-free world) are unchanged," the official said. "It will not make any difference if the prime minister did not mention the principles."

However, the efforts of Abe and his office after the speech to dampen speculation that the three non-nuclear principles might be ushered out have done little to stop a general feeling of unease.

"If the government is thinking that it is not necessary to refer to the three non-nuclear principles on the grounds that it is a matter of course to firmly maintain them, it is the same as the case concerning the security legislation (now being deliberated in the Diet)," said Renho, an acting representative of the largest opposition Democratic Party of Japan, on Aug. 6. "We are anxious that unless there are guarantees to maintain the principles, the government could change them at any time."

Kunihiko Sakuma, 70, director of “Hiroshimaken Genbaku-Higaisha Dantai Kyogikai” (Council of organizations of atomic bomb survivors in Hiroshima Prefecture), was even more angry.

“It is little wonder if it is understood that Japan has abolished the three non-nuclear principles, which is its national credo,” he said.

Toshiyuki Mimaki, 73, a vice director of a different organization, also named, “Hiroshimaken Genbaku-Higaisha Dantai Kyogikai,” said that he was not aware that Abe did not mention the principles in his speech at the ceremony.

“It is frightful that the words went missing from the prime minister’s public speech while we were not paying close attention. The principles may be emasculated in the eras of my children or grandchildren while they are not aware,” he said.

On Aug. 5, Defense Minister Gen Nakatani caused an uproar after he said in the Upper House special committee on the security legislation that the possibility that the Self-Defense Forces will transport nuclear weapons is not ruled out.

“We are concerned because the prime minister did not refer to the principles amid a move to make it possible for Japan to wage a war,” said Hirokami Yamada, 84, head of the secretariat for the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Survivors Council.

(Shinji Muramatsu contributed to this article.)

August 7, 2015

Abe panel report mentions 'aggression,' 'colonial rule,' but mum on need for apology

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201508070067

By TAKASHI FUNAKOSHI/ Staff Writer

An advisory panel to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe submitted a report on Aug. 6 that mentions Japan's aggression before and during World War II, colonial rule and the responsibility of Japan's wartime leaders. However, it does not touch upon the need for an apology to those who suffered during the war because of Japan.

Panel members left it up to Abe to decide if he will include an apology in the statement he will release on Aug. 14 to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II.

It remains to be seen to what extent Abe will incorporate the report's findings in his own 70th anniversary statement.

He has said he would follow "on the whole" the statements released in 1995 and 2005 by predecessors Tomiichi Murayama and Junichiro Koizumi, respectively, when they were prime minister. However, Abe has stopped short of saying he would use the same words from those two statements.

Abe convened the panel to look into historical issues to provide background for his widely anticipated statement. The report, covering developments from before World War II and including the 70 years since the war's end, was submitted to the prime minister by panel chairman Taizo Nishimuro, president of Japan Post Holdings Co., and Shinichi Kitaoka, president of the International University of Japan.

"With this year marking the milestone of 70 years since the war's end, I want to compile a statement to be transmitted to the world that will lay out what we have learned from that war as well as the course that Japan should proceed along in the future," Abe said.

The panel, officially known as the Advisory Panel on the History of the 20th Century and on Japan's Role and World Order in the 21st Century, was formed in late February. Among the 16 members were historians as well as representatives from the business and media sectors. It held seven sessions at which various topics of Japan's past were discussed.

The report said that since the Manchurian Incident in 1931, Japan "expanded its aggression against the continent, ... lost sight of the global trends, and caused much harm to various countries, largely in Asia, through a reckless war."

It added that, "Colonial rule became particularly harsh from the second half of the 1930s."

It also pointed out, "It must be said that the responsibilities of the Japanese government and military leaders ... are very serious."

Reflecting the divisive nature of the topics, the report included a footnote that said, "There were some dissenting views in the panel concerning the use of the word 'aggression.' "

However, at a news conference on Aug. 6, Kitaoka, the deputy chairman of the panel, said about the footnote, "We included the footnote because one member expressed an opposing view which was seconded by another member. We never thought about revising the main part of the report. This is not a case of including both sides of the argument."

Regarding the path Japan took after the war, the report said Japan "is one of the countries that have been faithful" to the new liberal international system based on the premises of peace, rule of law and other principles that was established under the initiative of the United States.

But the panel said Japan still had more to contribute internationally in the security field.

The report also devoted a major part to analyzing the changes in Japan's relationship with various nations since the end of the war.

Regarding the ties with the United States, the report said, "our bilateral relations achieved a rare success in the history of the world."

However, the report could not offer such glowing terms for the relations with China and South Korea.

Regarding the ties with Beijing since the end of World War II, the report said the period represented, "70 years during which ... (Japan's and China's) intentions failed to coincide fully."

The report described a "yet-to-be-achieved reconciliation" in relation to South Korea.

No apology

August 9, 2015

Draft of Abe statement does not include 'apology' for Japan's role in WWII

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201508090024

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The draft of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's statement to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II does not include the word "apology" to Asian countries, which was included in two past landmark statements, according to sources.

Abe showed the draft to executives of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and junior coalition partner, Komeito, at a meeting on the night of Aug. 7.

According to attendees, Abe reiterated that he will “inherit as a whole” the statements issued by former Prime Ministers Tomiichi Murayama and Junichiro Koizumi to mark the 50th and 60th anniversaries, respectively.

However, the draft of Abe's statement did not include “apology” or similar wording for Japan's role in the war.

Regarding the omission, one Komeito leader told Abe, “You have said that you will follow the past statements. Your statement must convey the feeling of apologies to other countries.”

The draft included the word “remorse” for the war. However, the words “colonial rule and aggression” were not clearly explained to the junior coalition partner's satisfaction.

One Komeito participant asked Abe to put the word “aggression” in a clear context, saying, “Why is Japan showing remorse? Unless you make clear what Japan is showing remorse for, your statement cannot convey (the feeling of remorse).”

The draft also included the strides Japan has made in the postwar era and international contributions the nation should make in the future, the sources said.

In response to the suggestions from Komeito, Abe said, “I have heard (your opinions).”

The focus will now shift to how much of Komeito's input Abe will incorporate into his statement.

“(The meeting held on the night of Aug. 7) is the last one in which we will meet with Komeito representatives to discuss the statement,” an LDP executive said.

However, a Komeito executive said, “We have not yet left (the contents of the statement) entirely up to the prime minister.”

The meeting included Komeito leader Natsuo Yamaguchi and Komeito Secretary-General Yoshihisa Inoue. LDP Secretary-General Sadakazu Tanigaki and Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga also were in attendance.

Abe's Cabinet is scheduled to approve his war anniversary statement on Aug. 14.

Victory for nuclear lobby

August 11, 2015

In major victory for nuclear industry, first reactor goes online under post-Fukushima regime

by Eric Johnston

Staff Writer

SATSUMASENDAI, Kagoshima Pref. – Four years and five months to the day after the crisis began at the Fukushima No. 1 power station, Japan formally returned to nuclear power Tuesday with the restart of Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai No. 1 reactor in Kagoshima Prefecture.

Despite nationwide public opposition, questions about plant safety, the practicality of disaster response plans and who will be responsible for them, the strongly pro-nuclear Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, as well as the politically powerful utilities, local Liberal Democratic Party politicians, and major corporations involved in the nuclear industry have pushed hard to bring as many reactors back online as possible.

The nuclear lobby strongly argues that atomic power is cheaper than importing oil or coal and will help curb greenhouse gas emissions.

With the restart of the Sendai No. 1 reactor, the first under the new safety inspection regime that went into effect two years ago, attention has now turned to whether there will be a rush to restart other reactors.

In addition to reactor No. 2 at the Sendai plant, which is expected to be brought back online in early or mid-October, another 23 reactors at 14 plants are under consideration to restart.

Three of these, including the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama facility in Fukui Prefecture and reactor 3 at Chugoku Electric Power Co.'s Ikata plant in Ehime Prefecture, have been given the green light for restart by the Nuclear Regulatory Authority (NRA).

However, the two Takahama reactors have a provisional injunction against their restart slapped on them by the Fukui District Court in April, thereby making their fate uncertain.

On Tuesday morning, workers at the two-reactor Sendai plant in the city of Satsumasendai pulled out the control rods that have been suppressing nuclear fission in reactor 1 for the first time since May 2011, when it was taken offline for mandatory regular checks.

The reactor was expected to reach criticality within half a day, and the utility plans to start generating and delivering electricity in three days.

The reactor will have a test run for about a month, and if no problems are encountered, Kyushu Electric Power will begin selling the nuclear-generated electricity in mid-September.

At about the same time, final preparations will begin for a restart at the plant's No. 2 reactor, which is expected to occur in early or mid-October, with electricity from that reactor being sold by mid-November.

"The Abe administration, under its basic energy plan, has already decided it will activate reactors that have cleared new nuclear safety standards by the NRA, which are the toughest in the world. It's under this policy that the Sendai reactor was restarted," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said Tuesday morning.

Local communities like Satsumasendai, and the pro-nuclear local chapters of the Liberal Democratic Party, also rely heavily on central government subsidies and utility donations that come with hosting a plant.

The restart of the Sendai reactor thus marks a major victory for nuclear proponents at not only the national level but in other localities looking to restart another two dozen reactors.

At a news conference in the afternoon, Satsumasendai Mayor Hideo Iwakiri welcomed the restart, saying he believes the plant's reactors are safe and that he hopes they will provide a much-needed financial and economic boost.

"Between 5 and 6 percent of the town budget comes from central government funding for hosting a nuclear power plant or from Kyushu Electric," Iwakiri said.

Tuesday's restart came despite local concerns about what will happen if an accident occurs and, most importantly, who bears responsibility for the orderly and timely evacuation within 30 km of the plant.

"The premise of evacuation plans drawn up by Kagoshima assumes that the main access road in the area will not be damaged and will be available to get people out of the contaminated area before they are exposed to radiation. If that's the case, what happens?" asks Shoji Takagi, a manga artist and anti-nuclear activist.

The question of where final responsibility lies for the overall safety of the plant's operation, including proper safety measures, has emerged as the key issue in the debate over not only Sendai but all possible restarts.

Local officials say they grant permission for restarts based on the "central government's" seal of approval but admit they also need direction from Tokyo to draw up more detailed and effective accident contingency plans.

The NRA, however, says it is only responsible for the technical aspects of the safety of each plant.

Yukio Edano, secretary-general of the Democratic Party of Japan, the nation's largest opposition force, said that while the local governments have been tasked with drawing up and carrying out emergency evacuation programs, the roles of the central government have not been spelled out.

"(The Fukushima crisis) has made it clear that it is impossible for local governments alone to (evacuate residents). The central government should play responsible roles to evacuate them," Edano said.

"But the state is trying to evade that responsibility," he added.

In an attempt to quell lingering concerns, industry minister Yoichi Miyazawa said Tuesday that in the event of an accident, the central government will take the lead in responding to any emergency.

However, with nearly two dozen reactors elsewhere up for restart, both the central government and local authorities who want the money that comes with restarts are likely to find that demands to address these concerns in more detail are not going away.

Staff writer Reiji Yoshida contributed to this story.

Kepeco anticipates improved supply

August 11, 2015

Utility says restart will improve supply

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150811_25.html

Aug. 11, 2015 - Updated 07:01 UTC+2

The operator of the Sendai nuclear power plant expects the restart of its reactor to greatly improve energy supply.

Nearly 40 percent of Kyushu Electric Power Company's output came from nuclear power before the 2011 accident in Fukushima. The ratio is higher than those of other utilities.

Company officials say they are meeting this summer's power demand by operating thermal plants at full capacity and procuring power from other firms. But they say the thermal plants are old and often stop running.

The officials say that with the full operation of the Sendai plant's No.1 reactor, the company can secure power reserves of 5 percent or more. The reactor has a generation capacity of 890-thousand kilowatts.

Expensive safety measures

August 12, 2015

Power plant operators to invest ¥3 trillion on safety measures

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/08/12/business/power-plant-operators-to-invest-%C2%A53-trillion-on-safety-measures/#.VctRc_nwmos

JJI

Eleven nuclear power plant operators plan to invest a total of ¥3 trillion on a variety of safety measures, informed sources said Tuesday.

The safety measures include installing breakwaters and ensuring emergency power sources are available. In addition, the companies are required to implement anti-terrorism measures by July 2018.

Costs for safety measures are likely to increase further, but such investment will be inevitable for companies eager to win regulatory approval for reactor restarts.

Between them, the 11 companies have applied for regulatory approval for 25 restarts. So far, five of the units have obtained approval, including the No. 1 reactor at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai nuclear plant in Kagoshima Prefecture, which went back online on Tuesday.

Tohoku Electric Power Co.'s costs for safety measures will increase to over ¥300 billion from the originally estimated ¥182 billion due to additional construction work, including burying emergency fuel tanks to protect them from high wind.

Kansai Electric Power Co.'s spending will balloon to ¥490 billion from less than ¥300 billion because of anti-terrorism work.

Current plans in place at Chubu Electric Power Co. and Kyushu Electric do not include costs for anti-terrorism work, estimated at some tens of billions of yen.

The companies expect to reduce costs by firing up nuclear reactors as it would reduce the need to buy fuel for thermal power plants.

Kyushu Electric expects a monthly improvement of ¥7.5 billion in its balance sheet per reactor with the restart of the Sendai nuclear plant. The company aims to restart the plant's No. 2 reactor in mid-October.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. projects that the restart of its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture will improve its balance sheet by over ¥8 billion per month.

If the reactors are not restarted, the companies will be forced to cut costs further.

A long-term suspension of nuclear reactors will force power firms that have never carried out large-scale rate hikes after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami to consider rate increases, said Yukihiro Takabayashi, managing executive officer of Hokuriku Electric Power Co.

Subsidies for idled plants will be lowered

August 12, 2015

Grants to local bodies hosting idled nuclear reactors to be lowered

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150811p2a00m0na010000c.html>

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is set to cut back on subsidies to local governments home to idled nuclear reactors in **an attempt to pressure them into reactivating the reactors**, it has been learned. Starting in fiscal 2016, the ministry will revise grant amounts based on the operational rate of nuclear plants and other factors. Currently, the grants are allocated to local governments hosting nuclear stations that are suspended for safety reasons by deeming their operational rate to be 81 percent across the board. Under the planned new criteria, the deemed operational rate will be set for the respective nuclear plants based on their past performances prior to the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant -- which stood at an average 70 percent. Because the deemed operational rate is applied to nuclear plants nationwide that have remained offline since the onset of the Fukushima crisis, the government's move may prompt local bodies to call for reactivating reactors in their jurisdictions out of fear for reduced subsidies.

According to the industry ministry, the planned measure is aimed at ensuring fairness among local governments home to nuclear power stations after the Aug. 11 reactivation of Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai Nuclear Power Plant in Kagoshima Prefecture -- so that the amount of subsidies to local governments with restarted reactors will not be less than those to local bodies with idled reactors. Under the current system, local governments receive grants whose amounts reflect the operational performance of reactors from two fiscal years back -- which will be changed to 1.5 fiscal years back from fiscal 2016. From fiscal 2013 onwards, municipalities have received grants based on the deemed operational rate at 81 percent as many of the reactors they host were suspended for regular inspections by the end of fiscal 2011 in the wake of the Fukushima meltdowns and still remain offline. The uniform 81 percent rate corresponds to the full operational rate except for the regular inspection period once every 13 months.

The ministry started reviewing the grant system after an expert panel to the ministry drew up a report in December last year calling for ensuring fairness among municipalities hosting nuclear plants. The new deemed operational rate will be set at no more than 81 percent and will take into account the operational performance at each nuclear plant prior to the Fukushima meltdowns. Unless reactors are brought back online, grants to each municipality are destined to be cut back.

As many municipalities hosting nuclear stations heavily depend on the grants and other revenues related to nuclear power, they have called on the ministry to maintain the existing deemed operational rate system. The Mihama Municipal Government in Fukui Prefecture -- more than 40 percent of whose revenues in fiscal 2014 were related to nuclear power including the grants for local bodies hosting reactors at 1.49 billion yen -- has already anticipated that the grant amounts will be halved from fiscal 2016 due to the decommissioning of the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at the Mihama Nuclear Power Plant operated by Kansai Electric Power Co. "If the deemed operational rate is to be brought down on top of this, there will be growing calls for reactivating reactors," said a municipal government official.

Hisao Ito, a special researcher at the Tokyo Jichi Kenkyu Center (Autonomy Tokyo) who is specialized in local government finance, commented, "Under the current scheme where the grant amounts are decided at the discretion of the central government, local governments will not be able to break away from finances dependent on such subsidies. Municipalities should cultivate regional resources other than nuclear power generation, while the central government should support them through impact mitigation measures such as those for former coal mining areas."

Idled reactors expensive

August 17, 2015

Utilities spent ¥1.4 trillion last year to maintain idled reactors

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/08/17/business/corporate-business/utilities-spent-%C2%A51-4-trillion-last-year-maintain-idled-reactors/#.VdHqjfwmos>

Kyodo

The nation's nine utilities with nuclear power plants had to spend a total of about ¥1.4 trillion last fiscal year to maintain their idled reactors, financial statements showed Monday, revealing part of the reason that electricity rates went up.

Kyushu Electric Power Co. restarted a reactor last week despite strong public opposition, adding to the view the utilities are trying to reactivate their idled plants as soon as possible to help rehabilitate their balance sheets, which are also suffering from rising fuel costs for alternative power generation.

All of the country's commercial reactors remained offline in fiscal 2014, which ended March 31, amid heightened safety concerns following the 2011 crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 complex.

Tepco spent the most — ¥548.6 billion — having to maintain the Fukushima No. 2 nuclear complex, which is located about 10 km south of Fukushima No. 1, and the massive Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata Prefecture.

Kansai Electric Power Co., which relied heavily on nuclear power before the Fukushima disaster, spent ¥298.8 billion, while Kyushu Electric spent ¥136.3 billion.

Last week, a reactor owned by Kyushu Electric became the first to come back online under upgraded regulations introduced after the Fukushima meltdowns.

Five of the nine companies — Tohoku Electric Power Co., Tokyo Electric, Chubu Electric Power Co., Hokuriku Electric Power Co. and Kansai Electric — also had to pay some ¥130 billion to Japan Atomic Power Co. to honor their contracts with the entity, even though their reactors were idle.

TEPCO's mounting legal challenges

Fukushima operator's mounting legal woes to fuel nuclear opposition

Source : Reuters

<https://uk.news.yahoo.com/fukushima-operators-mounting-legal-woes-fuel-nuclear-opposition-210834627--finance.html#z4lDBk7>



By Kentaro Hamada, Reuters via Yahoo, August 16, 2015
<http://tinyurl.com/qfqopl8>

IWAKI, Japan (Reuters) - Four and a half years after the Fukushima disaster, and as Japan tentatively restarts nuclear power elsewhere, the legal challenges are mounting for the crippled plant's operator. They include a judge's forced disclosure of a 2008 internal document prepared for managers at Tokyo Electric Power Co warning of a need for precautions against an unprecedented nuclear catastrophe. Also, class actions against Tepco and the government now have more plaintiffs than any previous Japanese contamination suit and, overruling reluctant prosecutors, criminal charges have been levelled against former Tepco executives for failing to take measures to prevent the 2011 meltdowns and explosions.

Radiation from the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986 forced 160,000 people from their homes, many never to return, and destroyed businesses, fisheries and agriculture. The criminal and civil legal cases do not threaten financial ruin for Tepco, which is now backstopped by Japanese taxpayers and faces far bigger costs to decommission the Fukushima plant and clean up the surrounding areas.

Rather, the cases could further increase opposition to nuclear restarts -- which consistently beats support by about two-to-one -- as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government pushes to restore nuclear to Japan's energy mix to reduce reliance on imported fossil fuel.

"The nuclear plant disaster has upended our way of life," evacuee and former beekeeper Takahisa Ogawa, 45, testified recently in a court in Iwaki, near the Fukushima power station. "We've lost the support we counted on."

PROVING NEGLIGENCE

Ogawa and other plaintiffs are seeking 20 million yen (£102,192) each in damages from Tepco. More than 10,000 evacuees and nearby residents have brought at least 20 lawsuits against the utility and the

government over the handling of the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant 220 km (130 miles) north of Tokyo.

The biggest class action, with 4,000 plaintiffs, seeks to dramatically increase Tepco's liability by proving negligence under Japan's civil law, rather than simply proving harm and seeking compensation, said lead attorney Gentaro Managi.

Japan recently approved increasing the amount of compensation payments through a government-run fund to 7 trillion yen (\$56 billion).

Prosecutors twice declined to charge former Tepco bosses over their handling of the disaster, citing a lack of evidence, but a citizens' panel overruled them last month. It's unlikely the three former executives, who will be summoned to give evidence in court, will be convicted as it is hard to prove criminal acts in this type of case, said Nicholes Benes of The Board Director Training Institute of Japan.

The legal actions against Tepco are "serious for the industry" as it seeks to gradually bring some of Japan's 43 idled nuclear reactors back online, said Tom O'Sullivan, an independent energy consultant and former investment banker.

"With potentially up to 25 reactors coming online, board members of other electric power companies must be quite nervous about what could happen if something goes wrong," he said. "Most reactors have been switched off for four years so switching them back on is going to be potentially problematic, not to mention the risk of natural disasters."

"UNAVOIDABLE"

It's unclear what bearing the various lawsuits against Tepco might have on one another, but a common thread is that it should have anticipated the possibility of a devastating quake and tsunami and taken steps to reduce the impact.

The company maintains that the severity of the 9.0 magnitude quake and 13-meter wave could not have been predicted.

But the document introduced as evidence in the shareholders' suit after a judge forced Tepco to produce it, appears to challenge that. The "Tsunami Measures Unavoidable" report, dated September 2008, was filed with the Tokyo District Court in June, but has not been widely reported.

The unnamed authors prepared the report for a meeting attended by the head of the power station and marked the document "to be collected after discussion." It's not clear whether senior executives in Tokyo saw the report at the time.

The report called for Tepco to prepare for a worse tsunami than it previously assumed, based on experts' views.

"Considering that it is difficult to completely reject the opinions given thus far of academic experts on earthquakes and tsunami, as well as the expertise of the [government's] Headquarters for Earthquake Research Promotion, it is unavoidable to have tsunami countermeasures that assume a higher tsunami than at present," says the report.

"This is prime evidence that Tepco recognised the need for tsunami measures," said Hiroyuki Kawai, lead attorney in the shareholders' suit. "This will have an important impact on the lawsuit."

Tepco, in a court filing, counters that the document "does not mean there was a risk that a tsunami would strike and did not assume any specific tsunami countermeasures."

Asked to comment further on the internal report and the range of legal problems facing the company, Tepco spokesman Kohji Sakakibara told Reuters, "We cannot answer these questions because they pertain to lawsuits and because they suppose a hypothetical determination of negligence. However, the company is making appropriate assertions in the lawsuits and expects that in the end the courts will render fair judgements."

The shareholder lawsuit, filed in March 2012, seeks to establish responsibility for the disaster and demands 5.5 trillion yen [\$44 billion] in damages from current and former executives. A verdict is not expected for at least a year.

"This is likely to become a long battle where lawsuits go on for several decades or half a century," said Shunichi Teranishi, a professor emeritus of law at Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo, comparing it to the Minamata mercury poisoning disaster in the 1950s, where lawsuits continue to be filed to this day.

(Reporting by Kentaro Hamada; additional reporting by Aaron Sheldrick; Writing by Osamu Tsukimori; Editing by William Mallard & Ian Geoghegan)

see also :

August 17, 2015

Tepco facing plaintiff surge over Fukushima debacle, '08 disaster warning

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/08/17/national/crime-legal/tepco-facing-plaintiff-surge-fukushima-debacle-08-disaster-warning/#.VdHf7pfwmos>

No surprise

August 17, 2015

Industrial Groups Welcome Japan Reactor Restart

<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2015/08/17/industrial-groups-welcome-japan-reactor-restart>

Security & Safety

17 Aug (NucNet): The chairmen of three industrial groups in Japan have welcomed the restart of the Sendai-1 nuclear reactor unit, saying it will help the country's economy, the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum (Jaif) said.

Chairman Sadayuki Sakakibara of the Japan Business Federation Keidanren (JBF), Chairman Akio Mimura of the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI) and Chairman Yoshimitsu Kobayashi of the Japan Association of Corporate Executives (JACE) issued statements after the Sendai-1 nuclear unit restarted on 10 August 2015.

Mr Sakakibara said nuclear power is an important energy source for Japan, "not only from the viewpoints of energy security and economy, but also as a measure to combat global warming".

Mr Mimura said the restart of the reactor will be very helpful to Japan's economy as a whole because rising power costs have become a burden to small- and medium-sized enterprises, as well as to the recovery of local economies. Mr Mimura emphasized that a stable supply of energy at a reasonable price must be realised throughout Japan by all means.

The expertise accumulated during the examination procedures at Sendai-1 should be shared among Japan's power companies and nuclear power station operators in order to speed up the process for restarting other nuclear units, Mr Mimura also said.

Mr Kobayashi said constant efforts have to be made to improve safety at all nuclear power stations, including such systematic aspects as the issuance of highly practical evacuation plans, and the disclosure of accurate information to the public nationwide.

The government should also formulate realistic measures concerning high-level radioactive waste treatment and disposal, as well as the nuclear fuel cycle, so that the country's nuclear power business can be sustainable, Mr Kobayashi also said.

In May 2015, Japan's government said it will "take the initiative" in identifying scientifically suitable or promising candidate sites for a high-level radioactive waste (HLW) repository, moving away from its previous approach of relying on applications from municipalities.

The Japan Times said around 17,000 tonnes of spent fuel from nuclear plants across the country are stored in pools at the plants themselves and in a storage facility at the reprocessing plant in Rokkasho, Aomori prefecture.

In April 2014, Jaif president Takuya Hattori said fossil fuel plants have had to fill the gap left by nuclear energy when the country's nuclear units were shut down after the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and the Fukushima Daiichi accident. For utilities, this meant having to buy more oil, coal and natural gas adding a cost of about ¥3.7 trillion (about €28.5 billion) for 2014.

Since the shutdown of nuclear reactors in Japan, utilities have increased rates by about 20 percent for household consumers and about 30 percent for industrial consumers, according to Jaif. This has resulted in energy-intensive industries wanting to move out of Japan to countries like South Korea.

On 10 August 2015, Sendai-1 became the first nuclear unit to restart in Japan after all units had been shut down for safety checks and upgrades following the Fukushima-Daiichi accident. The Sendai-1 unit received approval to restart in May 2015, completing the NRA's three-part screening process and new safety requirements introduced for all nuclear plants in June 2013.

Earlier this year Japan's Institute of Energy Economics said 11 nuclear units could be back online by the end of March 2016.

"Truth... the first casualty of war"

August 8, 2015

Truth hurts: censorship in the media

Staff Writer

"Truth, it has been said, is the first casualty of war." — Philip Snowden, July 1916

In September 1945, less than a month after Japan's surrender ending World War II and ushering in the U.S.-led Occupation, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, supreme commander for the Allied powers, began cracking down on alleged Japanese war criminals. Over the next three months, hundreds of politicians, military men, bureaucrats and industrialists would be issued arrest warrants for their role in leading Japan to, and through, the war.

Among those who found themselves under suspicion as Class-A, -B, or -C war criminals were senior members of the press. One of the most notorious was Matsutaro Shoriki, owner of the Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper.

"He was one of the most important journalists who actively propagated the Axis cause before the war and energetically supported it through the war," read a secret report on Shoriki compiled by Occupation officials when he was arrested on Dec. 12, 1945.

"With the large circulation that his newspaper enjoyed, he ought to be regarded as one of the most evil influences in poisoning the public mind."

Shoriki would serve only 21 months in prison before being released, as the Occupation's early zeal for going after the country's conservative and right-wing wartime leaders such as Shoriki gave way to a desire to work with them as a bulwark against the Soviet Union and communism in the new Cold War.

Yet Shoriki was hardly alone. Senior editors and producers working for the country's major print and broadcast media also found themselves arrested or under suspicion in the early months of the Occupation, as the Allies looked to fix blame on the war's most influential propagandists and ensure they would not hinder efforts to rebuild Japan. But the roots of Japan's media problem ran deeper than most in SCAP realized.

Road to censorship

When Japan surrendered, the Asahi, Mainichi and Yomiuri newspapers, along with NHK radio, were the dominant news organizations and had long been subject to censorship. Government control of newspapers dated back to at least 1909, when the Diet passed the Newspaper Law, which restricted freedom of press.

As Gregory Kasza outlines in his 1988 book, "The State and the Mass Media in Japan: 1918-1945," activities banned under the 1909 law included covering closed judicial and legislative meetings, printing the contents of government documents that had not been officially released, insulting the Emperor or agitating for the government to be overthrown. Anything that authorities might define as "subversive" to the public order, or was judged to be a threat to public manners or morals, also ran the risk of being censored.

This law formed the basis of future government efforts that would further restrict press freedom. For example, the 1925 Public Security Preservation Law (also known as the Peace Preservation Law) was aimed at punishing socialist or communist groups, and made it a crime for anyone to form an organization that challenged the national polity or the system of private property.

Following the 1931 Manchurian Incident, which would lead to war with China, the government once again intervened. In March 1933, partially to quell opposition to what the Imperial Japanese Army was doing in Manchuria, the Diet passed a resolution that urged all "radical" ideas to be suppressed.

For NHK, which began radio broadcasts in 1925, a key year was 1934 when the government decided the broadcaster's local stations had too much autonomy. NHK branches at the time sometimes saw news in ways that were too different from the official line heard in Tokyo. Thus, the Communications Ministry forced NHK to centralize its operations in the Tokyo head office, which could now control content for the entire country.

“Programming would not simply flatter popular desires but would promote the ‘Japanese spirit’ and provide leadership,” Kasza writes, paraphrasing the statement of a ministry official.

The Communications Ministry also took charge of the hiring and firing at NHK. Ex-bureaucrats, many of whom often had little or no understanding of radio, were appointed to high-level posts at the broadcaster. This would lead to an inside joke that the ideal NHK executive was a “three *tei* man.” First, he was a graduate of a university such as Tokyo University, a *tei-koku daigaku*, or “Imperial university.” Second, he was somebody who had worked in the Tei-shinsho (Communications Ministry). And, third, he was a *tei-no* — an imbecile.

Japanese media scholars point to a number of laws passed in the late 1930s that removed the final barriers to media censorship — in particular, the 1938 National Mobilization Law, which was drafted in response to the July 1937 Marco Polo Bridge Incident near Beijing, an event that had led to full-scale war between Japan and China.

The law strengthened government control over private organizations, especially the media. Despite protests by some Diet members that it was unconstitutional, the law passed in 1938 under strong pressure from the Cabinet and with concerns, very real at the time, that the military might overthrow the government, as had almost happened during the Feb. 26, 1936, incident in which young military officers tried to stage a coup d’etat.

“The National Mobilization Law was the pivotal moment in the history of the Japanese media,” says Kaori Hayashi, a media scholar at the University of Tokyo’s Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies. “It became the source of power for all the existing media players, including broadcasting stations, because it excluded new players from the (media) industry, and made the *kisha* (press) club system that exists today legitimate.”

Final consolidation

From the spring of 1938, the move toward more government control of the media accelerated. A few months after the National Mobilization Law, the Home Ministry banned reports that conflicted with the government’s China policy. Furthermore, letters to the editor would be more carefully scrutinized. None that were judged to weaken public resolve would be printed. Nor were newspapers allowed to print letters from soldiers or the families of soldiers in China who faced problems. Building upon the morality clause in the 1909 Newspaper Law, the government also frowned upon articles that introduced “gaudy new fashions” or “frivolous tastes.”

With so many new laws and regulations to possibly run afoul of, and never entirely sure what would pass the censor, major media organs and the government had, by the early 1940s, developed a system of consultation and cooperation. Senior editors would meet with government officials to not only receive legally enforceable directives on what they could and could not print but also “advice” on how to spin the news in a way that would pass the censor and avoid the financial costs — and possible legal action — that would result in newspapers violating government press directives.

By then, there were far fewer voices of dissent in the media to oppose these efforts at control.

“In addition to the state’s legal controls, the continual ‘consultations’ with media people enabled the government to censor material before publication and to blacklist writers,” Kasza said in an e-mail to The Japan Times. “By the late 1930s, many of those banished from the media world had been mainstream rather than radical intellectuals, and this sent a clear message to those who remained active. Media people who wanted to continue resistance were relatively few.”

Over 1940 and 1941, consolidation of the media under government supervision was largely completed. In early 1941, the Cabinet Information Bureau, which would emerge as the most powerful government

authority in terms of media control, issued a directive after consultations with major newspapers such as the Yomiuri, Asahi and Mainichi that banned the publication of state secrets.

Further orders were given to the media to play up government attempts to resolve the war in China (or the “China Incident” as it was referred to). On the home front, reports and editors were forbidden to be overly critical of Diet members. By then, Kasza writes in his book, Cabinet Information Bureau officials were holding constant briefings at the Diet, where bureaucrats would first attend the Diet sessions and then sit in on meetings with editors where they would tell the media what was banned, what they would not like published, and how the papers might spin particular stories to avoid censorship.

The result would be little more than propaganda about war, virtually all of it false. In the months after the December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, the media could cheerlead for the navy’s advances in the South Pacific (even as the “China Incident” continued to drag on). However, Japan’s defeat at the Battle of Midway in June 1942 was hushed up, as were subsequent defeats as the tide of war turned.

This was not to say the media themselves were always in the dark about what was really going on, although clandestine efforts to learn the truth were necessary. One of the more famous stories of attempts to learn from the outside world the truth of what was happening is that of Mainichi Shimbun’s “Women’s Toilet Press.”

Not long after Pearl Harbor, the women’s toilet in the paper’s headquarters was renovated, which included soundproofing. On the assumption the men in the police and military would not embarrass themselves by searching a woman’s toilet, enterprising journalists hid a shortwave radio there to secretly — and illegally — receive overseas broadcasts.

Over the course of the war, the radio picked up broadcasts from numerous countries, including the United States. It was via this source that Mainichi journalists learned about (but could not report directly on) Japan’s defeats in the Pacific War after 1942, the collapse and surrender of its ally Germany in May 1945 and then, in July 1945, the Potsdam Declaration that called for Japan’s unconditional surrender.

Censorship continues

The end of the war brought with it the American-led Occupation and an often sincere, if sometimes naive, belief on the part of Occupation officials they could fundamentally remake Japan. “Democracy” was the buzzword in the first months after the war. As the Japanese media learned, however, that did not necessarily mean they were free to report on whatever they wished.

In William Coughlin’s definitive 1952 book on Occupation policy toward the media, “Conquered Press: The MacArthur Era in Japanese Journalism,” the author notes that MacArthur had a contentious relationship with the Japanese and foreign media. What could be printed (or broadcast on the radio) under Occupation authority was often decided in an arbitrary manner.

“The application of censorship rules was so confusing and difficult that most large Japanese newspapers set up permanent ‘censorship desks’ at which they posted experts who were expected to keep informed on the latest interpretation of the rules by Supreme Headquarters,” Coughlin writes.

While domestic reports were targeted for censorship, SCAP officials were particularly anxious to keep out foreign media reports that were critical about what was happening in Japan. U.S. Col. Donald Hoover, chief of censorship, said on Nov. 3, 1945 that there were four types of foreign media stories that would not be allowed to be reported in Japan.

These included, Coughlin writes, attempts to build up offenses by American troops into anything resembling a “crime wave,” any attacks in editorials or reports from the U.S. to Japan that might undermine Japanese confidence in the Occupation, blatantly false statements and anything that encouraged militarism.

Censorship would continue throughout the Occupation. By 1948, however, liberal idealists who'd arrived in the autumn of 1945 had all departed, replaced by those concerned with the looming Cold War and keeping militant unions, leftists and socialists out of power — and especially out of the media. Those who had been arrested on suspicion of being war criminals in 1945 were out of jail by 1948 and America's new allies in the struggle against communism.

The change in priorities suited Japanese media owners who were anxious to curb the power of the unions, and they saw the advantages of issuing their own directives in line with SCAP's attitude. On March 16, 1948, the Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association cracked down on printers unions and reporters who reported in a way that "damaged editorial fairness" or didn't follow editorial policy as laid down by management.

"Reporters were virtually deprived of their freedom, and 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' became god-like terms for Japanese reporters," Tokyo University's Hayashi says.

When the Occupation ended in 1951 with the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, Japan's media would consist of all of the prewar daily newspapers as well as NHK and, not long afterward, commercial television stations. With the Americans gone, Japan's media faced fewer legal restraints than at any time since, arguably, the 1909 newspaper law. However, as postwar developments would come to show, the media, like Japan itself, would retain certain prewar habits, customs and political arrangements that, if nothing else, ensured their own survival and prosperity.

Government ban on foreign loanwords forced The Japan Times to change its name in 1943

Strict control of the press during wartime Japan also extended to the realm of English-language newspapers, and particularly to The Japan Times, after its English competitors were incorporated into the paper.

The decision to continue publishing one English-language paper during the war years was made for several reasons. First, it was a source of information for citizens of friendly or neutral countries who remained in Japan during the war years. Second, it was a way for the Japanese government and the Foreign Ministry to speak to the outside world.

"There were liberal circles at both The Japan Times and the Foreign Ministry who wanted to show the world Japan was not being run by a bunch of fanatics," says Peter O'Connor, an expert on the history of English newspapers in Japan and Asia who teaches at Musashino University and Waseda SILS in Tokyo. The paper's exact positions on any given issue weren't always clear, though it did operate under government control. However, it was not restricted: It was sold at venues other than foreign embassies in Tokyo. According to O'Connor, it could also be purchased in kiosks and international hotels by anyone, without having to register with the government or receiving special permission.

This is somewhat ironic given official attempts to ban the public use of English. Mark Irwin, a linguistic scholar at Yamagata University who has written on wartime crackdowns on English, says that between 1940 and 1945, English was declared a *tekiseigo* (combatant language) or a *tekikokugo* (language of an enemy nation).

What this meant in practice was that many English loanwords were replaced with more "Japanese" words. For example, entertainers were no longer allowed to use "bizarre stage names, including those containing English" because they were "fostering the vice of foreigner worship."

English signs at more than 4,000 train stations were removed, sales of records and songs with English titles or lyrics were prohibited, and bars and restaurants in the Ginza were not allowed to have "European-like" names.

Of course, the "Japan" Times became the "Nippon" Times in 1943, because "Japan" was, after all, an English name.

JAEA ignores regulations while NRA turns a blind eye

August 19, 2015

JAEA produced nuclear fuel without permission

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Aug. 19, 2015 - Updated 11:03 UTC+2

Japan's nuclear regulators have ordered the Japan Atomic Energy Agency not to produce or test nuclear fuel before clearing screening and inspections.

The agency's facility in Tokai Village, north of Tokyo, has government permission to use nuclear fuel but not to process it, despite having applied to do so in 2004.

On Wednesday, **the agency told the Nuclear Regulation Authority that it test-produced mixed-oxide, or MOX, fuel at the facility last month.** The fuel is a combination of uranium and plutonium reprocessed from spent nuclear fuel.

The agency said it thought that since the production was done experimentally, permission for usage was enough.

Regulators ordered the agency to immediately apply for screening, and said processing permission is needed to produce and test MOX fuel.

The agency said it will respond appropriately to the order.

Meanwhile, **the authority's secretariat has admitted to failing to point out the need for processing permission despite being notified in advance of the agency's test plan.**

End of Kepco's monopoly?

August 23, 2015

Top-heavy, nuke-clinging Kepco faces liberated electricity market

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/08/23/national/top-heavy-nuke-clinging-kepco-faces-liberated-electricity-market/#.VdozDJfwLLP>

by Eric Johnston
Staff Writer

OSAKA – News that 7-Eleven stores in the Kansai region will trade Kansai Electric Power Co.'s electricity in favor of cheaper electricity from Tokyo Electric Power Co. has locals wondering if Kepco's six-decade monopoly over Kansai's electricity supply might be ending.

From October, about 1,000 Seven-Eleven Japan Co. Ltd. stores in three Kansai prefectures will purchase their electricity from Tepco. The move comes just months after Kepco raised rates, and Seven-Eleven Japan, noting Tepco's cheaper fees, made the move to switch utilities.

Stores in Nara, Wakayama and Hyogo prefectures will receive 32,000 kw of Tepco-provided electricity from a self-generator at the utility's Kansai factory. That's enough to power about 10,000 homes. For Seven-Eleven Japan, switching to Tepco means reduced electricity costs amounting to hundreds of millions of yen.

With deregulation in the smaller users electricity market set to begin next April, giving small businesses and residential customers a wider option of providers, Kepco seems particularly ill-placed to take advantage of the new competitive environment.

Prior to 2011, Kepco relied on nuclear power for up to half of its total electricity supply — the highest ratio of any utility in Japan. Because all 11 of its reactors remain idle, though two will be decommissioned, Kepco says it was forced to hike electricity rates in June to make up for lost revenues. But a host of critics, starting with Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto, have also noted that Kepco has done little to reduce its top-heavy management structure, especially the number of senior executives, all of whom command huge salaries and bonuses.

Adding to investor concerns is the fact that scare stories about how blackouts will occur without Kepco-provided nuclear power no longer resonate with the public. Thanks to a combination of voluntary reductions in electricity usage and ever more energy efficient technology, Japan as a whole is consuming over 10 percent less electricity now compared to 2010.

Even during the first week of August, when air conditioners were running full blast and temperatures topped 35 degrees, Kepco had plenty of electricity to sell, with demand under 90 percent, and as low as 80 percent, of available supply.

Nowadays, Kepco has changed tactics, and says the only way it can compete against Tepco and new electricity providers is to restart its nuclear plants so it can offer lower prices. But increased competition due to deregulatory measures, the introduction of more energy-efficient technologies like LED lighting, and shifting electricity consumption habits these past four years means Kepco will have to fight a lot harder to keep its old customers — let alone find new ones — in the coming years.

TEPCO blamed (again) for negligence in reporting information

August 25, 2015

Panel blames TEPCO's negligence for delay in information disclosure

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201508250044>

By HIROMI KUMAI/ Staff Writer

An outside panel of experts accused Tokyo Electric Power Co. of **not living up to its responsibility to promptly release all available data on the contaminated water leaks at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.**

The third-party panel said that up until February this year, plant operator TEPCO had been negligent in releasing information about radioactive water leaks, although it had data confirming the leaks. Contaminated water had been confirmed leaking into the ocean every time it rained since TEPCO started monitoring the radioactive levels in drainage systems in April 2014. When leaks of contaminated water into the plant's harbor first came into light in summer 2013, the utility pledged to promptly report the radiation levels whenever it obtained monitoring data. But workers at the plant had not been informed of the policy nor were they assigned specific tasks related to the policy. The panel's report concluded that TEPCO showed a tendency to prioritize responding to recurrent troubles at the plant over actually implementing effective countermeasures. "There is an organizational culture at the company for officials to avoid clarifying where responsibility lies and implementing planned countermeasures," the report said. After its shoddy record of reporting information on radiation levels drew fire, TEPCO retraced past data and made it available to the public. It has disclosed all monitoring data on radioactive materials at the plant since Aug. 20.

Typhoon season soon : TEPCO still not fully prepared against radioactive leaks

August 29, 2015

Contaminated rainwater at Fukushima plant repeatedly leaked into sea

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150829p2a00m0na019000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Rainwater containing radioactive contaminants flowed from a drainage ditch by the reactor buildings at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant into the sea on five occasions in just over four months, it has been learned.

The ditch is 2 meters deep and 2 meters wide, and stretches for about 800 meters. It was created to ferry rainwater from the plant grounds into the ocean, but in February this year it was learned that highly contaminated rainwater from the top of the No. 2 reactor building had flowed into the ditch and subsequently into the ocean. Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the plant, set up a 70-centimeter-high dam in the ditch, as well as eight pumps to move water from the ditch to another ditch that runs into a sealed harbor area. The pumps, which together can process rainfall of 14 millimeters per hour, were started on April 17 this year.

On April 21, however, loss of power caused by trouble with power generators resulted in all of the pumps shutting down, and contaminated water leaked into the sea. On July 16, rainfall rose to 21 millimeters per hour at one point. This was more than the pumps could handle, and workers confirmed that water flowed into the ocean. In all, five leaks from the ditch occurred in the period between April 17 and Aug. 27.

The concentrations of radioactive cesium and other radioactive materials in the contaminated rainwater ranged from around 20 to 670 times the safety level set for a "subdrain" plan in which decontaminated groundwater is to be released into the ocean.

The volume of leaked rainwater is unknown, but no changes have been seen in radioactive concentrations in the sea near the plant.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government on Aug. 27 issued a new request to TEPCO to introduce leak prevention measures. The next day, TEPCO raised the ditch dam by 15 centimeters, but Naohiro Masuda, chief decommissioning officer at Fukushima Daiichi Decontamination and Decommissioning Engineering Co., says, "Our main countermeasure will be to **replace the ditch with a new one.**"

This new ditch is designed to carry rainwater into the sealed harbor area. Masuda indicated that until completion of the new ditch -- scheduled within the fiscal year -- additional leaks may be unavoidable. **The plant therefore looks set to enter the typhoon season without full preparations against further leaks.**

In February, after the rainwater leaks were discovered, fishermen protested that TEPCO had not released radiation measurements for the drainage ditch water for around 10 months. Negotiations with fishermen over the subdrain plan were subsequently put on hold. However, the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Associations officially agreed to the plan after receiving notification from TEPCO and the national government regarding measures to prevent a recurrence of the leaks.

Regarding the rainwater leaks, federation chairman Tetsu Nozaki commented, "All we can do is to ask TEPCO to improve the situation. The subdrain plan is a separate issue, and there is no change in our acceptance of it."

Final report on Fukushima disaster (2)

September 1, 2015

Child thyroid cancer unlikely to rise in Fukushima but extent of radiation exposure unclear: IAEA

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/09/01/national/science-health/iaea-fukushima-linked-child-cancers-unlikely-rise-extent-radiation-exposure-unclear/#.VeVMOpfwmic>

Reuters

UNITED NATIONS – An increase in thyroid cancer among children is unlikely after the disaster at the Fukushima No 1 nuclear plant four years ago, but it remains unclear exactly how much radiation children in the vicinity were exposed to, International Atomic Energy Agency said in a new report.

Increased thyroid cancer is generally the leading health concern after exposure to nuclear radiation, but that may not be the case after the three reactor meltdowns at the Tokyo Electric Power Co. plant in March 2011, the Vienna-based watchdog said in the report, which was released Monday.

"Because the reported thyroid doses attributable to the accident were generally low, an increase in childhood thyroid cancer attributable to the accident is unlikely," the report says.

"However, uncertainties remain concerning the thyroid equivalent doses incurred by children immediately after the accident," it adds.

Those uncertainties are largely due to a lack of reliable personal radiation monitoring data immediately after the disaster started, when radioactive iodine and other radioactive materials were spewed into the environment, the report says.

The earthquake and following tsunami made emergency response measures difficult, if not impossible, to implement.

Adding to the uncertainty was the fact that the administration of “stable iodine” to protect children’s thyroid glands was not done uniformly at the time, “primarily due to the lack of detailed arrangements,” the report says.

Detailed screening of children’s thyroid glands is being undertaken now in Japan as part of a survey aimed at the early detection and treatment of diseases.

The report highlights areas where improvements are needed in light of the Fukushima catastrophe. The IAEA said more sustainable solutions are needed for the management of highly radioactive water and radioactive waste being collected at the plant, “including the possible resumption of controlled discharge into the sea.”

The reports adds that countries should prepare detailed scenarios and train workers for coping with worst-case natural disasters, including situations where more than one disaster is combined with a nuclear accident. They should also plan for cleanup operations in the wake of such incidents.

The report calls for strengthened international cooperation in the event of such accidents.

U.N. nuclear watchdog makes comprehensive report on Fukushima accident

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150901p2g00m0dm048000c.html>

VIENNA (Kyodo) -- The International Atomic Energy Agency on Monday released a comprehensive report on the causes and consequences of the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, saying that a major factor behind the accident was "the widespread assumption in Japan" that nuclear power plants were safe and an accident of that magnitude unthinkable.

The report, which comes with technical volumes totaling more than 1,000 pages, will be presented to the next annual meeting of the U.N. nuclear watchdog's general conference scheduled to start Sept. 14.

Director General Yukiya Amano said that the safety assumption was accepted by nuclear power plant operators and that regulators and the government did not challenge it. "As a result, Japan was not sufficiently prepared for a severe nuclear accident in March 2011," he said in the report.

The report is a result of a collaboration of some 180 experts from 42 countries. It compiles lessons learned from the accident triggered by a tsunami following a massive earthquake as well as Japan's emergency responses, radiological consequences and post-accident recovery.

Final report on Fukushima disaster (3)



The Fukushima Daiichi Accident

Report by the Director General
and Technical Volumes



<https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/iaea-releases-director-general%E2%80%99s-report-fukushima-daiichi-accident>

IAEA Releases Director General's Report on Fukushima Daiichi Accident

Monday 31 August 2015 14:00 CEST

By Miklos Gaspar, IAEA Office of Public Information and Communication

The IAEA Director General's Report on the Fukushima Accident and the five technical volumes distil and assemble lessons learned from the accident and provide a knowledge base for the future.

The IAEA Director General's Report on the Fukushima Daiichi Accident, along with five technical volumes on this topic by international experts, have just been publicly released. This publication comes ahead of the Agency's General Conference in September.

The report assesses the causes and consequences of the 11 March 2011 accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in Japan, triggered by a tsunami that followed a massive earthquake. It was the worst emergency at a nuclear power plant since the Chernobyl disaster in 1986.

"The report considers human, organizational and technical factors and aims to provide an understanding of what happened, and why, so that the necessary lessons learned can be acted upon by governments, regulators and nuclear power plant operators throughout the world," IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano said in his Foreword to the Report. "There can be no grounds for complacency about nuclear safety in any country."

The report and the technical volumes distil and assemble lessons learned from the accident and provide a knowledge base for the future. They consider the accident itself, emergency preparedness and response, radiological consequences of the accident, post-accident recovery and the activities of the IAEA since the accident. Measures taken, both in Japan and internationally, are examined. "Although nuclear safety remains the responsibility of each individual country, nuclear accidents can transcend national borders," Mr Amano said in his foreword. "The Fukushima Daiichi accident underlined the vital importance of effective international cooperation. The IAEA is where most of that cooperation takes place. Our Member States adopted the IAEA Action Plan on Nuclear Safety a few months after the accident and have been implementing its far reaching provisions to improve global nuclear safety."

Mr Amano had announced in 2012 that the IAEA would prepare an authoritative, factual and balanced assessment of the accident, addressing both its causes and consequences. The report is the result of an extensive collaboration that involved some 180 experts from 42 IAEA Member States and several international bodies.

The report and the technical volumes are accessible here. A brochure summarizing the main findings is available here.

The Director General's Report in Arabic, French, Russian and Spanish is available here. The Chinese translation will be available later this week. The unofficial Japanese translation of the Foreword and the Executive summary of the Director General's Report are available here. The full translation will be published in September.

Related Resources

- The Fukushima Daiichi Accident Report by the Director General and Technical Volumes
- In Focus: Fukushima Nuclear Accident
- In Focus: IAEA Action Plan on Nuclear Safety

Final report on Fukushima disaster (4)

01.09.2015_No166 / News

Japan Thought Major Nuclear Accident Was 'Simply Unthinkable', Says IAEA Fukushima Report

<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2015/09/01/japan-thought-major-nuclear-accident-was-simply-unthinkable-says-iaea-fukushima-report>

Unplanned Events & Incidents

1 Sep (NucNet): A major factor that contributed to the March 2011 accident at the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear station was the widespread assumption in Japan that its nuclear power plants were so safe that an accident of this magnitude was "simply unthinkable", a report by the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency says.

The report, which is more than 200 pages long and is published with five technical volumes, says this assumption was accepted by nuclear station operators and not challenged by regulators or by the government. "As a result, Japan was not sufficiently prepared for a severe nuclear accident in March 2011," the report says.

IAEA director-general Yukiya Amano said in his foreword to the report that the accident, the worst emergency at a nuclear power plant since the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, exposed "certain weaknesses" in Japan's regulatory framework. Responsibilities were divided among a number of bodies, and it was not always clear where authority lay.

Mr Amano said there were also certain weaknesses in plant design, in emergency preparedness and response arrangements and in planning for the management of a severe accident.

“There was an assumption that there would never be a loss of all electrical power at a nuclear power plant for more than a short period,” he said. “The possibility of several reactors at the same facility suffering a crisis at the same time was not considered. And insufficient provision was made for the possibility of a nuclear accident occurring at the same time as a major natural disaster.”

Mr Amano said since the accident, Japan has reformed its regulatory system to better meet international standards. It gave regulators clearer responsibilities and greater authority. The new regulatory framework will be reviewed by international experts through an IAEA Integrated Regulatory Review Service mission. Emergency preparedness and response arrangements have also been strengthened.

The IAEA said the report assesses the causes and consequences of the accident, which was triggered by a tsunami that followed a massive earthquake. It considers human, organisational and technical factors and aims to provide an understanding of what happened, and why, so that lessons learned can be acted upon by governments, regulators and nuclear power plant operators.

The report considers the accident itself, emergency preparedness and response, radiological consequences of the accident, post-accident recovery and the activities of the IAEA since the accident. It examines measures taken, both in Japan and internationally.

“Although nuclear safety remains the responsibility of each individual country, nuclear accidents can transcend national borders,” Mr Amano said. **“The Fukushima-Daiichi accident underlined the vital importance of effective international cooperation.”**

Mr Amano had announced in 2012 that the IAEA would prepare an assessment of the accident, addressing both its causes and consequences. The IAEA said the report is the result of an extensive collaboration that involved some 180 experts from 42 IAEA member states and several international bodies.

The report is online: <http://bit.ly/1hQl49S>

Delay in decontamination unacceptable

August 31, 2015

Panel: Delay in decontamination work regrettable

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20150901_04.html

Aug. 31, 2015 - Updated 22:36 UTC+2

A panel of Japan's Environment Ministry says the government should reflect on the greatly delayed decontamination work in Fukushima Prefecture.

A nuclear accident occurred there in 2011.

The panel of experts released a draft outline at a meeting in Tokyo on Monday. The panel has been looking into the disposal of contaminated waste from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster.

The draft refers to the government-run decontamination operation in evacuation zones in the prefecture. The projected end of the work was revised to the end of March, 2017 -- about 2 to 3 years later than initially planned.

The panel said the government should reflect on the delay caused by difficulties in securing initial storage sites for contaminated soil and debris.

The draft also refers to the issue of building disposal facilities for radioactive waste. The government plans to set up such facilities in 5 prefectures in eastern and northeastern Japan, but faces local objections.

The panel only said that the government should continue providing explanations to communities.

The draft approves the continuation of the government policy on decontamination and nuclear waste disposal, saying that the basic framework is working effectively.

The panel plans to compile a report at the next meeting.

Final report on Fukushima disaster (4)

September 1, 2015

Assumption of safety behind Fukushima debacle: final IAEA report

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/09/01/national/assumption-safety-behind-fukushima-debacle-final-iaea-report/#.VeaWPJfwmic>

Jiji

BERLIN – The widespread assumption that nuclear plants were safe was behind the March 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the International Atomic Energy Agency said in its final report on the crisis.

Before the catastrophe, “there was a basic assumption in Japan that the design of nuclear power plants and the safety measures that had been put in place were sufficiently robust to withstand external events of low probability and high consequences,” the report, released Monday, says.

Because of this assumption, “there was a tendency for organizations and their staff not to challenge the level of safety,” the report says. This “resulted in a situation where safety improvements were not introduced promptly.”

The IAEA report stresses the need to “take an integrated approach that takes account of the complex interactions between people, organizations and technology” in order to better identify plant vulnerabilities to natural disasters and other unexpected events.

The report was compiled by around 180 experts from 42 countries. The plant was damaged in the tsunami caused by the powerful earthquake that hit off the Tohoku coast on March 11, 2011.

Some of the factors that contributed to the accident were “not unique to Japan,” IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano says in the report, adding that “continuous questioning and openness to learning from experience are key to safety culture and are essential for everyone involved in nuclear power.”

The Fukushima No. 1 plant’s vulnerability “to external hazards had not been reassessed in a systematic and comprehensive manner during its lifetime,” the IAEA report says.

“The assessment of natural hazards needs to consider the potential for their occurrence in combination, either simultaneously or sequentially,” it says.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. was “not fully prepared for the multiunit loss of power and the loss of cooling caused by the tsunami.”

“Operators had therefore not received appropriate training and had not taken part in relevant severe accident exercises, and the equipment available to them was not adequate in the degraded plant conditions,” the report says.

Furthermore, the report argues that “it was not fully clear which organizations had the responsibility and authority to issue binding instructions on how to respond to safety issues without delay.”

It points to a lack of “coordinated arrangements for responding to a nuclear emergency and a natural disaster occurring simultaneously.”

On the accident’s effects on human health, the Vienna-based IAEA said that thyroid cancer in children is “the most likely health effect.”

However, it adds that “because the reported thyroid doses attributable to the accident were generally low, an increase in childhood thyroid cancer attributable to the accident is unlikely.”

Still, the report notes that uncertainties remain “concerning the thyroid equivalent doses incurred by children immediately after the accident.”

As for the return home of people who have been evacuated following the accident, the IAEA stressed the need to consider “factors such as the restoration of infrastructure, and the viability and sustainable economic activity of the community.”

The long-term goal of post-accident recovery is to re-establish an acceptable basis for a fully functioning society in areas affected by the nuclear crisis, the report notes.

“Communication with the public on recovery activities is essential to build trust,” it says. For effective communication, “it is necessary for experts to understand the information needs of the affected population and to provide understandable information through relevant means.”

50 years ago TEPCO

50 YEARS AGO

Friday, Sept. 21, 1965 (Supplement published on the occasion of the ninth IAEA Conference, held in Tokyo)

Tepco reveals atomic power generation plans

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/09/05/national/history/accord-reached-french-indo-china-tepco-reveals-atomic-power-generation-plans-tokyo-civil-servants-get-reusable-chopsticks/#.VeyLtZfwmic>

SOON! THIS SITE WILL BE THE SOURCE OF NUCLEAR POWER!

Construction of the No. 1 Atomic Reactor (Power Output 350,000 KW) begins this year by the Tokyo Electric Power Company, ends in 1970; No. 2 (output 600,000 KW) begins in 1968; No. 3 (output 600,000 KW) in 1970 and No. 4 (output 600,000 KW) in 1972. The total output will be 2,150,000 KW when the No. 4 Atomic Reactor is completed in 1976. This project will supply limitless electric power energy for the benefit of the public.

 **TOKYO ELECTRIC POWER CO., INC.**
9, 2-chome, Uchisaiwai-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, Japan

The sources of energy used for the generation of electric power in Japan have been progressively switched from hydraulic power to coal and then to heavy oil.

The country is now preparing to develop nuclear energy as a new source of energy from the standpoint of economically securing fuel required for steam power generation. The demand made on Tepco is expected to reach 17.89 million kw by 1973.

Tepco's program for nuclear power generation calls for the development of about 2 million kw by 1975. The move is expected to result in the conservation of about 3 million kiloliters of heavy oil, or about one-fifth of the total amount of crude oil needs.

Tepco has constantly kept busy making preparations, doing research and conducting other studies since setting up an atomic energy generation section in 1955.

A land area of about 2 million sq. meters was acquired for this purpose in November of last year along the coast stretching from Okuma-machi to Futaba-machi of Futaba-gun, Fukushima Prefecture.

Plans have been made to install the first and second reactors at this point. The enriched uranium light water model is scheduled to be used as the first reactor.

The Fukushima Research Center was established last December for the purpose of conducting on-the-spot research.

In order to collect enough data needed for ensuring the safety of the atomic power plant and its construction, the center is now busy at work on meteorological observation, geological and oceanographic surveys along with seismographic and subterranean observations — all of which are broad and time-consuming projects.

A study is underway to determine the water pumping formula for the cooling system, but a tentative plan calls for the acquisition of water directly from the sea through the construction of breakwaters.

A new committee, an advisory organ to the president is headed by Naojiro Tanaka, an executive director. It is in charge of drawing up blueprints for the atomic power plants and for making other arrangements necessary for launching the construction.

Another committee was organized this past July, also under the chairmanship of Tanaka, to work on the problem of earthquake-proofing and other technical matters regarding the construction. This committee is made up of academic and engineering experts, both inside and outside the company.

Thus busily engaged, Tepco is moving steadily ahead toward its goal.

Nuclear safety round the world

September 8, 2015

IAEA chief: Fukushima a lesson for others

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Sep. 8, 2015 - Updated 03:52 UTC+2

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency says he hopes its report on the Fukushima Daiichi accident will provide lessons on improving nuclear safety around the world.

IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano was speaking at a meeting of the board of governors on Monday in Vienna.

Amano cited the agency's final report released on August 31st, which looked into the causes and impact of the accident.

He described the report as a "major undertaking" with contributions from experts from many countries and international organizations. He said it was drawn up to serve as a solid knowledge base for the future.

He later told reporters he hopes that every country will make full use of the report in their efforts to improve nuclear safety.

The report says Japan was not sufficiently prepared for a severe nuclear accident due to an assumption

that nuclear plants were safe.

The ambassador for the Permanent Mission of Japan to the International Organizations in Vienna, Mitsuru Kitano, told the meeting Japan is taking the criticism to heart.

Kitano said that based on lessons from the accident, Japan has introduced various measures and wants to contribute to improving nuclear safety around the world.

Nuclear terrorism

September 7, 2015

07.09.2015_No169 / News

Amano Calls For Urgent Action On Protection Of Nuclear Facilities

<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2015/09/07/amano-calls-for-urgent-action-on-protection-of-nuclear-facilities>

7 Sep (NucNet): Countries must take the threat of nuclear terrorism seriously by ensuring that amendments to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM) that oblige countries to protect nuclear facilities such as nuclear stations enter into force as soon as possible, International Atomic Energy Agency director-general Yukiya Amano has said.

Writing on the Project Syndicate website, Mr Amano said amendments to the 1987 CPPNM that would make it harder for terrorists to obtain nuclear material have yet to enter into force. The resulting vulnerability “needs to be addressed urgently”, he said.

In July 2005, signatories to the CPPNM agreed to amend it to address the risk of terrorism more effectively. The new measures would make it more difficult for terrorists to cause a widespread release of radioactive material by attacking a nuclear power station or detonating a radioactive dispersal device – commonly known as a dirty bomb.

But before the amendment can enter into force, two-thirds of the 152 signatories to the original CPPNM must ratify it. While significant progress has been made – in July, the US, Italy, and Turkey did so – at least 14 more countries are needed.

The original Convention focused only on the international transport of nuclear material, and did not cover the protection of nuclear facilities.

The amendment adopted 10 years ago would oblige countries to protect nuclear facilities and any nuclear material used, stored, or transported domestically. It would expand cooperation on locating and recovering stolen or smuggled nuclear material and coordinate the response to any attack on a nuclear facility. It would also make nuclear trafficking a criminal offence and require signatories to cooperate on improving national systems of physical protection and minimising the consequences of sabotage.

Mr Amano said the fact that there has never been a major terrorist attack involving nuclear or other radioactive material “should not blind us to the severity of the threat”. He said: “There is evidence that terrorist groups have tried to acquire the material needed to construct a crude nuclear explosive device, or a dirty bomb.”

The amount of nuclear material in the world is increasing, he said. Since 1999, the amount of such material being used for peaceful purposes has increased by 70 percent – a trend that will continue as the use of nuclear power grows. “It is essential that effective measures are in place to ensure that these materials are not misused or misplaced, whether accidentally or intentionally.”

Since 1995, the IAEA’s member states have reported nearly 2,800 incidents involving radioactive material escaping regulatory control, Mr Amano said. Although only a handful of these incidents involved material that could be used to make a nuclear explosive device, a relatively small amount of radioactive material could be combined with conventional explosives to create a dirty bomb. Such a weapon could be capable of killing many people, contaminating large urban areas, and sparking mass panic.

Mr Amano said much has been achieved in the secure management of nuclear material since the attacks on the US in September 2001 prompted a renewed focus on the risks of terrorism. Many countries have instituted effective measures to prevent the theft, sabotage, or illegal transfer of nuclear or other radioactive material, and security at many nuclear facilities has been improved. “But much more needs to be done,” he said.

The article is online: <http://bit.ly/1UwwFvV>

Background

The Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material was signed in Vienna and New York on 3 March 1980 and is the only international legally binding undertaking in the area of physical protection of nuclear material. It establishes measures related to the prevention, detection and punishment of offences relating to nuclear material.

A conference was held in July 2005 to amend the Convention and strengthen its provisions. The amended Convention makes it legally binding for signatories to protect nuclear facilities and material in peaceful domestic use, storage as well as transport. It also provides for expanded cooperation between and among states on measures to locate and recover stolen or smuggled nuclear material, mitigate any radiological consequences of sabotage, and prevent and combat related offences.

For more information: www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/nuclearsecurity

Nuclear terrorism a threat without global security co-operation

Source : The Australian

- **Nuclear terrorism is, in the words of US President Barack Obama, “the gravest danger we face”. But while few would dispute this characterisation, the world has unfinished business in minimising the threat. Ten years after world leaders agreed to amend the landmark 1987 Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material to make it harder for terrorists to obtain nuclear material, the new measures have yet to enter into force. The resulting vulnerability needs to be -addressed urgently.**
- In July 2005, signatories to the CPPNM agreed to amend the convention to address the risk of terrorism more effectively. The new measures that were introduced would make it more difficult for terrorists to cause a widespread release of radioactive material by attacking a nuclear power plant or detonating a radioactive dispersal device — commonly known as a dirty bomb.
- Before the amendment can enter into force, two-thirds of the 152 signatories to the original convention must ratify it. While significant progress has been made — in July, the US, Italy, and Turkey did so — at least 14 more countries are needed.
- The fact that there has never been a major terrorist attack involving nuclear or other radio-active material should not blind us to the severity of the threat. There is evidence that terrorist groups have tried to acquire material to construct a crude nuclear explosive device, or a dirty bomb.
- In 2011, Moldovan police seized highly enriched uranium from smugglers who were trying to sell it. The smugglers, exhibiting a worrying level of technical knowledge, had tried to evade detection by building a shielded container. Thanks to efforts by Moldova, with the assistance of the International Atomic Energy Agency, to boost its nuclear security capabilities, the material was identified and confiscated, and the smugglers were arrested.
- **The amount of nuclear material in the world is increasing. Since 1999, the amount of such material being used for peaceful purposes has risen by 70 per cent — a trend that will continue as the use of nuclear power grows.** It is essential that effective measures are in place to ensure these materials are not misused or misplaced — accidentally or intentionally.
- **Since 1995, the IAEA’s member states have reported nearly 2800 incidents involving radioactive material escaping regulatory control.** Although only a handful of these incidents involved material that could be used to make a nuclear explosive device, a relatively small amount of radioactive material could be combined with conventional explosives to create a dirty bomb. Such a weapon could be capable of killing many people, contaminating large areas, and sparking mass panic.
- The original convention focused only on the international transport of nuclear material, and did not cover the protection of nuclear facilities. The amendment adopted 10 years ago would oblige countries to protect nuclear facilities and any nuclear material used, stored, or transported domestically. It would expand co-operation on locating and recovering stolen or smuggled nuclear material and co-ordinate the response to any attack on a nuclear facility. It would make nuclear trafficking a criminal offence and require signatories to co-operate on national systems of physical protection and minimising the consequences of sabotage.
- Protecting nuclear material is not just an issue for countries that use nuclear power. Terrorists and criminals will try to exploit any vulnerability in the global security system. Any country could find itself used as a transit point — just as any country could become the target of an attack.
- Effective international co-operation is crucial. The consequences of a security failure could be a catastrophe that transcends borders. All countries must take the threat of nuclear terrorism seriously. The most effective way to do so would be to ensure that the amendment to the CPPNM enters into force as soon as possible.
- *Yukiya Amano is director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency.*
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Not so easy to look at what we should look at

September 8, 2015

INSIGHT: Failing to see dangers of nuclear power right under one's nose

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/column/AJ201509080001>

By EMIKO INAGAKI/ Senior Staff Writer

Fifty-three months after the fateful nuclear disaster, the Sendai nuclear power plant in Kagoshima Prefecture has become the first in Japan to resume after all were taken offline for safety inspections. But the restart callously disregards the lives of so many people who were uprooted from their irreplaceable ancestral land, jobs, families and friends by the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in 2011.

Inspections of nuclear facilities certainly became more stringent after the Fukushima nuclear disaster. But that is no guarantee of their safety. An “unforeseeable” event may occur at any moment, and the cost will be too tragically enormous for anyone to grasp.

Why does the government not want to face up to that fact in earnest? And what about the public, which is allowing the government to move in that direction? While I was furious about these issues, I had the chance to attend a preview of a movie. Seeing it was like getting smacked up the side of the head.

Titled “**Tenku no Hachi**” (**The Big Bee**), the action epic, which features an act of terrorism on a nuclear plant, is based on a work of fiction by Keigo Higashino, a best-selling author.

To my surprise, the work both fully and scrupulously presented all the major problems of nuclear power generation that came under the public spotlight after the Fukushima disaster, such as the vulnerability of spent nuclear fuel storage pools, the fictional nature of the safety myth about nuclear power and the merciless way nuclear plants are being forced on depopulated communities in exchange for subsidies.

The original book was written 20 years ago.

Higashino has commented on the work as follows: After his initial plan for it, he spent five years conducting a lot of research on the issue. He was filled with confidence when he finished writing the novel, but received no reaction at all. He thought that, obviously, his work was being ignored on purpose.

If somebody was purposefully “ignoring” the work, who was it?

I WAS PART OF 'NUCLEAR VILLAGE'

I encountered the issue of nuclear power generation for the first time 27 years ago, when I was a reporter based in The Asahi Shimbun’s Takamatsu bureau in Kagawa Prefecture.

An “output modulation test” was staged at Shikoku Electric Power Co.’s Ikata nuclear power plant in Ehime Prefecture.

A nuclear reactor continues to generate electric power at constant levels day and night, so there is a nighttime surplus of electricity. The test was conducted to raise and lower output levels to enhance efficiency.

Opponents of nuclear power generation reacted angrily to what they argued was a “dangerous” experiment. Thousands of people arrived from all parts of Japan to stage a boisterous protest outside Shikoku Electric’s head office in Takamatsu on the day of the test.

A senior colleague of mine, who had been engaged in a student movement, appeared excited, as he said he was seeing a protest for the first time in a long while. However, local residents gave a chilly reception to the abrupt emergence of the hippie-like band of protesters, which was an uncommon sight.

"What are we supposed to do when all these outsiders suddenly show up and tell us this and that?" went the typical refrain.

I was, frankly, also fed up with the protesters.

The general thinking at the time was: "Japan has great technology. Speaking of possible accidents won't get you anywhere. After all, modern life is impossible without nuclear power."

The anti-nuclear agenda was an unrealistic argument being made by only a few, and was less than catchy as far as news reporting was concerned.

No sooner did I write a halfhearted article about the protest than I returned to covering the police beat--making morning and evening calls to the homes of police detectives in a desperate bid to learn about hidden cases they were pursuing.

That was the way to scoop the competition and enhance my standing at the newspaper. I never attempted, then or afterward, to look into the dilemma of nuclear power generation, although I would have had access to, if only I had sought, a trove of public documents and other materials.

I didn't even know how many nuclear reactors Japan had, and in which parts of the country, when I was confronted by the Fukushima disaster.

If our eyes are clouded and we are only eager to read the situation and act smartly, we don't see anything even if something important is hanging right under our noses or if hints are tossed out in our direction.

We use the phrase "nuclear village" to refer to a community of people who rely on benefits generated by the nuclear power industry, which actually represents a major national project. It is exactly those people that created the safety myth and ended up causing the latest disaster. Higashino may have had the nuclear village in mind as the culprit for ignoring the presence of his book.

After all, I was also possibly a member of the nuclear village. I relied on the safety myth as an excuse for looking away from the sorrow and dilemma of those whom nuclear plants were being forced upon, taking the convenient availability of electric power for granted and continuing to scoff at a deluge of alarms.

I was part of the group of people who ignored Higashino's work, which he had produced with all his might and competence.

LOOKING AT WHAT I SHOULD LOOK AT

One phrase has long stuck in my mind.

I visited a community last year that lies about a 10-kilometer radius from the disaster site. Its deserted landscapes that were frozen in time and were silently tumbling away appeared so eerie that a lump formed in my throat as I realized the exorbitant price of an affluent life.

I blurted out to a local resident who was guiding me around, "Can you forgive Japan for moving to restart its nuclear reactors, oblivious of a disaster of this magnitude?"

The resident remained silent for a while and then muttered, "If nobody changes, nothing will probably ever change."

Will I be able to change? Will I be able to keep myself separate from the popular sentiment of the time, refuse to conform to the general trend, look at what I should look at and say what I should say?

TEPCO a good investment?

September 9, 2015

Tepco's index-topping gains fueled by electricity shake-up

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/09/09/business/corporate-business/tepcos-index-topping-gains-fueled-electricity-shake/#.VfAQT5fwmic>

Bloomberg

Japan's reform of its energy market is proving a boon to investors in the company at the center of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster.

Tokyo Electric Power Co's shares have surged 59 percent in the six months through Tuesday's close, making it the best performer on the Nikkei 225 Stock Average and the 174-member Bloomberg World Utilities Index.

Tepco, owner of the wrecked plant, is seen as an early beneficiary of government-backed power reform. By April, residential power customers will be able to choose their provider for the first time. And by 2020, utilities will be required to separate their transmission, distribution and retail businesses.

"Looking towards the electricity market reform to be completed by 2020, a company the size of Tepco is an attractive investment," Mana Nakazora, an analyst at BNP Paribas Securities (Japan) Ltd., said by email. While the company's stock price has surged this year, it is still less than half of where it was before the Fukushima disaster. The shares fell 3.1 percent to ¥751 at the close of Tokyo trading on Tuesday. They closed at ¥2,153 the day before Fukushima, but have increased 55 percent since Tepco announced on May 1 that it will transition to a holding company beginning in April.

Tepco was rated new overweight on Tuesday with a target price of ¥1,000 a share by Yuji Nishiyama, an analyst at JPMorgan Securities Japan Co.

Spokesman Tatsuhiro Yamagishi declined to comment on the performance of the company's stock.

For Tepco, a more open energy market in Japan offers the opportunity for growth at a company whose survival was in question just a few years ago. The Fukushima disaster put it on the verge of default, with the head of Japan's biggest stock market telling the company to file for bankruptcy protection. Tepco was saved by a ¥1 trillion infusion from the government in 2012, the nation's largest bailout since the 1990s. The power company received ¥5.61 trillion from the state-backed Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp. to deal with payouts to victims of the Fukushima meltdown, Tepco reported last month.

Under the April reorganization, Tepco's nuclear operations will be placed into a holding company, while debt investors will be repaid from the funds of a spun-off power grid company.

Tepco's probability of debt nonpayment has dropped to 0.309 percent from about 1.121 percent on Oct. 16, according to the Bloomberg default-risk model, which considers factors such as share prices and debt. The probability of debt nonpayment was as high as 6.156 percent in 2012.

"The company's default risk has disappeared," said BNP Paribas's Nakazora.

The government's power reform began this year with the creation of an organization to manage the nation's supply and demand balance. Next year's full retail liberalization, the second stage of the reform, will allow utilities to more freely expand outside their traditional regions. The government aims to remove rate regulations by 2020.

A drop in fuel costs saw Tepco increase operating profit threefold in the quarter ended June 30. The price of liquefied natural gas imported into Japan fell to a six-year low in June, while crude oil prices are near a record low.

"Investors expected first-quarter profits to have a big increase due to the drop in oil then liquefied natural gas," Syusaku Nishikawa, a Tokyo-based analyst at Daiwa Securities Co., said by email.

Yet challenges remain. Liabilities related to the Fukushima disaster and Tepco's responsibilities will continue to pressure the company's credit quality in the long term, according to Mariko Semetko, a vice president at Moody's Japan K.K., which rates the company's outlook as negative.

Tepco, which operates the world's biggest nuclear plant by capacity at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa facility in Niigata Prefecture, has yet to restart any of its nuclear reactors. Resuming operations at the facility would boost profit by as much as ¥32 billion a month, the company has said.

"The recent improvements in profitability are definitely a plus," Semetko said by phone. "But the company hasn't yet started its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant and there are a lot of uncertainties around costs related to Fukushima. With all of that in mind, we haven't been able to stabilize the outlook yet."

Naoto Kan: Nuclear uneconomical

September 16, 2015

Former PM Naoto Kan says nuclear power makes little economic sense, must end

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/09/16/national/former-pm-naoto-kan-says-nuclear-power-makes-little-economic-sense-must-end/#.VfmQX5fwlLN>

by Kazuaki Nagata
Staff Writer

Although the first reactor in Japan to be fired up in two years went online last month, former Prime Minister Naoto Kan said Wednesday that Japan needs to seek a nuclear-free path.

This is a lesson the country has learned from the Fukushima nuclear disaster, said Kan, who was prime minister when the Fukushima No. 1 plant was hit by a huge quake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

"I'm absolutely sure that there will no longer be nuclear power by the end of this century. This is because it doesn't make sense economically, and enough energy can be provided without it," Kan said in a lecture to foreign residents in Tokyo.

While reactor 1 at the Sendai plant in Kagoshima Prefecture was restarted in August, Japan has survived the past few summers without nuclear power, Kan said.

He added that although the current government is still promoting nuclear power, Japan has seen an increase of renewable energy since the Fukushima accident, especially from solar panels.

He said nuclear power was believed to be a cheap source of energy, but it is actually expensive, considering the cost of decommissioning and managing nuclear waste.

Kan also shared his experience of visiting Olkiluoto Nuclear Power Plant in Finland, where a final nuclear waste repository is being constructed. There, he was told it would take 100,000 years for the radiation of nuclear waste to descend to the same level of the uranium that exists in the natural environment.

Using nuclear power, Kan said, means increasing the amount of dangerous waste that will trouble future generations, adding that this is why other former prime ministers such as Junichiro Koizumi and Morihiro Hosokawa are also voicing their wish to end Japan's dependence on it.

IAEA briefing on Fukushima disaster

September 18, 2015

IAEA holds briefing on Fukushima accident report

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Sep. 18, 2015 - Updated 07:07 UTC+2

The International Atomic Energy Agency has briefed its members on its report on the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident in 2011. It says an assumption that nuclear power plants are safe meant Japan was unprepared for a severe accident.

The IAEA held the briefing at its headquarters in Vienna, Austria, on Thursday. The 1,200-page-plus report was put together by about 180 experts from more than 40 member countries.

IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano said the report will be useful for all countries that either have, or are planning to build, nuclear power plants.

Experts pointed out in the report that Japan was not sufficiently prepared for a severe nuclear accident due to the assumption that nuclear plants were safe.

Participants exchanged views on the report at the end of the briefing. A Japanese representative expressed determination to pass on the experiences and lessons learned from the disaster to the international community.

Delegates from other countries spoke on the importance of sharing information to improve the safety of nuclear energy.

Just "hoping for inspired improvisation"

September 19, 2015

Rearranging the deck chairs on the nuclear Titanic

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2015/09/19/commentary/rearranging-deck-chairs-nuclear-titanic/#.Vf6xP5fwmic>

by Jeff Kingston

The International Atomic Energy Agency's recently released postmortem on the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011 makes for grim reading and serves as a timely reminder of why the restart of the Sendai nuclear plant in Kyushu is a bad idea.

When an atomic energy advocacy organization delivers multiple harsh assessments of Japan's woeful nuclear safety culture and inadequate emergency countermeasures and disaster management protocols, it's time to wonder how much has really changed in the past five years — and whether restarting any of the nation's nuclear reactors is a good idea.

In 2012, the government established a new nuclear safety watchdog agency called the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) and it now contends that Japan has the strictest nuclear safety regulations in the world. But is that true? And does it matter?

David Lochbaum, co-author of last year's "Fukushima: The Story of a Nuclear Disaster," the best book on the meltdowns that I've read, likens recent reforms to "rearranging the deck chairs on the nuclear Titanic." He's not buying Japan's claim of having the world's strictest guidelines.

"I'd sooner buy the Brooklyn Bridge," Lochbaum says. "What would Japan have said about its safety guidelines on March 10, 2011? Would they have conceded that their safety guidelines ranked 23rd worldwide, but that level of protection was good enough for the people of Japan?"

"It's all valueless posturing. No regulator in any country would publicly confess to anything less than the best on the planet."

Had the NRA existed pre-Fukushima, Lochbaum thinks the disaster would have shown that structure to be inadequate.

"The NRA would have been splintered and its roles relegated to various governmental agencies," he says.

At the time, however, responsibility and authority for nuclear safety was divided among various agencies, so the government moved to concentrate such powers under the NRA and calls that a solution.

"Disasters are bad and require changes," Lochbaum says. "That the changes fail to address the underlying problems gets lost."

However, Japan is not the only nation "rearranging the nuclear deck chairs" to conjure a simulacrum of enhanced safety, and Lochbaum points to an incident in 2008 in Pennsylvania as an example.

"When contract security officers were discovered sleeping on the job at the Peach Bottom nuclear plant,

its owner fired the contractor and brought the security officers in-house,” he says. “It was essentially the same group of individuals wearing different emblems on their uniforms. But somehow the different emblems ‘fixed’ the problem and all was well with the world.”

A relevant story since **most of the NRA’s employees used to work at the discredited Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, which was blamed for poor oversight and safety lapses due to regulatory capture and servile deference to the utilities.**

“It’s more convenient than truthful to blame Fukushima on regulatory capture,” Lochbaum says. “I am unaware of any reactor type operated by any company in any nation that would have survived the one-two punch that the earthquake and tsunami dealt that plant.” Yet, it is disconcerting to know that according to Lochbaum, “Fukushima’s design and operating procedures were not radically different than those deployed worldwide.”

Both the IAEA report and Lochbaum emphasize the need for defense in depth, meaning multiple levels of safety infrastructure, equipment and redundancy to reduce the possibility of a nuclear accident.

Defense in depth depends on manifold barriers that lessen risk, but Lochbaum points out all the barriers that failed at Fukushima: off-site power was lost, on-site power was lost, backup on-site power could not be deployed in time, the protective sea wall was insufficient, and more.

“Had just one of these barriers worked, Fukushima would not have happened,” Lochbaum says. “There was simply not enough what-iffing going on” — what the IAEA describes as a “failure to challenge existing safety systems.”

By not preparing for the worst and relying on probabilistic scenarios based on overly optimistic assumptions, the IAEA implies that Japan’s nuclear regulators and plant operators were derelict in their duties. There is a danger that the NRA, in touting its new safety regime, is yet again nurturing a myth of safety.

“When our guesses are good, the ‘strictest regulations’ look real good,” Lochbaum says. “When our guesses are bad, it must be regulatory capture or centralized governance, or de-centralized governance, or whatever lame excuse wanders by.”

The NRA will still rely extensively on plant operators reporting and self-inspections to ensure compliance with regulations. Given that all the utilities operating reactors admitted they faked their repair and maintenance data, why trust them now?

Lochbaum also notes the huge discrepancies between safety assessments by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission and plant operators. He likens safety goals to nuclear speed limits, but these are meaningless since the government’s radar gun and the utilities’ speedometers are way out of line. The closest match has a radar reading of a utility doing 110 miles per hour when it claimed it was following the 55 mile-per-hour speed limit. But at another nuclear plant at Watts Bar in Tennessee, when the “atomic speedometer showed 55 miles per hour, the NRC’s radar gun indicated a smokin’ fast 42,853 miles per hour!”

He concludes that existing risk-assessment models “cannot be used for anything other than amusing storytelling and nonproductive time-wasting until their results have closer agreement. **Differing by factors of 2 to 800 about risks doesn't allow risk-informed decision-making.** It supports risk-deformed decision-making.”

And don't bank on Japan's reactor stress tests or other new measures such as taller sea walls, longer-duration batteries and other incremental upgrades.

“Individually and collectively, (those things) hedge our guesses and make it less likely that a bad guess will trigger another nuclear disaster,” Lochbaum says. However, “As long as **protective barriers are determined by guesswork without the 'what if' backups,** nuclear disasters will continue to happen.”

The IAEA says there is no room for complacency about nuclear safety, but **it fails to call Japan out for a major flaw in its disaster emergency preparedness.** It details the need for a proper emergency evacuation organization, training and drills, but under current rules this is the responsibility of local hosting towns, one that exceeds their limited capacity — especially now that the evacuation zones around nuclear plants have been expanded to 30 km. Simulations of evacuations under optimistic assumptions underscore that people living inside the evacuation zone will be exposed to significant radiation because transport networks will be jammed. And if we factor in a volcanic eruption depositing a thick layer of ash and a simultaneous tsunami wiping out coastal roads, the evacuation would be disastrous.

The Titanic was also ill-prepared to evacuate its passengers because it failed to consider the unimaginable and thus mismanaged the risk. It seems the lessons of Fukushima are also being ignored in favor of wishing away risk, and **hoping for inspired improvisation.** There is thus good reason why citizens across Japan are filing lawsuits to block reactor restarts and some gutsy judges are resisting pressure from the nuclear village and siding with common sense.

TEPCO had been warned

September 25, 2015

TEPCO was advised on tsunami risk before quake

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Sep. 25, 2015 - Updated 01:48 UTC+2

The Japanese government has revealed that an official had advised Tokyo Electric Power Company to implement better tsunami measures 2 years before the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident.

Authorities on Thursday released depositions by 5 people who testified before a government

investigative panel on the nuclear crisis. They include a former inspector of the now-defunct Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency.

Initially, in September 2009, the utility told the agency official a tsunami from a possible earthquake could reach as high as 8 meters.

An expert from TEPCO used a massive quake from the 9th century as the basis for the estimate.

The agency official then suggested TEPCO to take concrete measures to prepare for a tsunami as he knew the pumps to cool the reactors would be submerged under those circumstances.

The inspector reportedly advised the utility to move the equipment inside buildings, like the Fukushima Daini plant, TEPCO's other nuclear power station in Fukushima Prefecture.

The documentation says a TEPCO official responded the utility could not decide by itself and needed to consult the Japan Society of Civil Engineers.

Another TEPCO official cast doubt on the plan by wondering if it's really possible to halt the reactors for that purpose.

The inspector further testified he didn't push the plan to the point of earmarking a budget for it.

After reviewing the statements, the government panel decided the agency did not urge TEPCO to take concrete action. It concluded the utility believed the government agency approved of its decision to wait until experts provided advice.

Japan Crushes Resistance to Restart

As the Japanese authorities restarted a nuclear reactor in Sendai, please find hereafter a link to a contribution to:

The Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol. 13, Issue. 38, No. 1, September 21, 2015:

Japan Crushes Resistance to Restart Nuclear Power Plants

This paper delivers an analysis of the rationale behind the arguments (including economic arguments) mobilized by the Japanese authorities to legitimize their decision to restart the n°1 reactor in Sendai, under the sign of blackmail.

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Thierry-Ribault/4374/article.html>

Japan Crushes Resistance to Restart Nuclear Power Plants

The Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol. 13, Issue. 38, No. 1, September 21, 2015

Thierry Ribault

Summary: This article reviews the Abe administration's moves to crush opposition to nuclear power and restart the first nuclear reactors since the closure of all 54 nuclear power plants following the triple meltdown of March 11, 2011. The author punctures official claims of an economic crisis resulting from post-3.11 import of fossil fuels, the basis for the Abe restart program. Likewise, claims that preserving a share of the energy mix to nuclear power is essential and inescapable in order to avert or alleviate climate crisis. Finally, the author considers the implications of government policies for the possible creation of a Japanese nuclear weapons arsenal.

On August 11, 2015, the n°1 reactor at Sendai nuclear power plant, located in Kagoshima Prefecture in south-west Japan, was reactivated, and one month later Kyushu Electric Power inserted 157 fuel rod assemblies into the n°2 reactor planned to restart in mid-October¹. The Abe administration seeks to make this moment decisive in its energy strategy, insisting that nuclear power is “vital” for the future of the nation, in ways that recall statements between 1931 and 1945 that the invasion of Manchuria was also “vital” for the Empire. The pragmatic criticism levelled against such an approach with regard to the future of Japanese energy by the former Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro, who pointed out that Japan had managed to rebuild itself after the Second World War *without* Manchuria, had no impact. Koizumi has become one of the leading actors of the pro-renewable energy elite, which includes the pro-solar billionaire Son Masayoshi, CEO of Softbank. Adamant about its national-nuclearism, the Abe administration seems to adopt the rule that whatever is furthest from the truth is also what is most communicable. Such has been the case with the raising of the thresholds of unacceptability with regard to the radioactive contamination of both the population and nuclear workers. The administration has also denied the health effects associated with the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, despite the evidence of an epidemic of thyroid cancer. Moreover, evacuated people are being sent back into contaminated zones, a decision accompanied by a “risk communication” policy relayed and supported internationally by handpicked UN experts².

Naturally, there has been tension, including within the government itself, and notably from political and industrial groups that favour promotion of renewable energy, mainly biomass and hydroelectric power. Even some of the most ardent defenders of nuclear power within parliament or government have changed their views to favour renewable energy. It is a (discreet) war of succession in terms of economic interests whose long-term outcomes are unforeseeable. It is certain, however, that with the reactivation of Sendai's n°1 reactor, Abe and his collaborators have won a battle in the *clique struggle*. They have achieved this largely thanks to a tool classically used in politics: blackmail. In this case, this blackmail has several facets: first, blackmail about the threat of trade deficit; second, about the threat of climate change; third, about the exploding costs of non-nuclear electricity and the threat of decreasing income for the giant power companies from nuclear power, and, finally, about the threat of an atomic bomb.

All the ingredients of the Abe administration's approach to the power plants were actually fully elaborated in the following passage extracted from the Prime Minister's response at the plenary session of the House of Councilors in January 31, 2013: «The Policy established by the former administration to halt the operation of all nuclear power plants by the 2030's lacks a concrete basis and has engendered anxiety and distrust among the municipalities that have accepted nuclear facilities and cooperated with the national government's energy policies, the international community, industry, and the remainder of the Japanese people. Therefore we will carry out a zero-based review of their strategy for energy and the environment and will establish a responsible energy policy which also ensures a stable supply of energy and reduces energy costs.»³

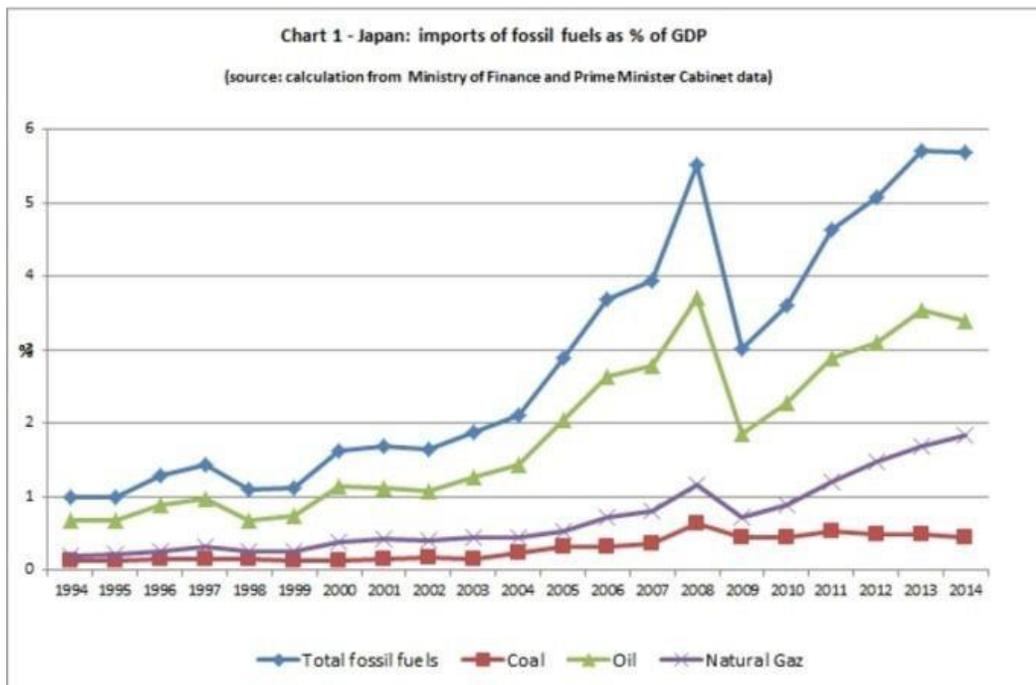
Thus, from the “zero-based review”, to the energy cost reduction guarantee, the security connoted “stable supply”, and the demagogic and manipulative argument according to which the Japanese people lost confidence and became anxious *because* “the policy established by the former administration to halt the operation of all nuclear power plants by the 2030’s” lacked a “concrete basis”, and not simply because of the explosion and the meltdown of three nuclear reactors that were supposed to be eternally safe, every single argument of the Abe administration is an inversion of the actual truth.

Let us examine in detail the content of each of these facets of the blackmail before drawing conclusions on the nature of the authoritarianism of the Abe administration on one hand, and the effectiveness of individual and collective action to fight this administration on the other.

1.The threat of trade deficit

In 2013, for the first time in three decades, the Japanese balance of trade was in deficit by a total of 11.5 billion yen. 7 billion of this was attributed to the relocation of Japanese industries to other parts of Asia – not connected with the Fukushima disaster – and 4 billion to the additional cost of petrol and gas to produce energy no longer supplied by nuclear power plants. However, from April 2015, the balance of trade was once again in surplus, with petrol purchases dropping by 51%, petroleum products by 38%, and liquefied natural gas by 12%.⁴ The following months were slightly negative, but the weaker yen policy of the Abe Administration (since December 2012) helped reassert the value of exports which substantially increased: in July 2015, the percent change from the same term in the preceding year was 7.6% for exports (of which machinery was 8%, electrical machinery 10.5%, transport equipment 10.4%), imports were -3.2% (of which -29% for mineral fuels), and the trade balance was -72.2%.⁵

Actually the growing share of imports of fossil fuels in the Japanese GDP is not new; indeed, it has been steady since the 1990s (Chart 1). The trend was halted in 2009, to restart in 2010, with a new peak in 2013 at a comparable level with that reached in 2008 (5.5%), but still lower than the levels reached during the oil shock of 1980 (6.6%). For petrol and coal, 2014 shows a reverse trend toward low levels, and even though we don’t know what the future will be, according to METI, prices of liquefied natural gas could be halved between 2014 and 2015. The data made public for the first half of 2015 suggest an extension of the fall in fossil fuel imports against GDP to 3.9% (against 5.7% in 2014). Considering the trade balance in the first semester of the year, the 2015 trade deficit could be four times lower than that of 2014.

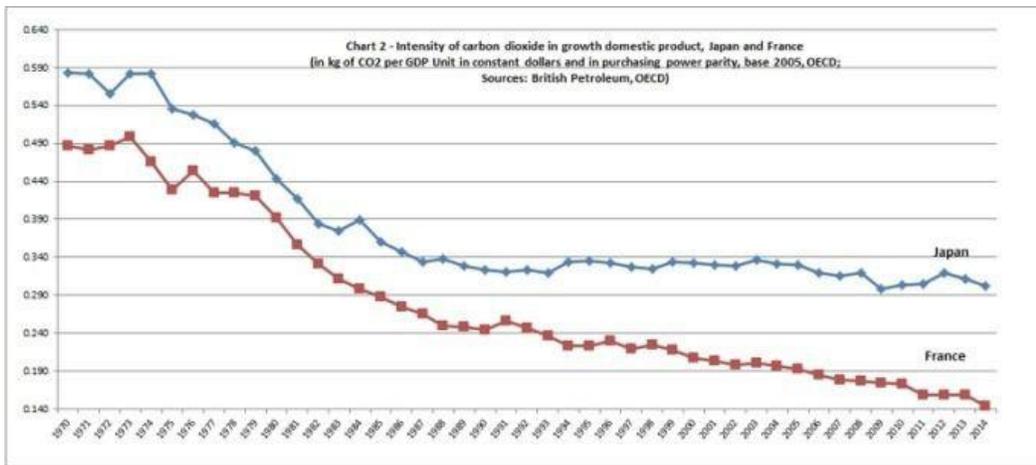


The results of a study by the energy economist Bernard Laponche in 2014⁶ confirm that the claim of a relationship between the termination of nuclear power and expansion of the Japanese trade deficit is groundless. According to Laponche, if “the energy bill (net import of fossil fuels) truly increased 46% between 2010 and 2013, 6% of this hike is due to changes in the energy system, namely the fall of nuclear electricity production, while 40% is due to the rise in imported fuels, particularly petrol, whose rising international price was unrelated to the fall in nuclear power production in Japan” (p.61).

Our first conclusion then is the following: Stopping the use of nuclear power in the wake of the Fukushima disaster did not have the expected disastrous impact on the Japanese balance of trade, and the loudly proclaimed “wealth drain” did not occur.

2.The threat of climate change

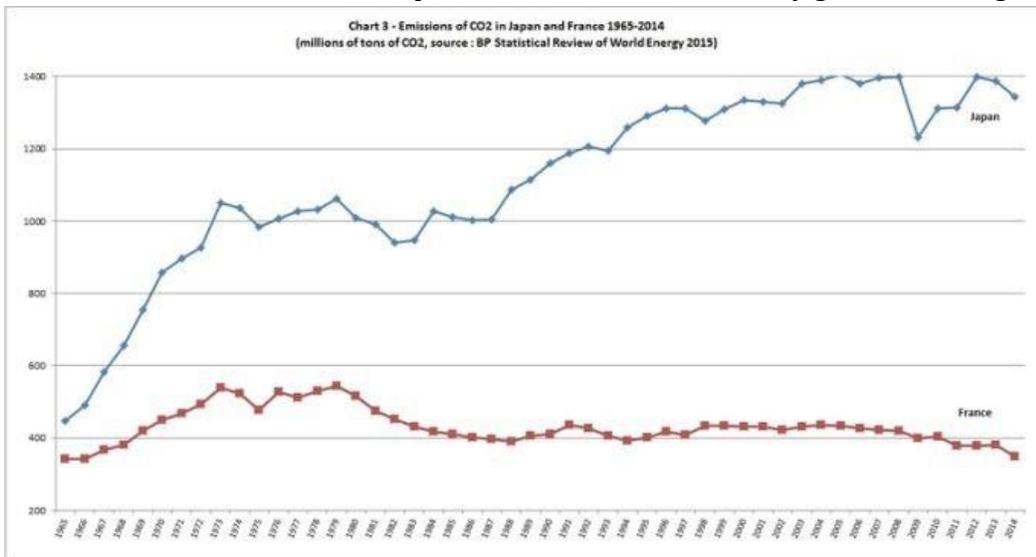
Since 2007-08, the intensity of Japanese GDP in carbon dioxide has been 1.8 to 2 times higher than in France, compared with 1.2 times during the 1970’s (Chart. 2). In the long run, this intensity has been falling in both countries, with some temporary reverses. This was the case in 1973, 1984, 1994, 1998, 2003, 2008, 2010, 2011 and 2012 in Japan, and in 1973, 1976, 1991, 1996, 1998 and 2003 in France. In Japan, CO2 intensity resumed its long-term fall in 2013 and 2014. Thus, this was not Japan’s first re-intensification in carbon dioxide emissions, and the shut down of nuclear power was just one element affecting a long term trajectory of declining CO2 intensity.



On the other hand, with few brief exceptions, the absolute value of CO₂ emissions has not stopped increasing in Japan since the 1950s (Chart 3). Not until 2009, right after the 2008 “Lehman shock,” did a significant decrease occur, before recovering to cruising speed in 2010. A new peak was reached in 2012, before the fall in 2013 and 2014.

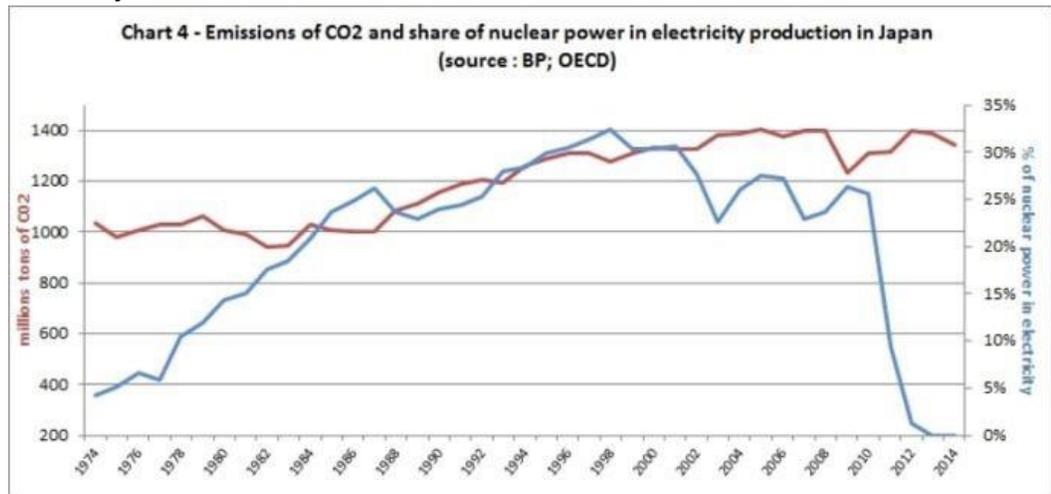
In France, for more than the last three decades, the absolute level of carbon dioxide emissions remained roughly constant, even higher than the level reached at the end of the 1950s, while the intensity of carbon in GDP fell steadily from 1974.

Thus, if the oil shocks did tend to slow down CO₂ emissions in the short run, in countries like Japan and France where production is highly energy intensive, the nuclear shock did keep total emissions, in absolute value, on a quasi-continuous ascending curve, despite promises to reduce emissions in both countries on the basis of nuclear power in a world threatened by global warming.



Despite a significant increase in the use of fossil fuels, the total amount of CO₂ emissions in Japan did not increase after the Fukushima disaster at the speed estimated by experts and by ardent nuclear defenders: energy savings kicking in, compensating for 28% of the nuclear electricity fall between 2011 and 2014, and the increased use of renewable energy are the two main factors behind this development. Thus, although coal and oil consumption rose after 2010, they did not reach pre-2008 crisis levels. CO₂ emissions in Japan, of which 40% are related to the production of electricity, maintained an identical trajectory before and after the Fukushima disaster. And, from 2012, they returned to their 2002–2008 level, that is about 1.4 billion tonnes of CO₂.

The disaster did not therefore precipitate Japan into a sudden and unstoppable increase in carbon dioxide emissions; rather it reinforced the upward trend experienced prior to the disaster, from the period of “recovery” that followed the 2008 crisis.



To sum up, the fall in the share of nuclear power in total electricity production in Japan in 2011 (12%) and 2012 (1%), did not lead to a proportional rise in carbon dioxide emissions (Chart 4). On the contrary, during the recent period, a drop in CO2 emissions has been observed: 0.9% in 2013, 3.1% in 2014. Finally, it can be noted that the increase in Japanese nuclear power plants between the 1960s and the 1970s coincided with one of the largest increases in CO2 emissions in the country – the volume increasing by 2.4 times between 1965 and 1973 against 1.3 times between 1973 and 2014. Several periods will follow where the growth of the nuclear power share into electricity production will go with the growth of CO2 emissions, particularly 1974-1978, 1982-1984, 1990-1997, 1999-2001, 2003-2006 and 2007-2008.

Therefore, our second conclusion is that, in the long term, the development of nuclear power never halted the almost uninterrupted increase in Japanese carbon emissions. In an economic system founded on a double energy dependency, the growth in both nuclear power’s share of electricity production and CO2 emissions may run in parallel and articulate with each other rather than the opposite, contrary to what one might anticipate.

3. The threat of exploding prices and costs of non-nuclear electricity

Between 2009 and 2014, electricity prices for Japanese households and small and medium size enterprises, and for big companies rose respectively by 24.4% and 35.6% (table 1). This increase has been presented by the government as a second disaster following the triple earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown of March 2011. However, once again, to impute such price increases to the nuclear power stoppage is to forget the past, since the price levels reached in the early 1990’s were equivalent to current levels which are being touted as a “record”. It also involves correlating in an unsound way the rise in electricity prices and the nuclear power stoppage while, when viewed in comparison with France, where the share of nuclear power in electricity production is between 75% and 77%, a country giving priority to nuclear power is also put at risk of high electricity price hikes: between 2009 and 2014 electricity prices in France grew respectively 44.6% for households and small and medium size enterprises, and 40% for big companies, that is, a greater increase than in Japan.

Table 1 – Comparative prices of electricity in current €/kWh including VAT

(sources: METI, Eurostat (1) et (2))

<image: http://img.over-blog-kiwi.com/1/22/53/68/20150927/ob_5d562e_tableau.jpg>

According to the projection released by Japan's Ministry of Industry in April 2015, nuclear power will be produced at a cost of 10.1 yen per kilowatt-hour in 2030 against 8.9 yen in 2011. This will make nuclear energy the least expensive source of energy compared to coal (12.2 yen), gas (13.4 yen) and renewable energy (solar: between 12.7 and 15.5 yen; wind: between 13.9 and 21.9 yen).⁷ The estimate of the cost of nuclear energy takes into account compensation for accidents, aid to local governments and costs related to the security of nuclear plants. The costs incurred by a nuclear accident have been greatly reduced by government experts to take into account the introduction of security standards that are much stricter and more reliable than those in place before the Fukushima disaster. According to their calculations, the authorities have thus halved the likelihood of a major accident.

Moreover, the estimated cost of the nuclear kilowatt-hour is based on the statements of investors in security made by electricity companies. However, shortly after publication of the figures, these companies revealed that their actual expenses would be two and a half times higher than those declared 30 months earlier and would reach at least 2.4 trillion yen.⁸

Yet it is on the basis of these cost estimates that the Japanese "energy mix" for electricity production by 2030 was defined in April: 20% to 22% for nuclear power – which implies either overturning the existing rule on shutting down reactors after 40 years of use or the building of new reactors – and 22% to 24% for renewable energy.⁹

As we will see below, by making the energy issue a *security* issue, the government legitimizes the preservation of a large share of nuclear power in Japan's energy mix. Particularly it allows justification of an arbitrary increase in the energy self-sufficiency rate from 6% now to 24% in fiscal 2030. Since this energy self-sufficiency rate is structurally defined as the share of renewables *and* of nuclear energies in the total primary energy supply, reaching the 24% target means, *mechanically*, to increase the share of nuclear power to 11% of total primary energy supply, with the balance (13%) coming from renewables largely insufficient to compensate by themselves for the decrease of fossil fuels. In other words, the self-sufficiency rate target is nothing but a tailored-made guarantee that nuclear power will be assured a substantial share in the Japanese energy mix for the coming decades. Abe's renewable energies policy appears to be simply a back up to legitimize this necessity under the cover of «clean» energy to save the climate, and «independant» energy to save the nation's sovereignty from foreign fossil fuels providers. According to a study by the Mitsubishi Research Institute conducted in December 2014 for the Ministry of Environment, by 2030, approximately 31% of Japan's electricity production could be generated in the form of renewable energy, including solar, wind, geothermal and hydroelectric power, as opposed to approximately 2% in 2013 (excluding large hydro)¹⁰. The Ministry considers that the guaranteed feed-in tariffs of renewable energy could drop sharply and be maintained, even with a significant production of renewable energy, to a level below that estimated by METI. Moreover, the substitution of renewable energy for fossil fuels could save between 11 and 25 trillion yen by 2030. However, during the development of its energy plan, METI neither took these figures nor studies into account; their findings have also gone unheeded.¹¹

Thus, our third conclusion: first, there is no correlation between the rise in electricity prices and the nuclear power stoppage; second, the cost estimates of the different energy sources made by the Japanese government have been arbitrarily distorted to make a false case for the economics of nuclear power.

4. The threat of decreased income from nuclear power

In addition to its unconditional support for the reactivation of nuclear power plants, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) is moving to cut back on subsidies to local governments with idle nuclear plants.

Under the current system, local governments receive grants whose amounts depend on the operational performance of their reactors during the two preceding fiscal years. From 2013, municipalities have received grants based on an across the board deemed operational rate of 81% while all reactors were suspended for safety inspections in the wake of the 2011 disaster. This rate corresponds to the full operational rate except for the regular inspection period once every 13 months. Starting in 2016, the reference period will be reduced to one and a half years. Unless the reactors concerned are reactivated, the operational rate will be reduced to the rate before the March 11, 2011 disaster; that is, 70% on average. According to METI, this adjustment whose goal is clearly to press for reactivation, is “aimed at ensuring fairness” with regard to municipalities which have already reactivated their nuclear reactors. *Consequently, in municipalities such as Mihama in Fukui prefecture – at the heart of what is referred to as the “Nuclear Ginza” – where 40% of tax revenues are attributable to nuclear power and where subsidies will be halved owing to the dismantling of several reactors -- politicians are under pressure to support the reactivation of reactors in their territory.*

5. The (real) threat of atomic bombs

Owing to the fact that its nuclear fuel recycling programme has shut down and its plutonium stockpile accumulation continues to cause international concern, Japan has been under “pressure” – to the extent possible – to use its fuel reserves in its reactors. Thus, US Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, Rose Gottemoeller, recently told journalists that Japan should complete its pending fuel recycling programme and burn plutonium as a fuel called MOX in its reactors: “If there is going to be a plutonium reprocessing program, the flip side of it is that there has to be a very vigorous MOX program and that the MOX actually has to be burned in power plants.”¹²

The question remains, however, whether Japan can restart the 18 reactors needed to burn the plutonium it holds, and specifically whether the Rokkasho reprocessing plant can actually start up.

The desire to guarantee legitimacy to the existence of a centre for storage, plutonium extraction and reprocessing and MOX production at Rokkasho, located in northern Japan, is not new. Indeed, this reprocessing chain, built in partnership with AREVA from 1993, has never become operational and its fuel storage capacity will soon be saturated: 2834 tonnes of fuel are now in the factory’s pools, 90% of the available capacity on the site. Using Rokkasho’s infrastructure is the sole action that could guarantee the sustainability of this 20 billion euro gem whose dismantling costs are estimated at an additional 80 billion euros. This is taking place within a context in which there is a sharp decline in Japanese demand for plutonium used in breeder reactors (the Monju reactor has experienced a series of accidents and has produced electricity for only one hour over the last 20 years) and for MOX in conventional reactors. Japan currently holds 157 tonnes of plutonium, of which 100 tonnes are located in nuclear power plants. The remaining 57 tonnes have been shipped to reprocessing plants and 45 tonnes have been separated (35 tonnes are stored in France and the UK). These can make 5000 nuclear bombs. Rokkasho’s reprocessing capacity could enable the annual production of eight tons of separated plutonium, sufficient to make 1000 atomic bombs.

The question that nobody asks, but that we believe requires attention is thus: beyond its civilian use, does Japan intend to make a non-civilian use of its plutonium reprocessing and production plant?

The amendment to the “Atomic Energy Basic Law” that was quietly passed on June 20 2012 stated that, henceforth, “*the nuclear energy policy of Japan has to contribute to national security*”, sheds light on this issue. Further light is shed by the more recent vote on security laws, extending the possibility for intervention of self-defense forces in conflicts abroad in the name of strengthening the Japan-US alliance in matters of security. Defense minister Gen Nakatani thus recently acknowledged that these laws paved the way for a “theoretical possibility” for Japan to transport nuclear weapons during logistical operations.

However, he reiterated that the country would not engage in this type of intervention given the “non-nuclear principles” to which Japan has been committed.¹³

We noted, in a paper written in October 2012, that: *“this new context is not characterized by Japan’s technological capacity to build a nuclear weapon within a limited period, but rather by the fact that, drawing on the opportunity for the reform of its Nuclear Regulation Authority in the wake of the Fukushima disaster, Japan is establishing a legal framework adequate for the recognition and activation of such capacity. The next step could be a reform of Article 9 of the constitution, consistent with the bigger political role that the United States intends to see Japan play in Asia, notably with regard to China. Although the development of Japanese military nuclear reactors is only a mere potentiality, it provides a strong argument to its neighbors who also aspire to “nuclear sovereignty”, resulting in the escalated accumulation of nuclear weapons.”* ¹⁴

Three years later, it is no longer necessary to evoke the likely scenario. Indeed, the Japanese constitution has been revised by Abe administration fiat challenging the pacifist stance on which Article 9 was premised. The considerable resistance to this revision has had little impact on the political regime that some do not hesitate to describe as a “dictatorship”.

According to Hasebe Yasuo of Waseda University, one of the three constitutional experts invited in June by the Japanese parliament to speak on the constitutionality of security laws, the latter “undermine legal stability”. Hasebe also pointed out that, “There is this enormous distance that is hardly understandable from a commonsense point of view between the words and terms in the security bills that are seemingly limiting the conditions for use of force.”

He also questioned the remarks made by the Vice President of the Liberal Democratic Party, Masahiro Komura that “constitutional scholars never fail to stick to the words in Article 9 of the Constitution”. “Does this mean”, asked Hasebe, “that Mr. Komura is going to say that he wants to wield political power without sticking to the Constitution? That is fairly scary.” ¹⁵

Reacting to a formulation in the safety laws which states that “the intentions, capability and scale of the aggressor will be taken into comprehensive consideration before a decision is made over whether to allow for use of force” Kobayashi Setsu of Keio University, another constitutional expert, noted that “essentially, the statement is urging the public to give carte blanche to the government over the operation of the military by leaving everything to chance. It is the idea of a dictatorship.”

This seems to have been unwittingly confirmed by Nishi Osamu, an expert from Komazawa University and member of the group of private advisers to the Prime Minister who contributed to the formulation of the security laws. Nishi argued that “there is no small number of people who deem the bills to be constitutional”, adding that “Constitutional debate is not about deciding something by majority vote.”

A group of Japanese parliamentarians recently revealed that even before debate on the details of the security bills inside the ruling coalition took place, meetings were held in December 2014 in the United States between Japanese representatives and US military forces in which Kawano Katsutoshi, chief of staff of the Self-Defense Forces Joint Staff, stated that “the new security legislation would be ready by the summer of 2015” and that the construction of a new military base to replace U.S Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in Okinawa Prefecture was considered under “a positive view.” ¹⁶

Thus, our fifth conclusion is that the articulation between civil nuclear power and military nuclear power sheds some light on why, with 53% of Japanese opposing the security laws,¹⁷ these laws were nonetheless passed into law, and why, with 57% against reactivation of the Sendai nuclear plant,¹⁸ reactor n°1 has nonetheless been reactivated.

Conclusion

It is therefore under the banner of blackmail that the Abe administration has reactivated the n°1 reactor at Sendai nuclear power plant. In Japan as elsewhere, by trying so much to present nuclear power as the

Swiss army knife of all good public energy policy – anti-CO2 emissions and anti-global warming, anti-increases in electricity prices and costs hikes, anti-trade balance disequilibrium and anti-energy dependency – planners refuse to adapt reality to the truth, willfully choosing to shape the latter on the image of the former, constantly presented as immutable in order to ensure full exercise of authority. In so doing, they submit everyone to the tyranny of threats.

“We need the security bills to avert war”,¹⁹ Abe declared in front of the *hibakusha* – the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August. This is just one additional element in the *national operation to secure* – through fraudulent means as well as by threatening violence – and with the consent of victims, renunciation of all forms of personal or collective action that could thwart the state’s authoritarianism. In his speech on August 6 on the occasion of the ceremony commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Hiroshima atomic bombing –for the first time since his ascension to power – Prime Minister Abe made no mention of the “three non-nuclear principles” that ban the production, possession and import of nuclear weapons into Japanese territory.

While representatives of citizens’ associations and bomb victims have expressed their “hope that this year will not become a turning point towards war”, others have not failed to draw attention to their “hope for the realisation of a world free of nuclear weapons.”²⁰

It is questionable, however, whether such “hopes”, like those of the 160 Satsumasendai demonstrators who opposed the reactivation of reactor n°1 – supported on the occasion by former Prime Minister Kan Naoto, a convert to anti-nuclearism since 2011 – and those of the valiant owners of the five cars which momentarily blocked the entrance to the power plant, have the ability to significantly alter the political orientations we have outlined above.

In an interview on “the state of urgency and legitimate defence” that took place a year after the Chernobyl disaster, Günther Anders raised an interesting question: “what lies at the core of hope? Is it the belief that things will get better?” His response is as true today as it was then: “we must not raise hope, we must prevent it. For no one acts through hope. All those who hope abandon improvement to another entity.”²¹ The time has come to speak of reprehensible actions in the nuclear field, and having hope will no longer be an alibi. In the atomic age, hope ceased to be virtuous. If to struggle is to have eyes open, it is not hope which can sustain the ability to resist in a padlocked situation, but the right to exercise legitimate self-defense against nuclear violence.

Hope tends to be “synonymous with cowardice” and it is from their intimate knowledge of this identity that nuclear blackmailers derive their force. For as long as their opponents remain hopeful, they will remain frighteningly harmless.

Thierry Ribault is a researcher at CNRS, the French National Centre for Scientific Research (Clersé laboratory - Lille1 University). He is the co-author (with Nadine Ribault) of *Les sanctuaires de l’abîme – Chronique du désastre de Fukushima*, Edited by *Les Éditions de l’Encyclopédie des nuisances*, Paris, 2012. Recommended citation: *Thierry Ribault, “Japan Crushes Resistance to Restart Nuclear Power Plants”, The Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol. 13, Issue 37, No. 3, September 14, 2015.*

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- Andrew DeWit, Can Abenomics Cope With Environmental Disaster?

Notes

1 Mainichi, September 11 2015.

2 While, unofficially, the radiation exposure limit has been raised for the population, contaminated zones under 20 mSv a year having been progressively reopened to the public since April 2011, the last being the town of Nahara in Fukushima Prefecture where 7,400 residents have been “allowed” to return home permanently in early August (Asahi, June 17 2015), Japanese nuclear plant workers will officially also “be allowed to be exposed” to more than twice the current level of radiation in emergency situations, according to the Nuclear Regulation Authority’s Radiation Council. The radiation council announced in a report released July 30, that their radiation exposure limit will be raised from the current 100 mSv to 250 mSv in emergencies (Mainichi, June 17 2015).

As for risk communication, it is defined by UNSCEAR experts as the «interactive exchange of information and opinions concerning risks» (p.15). More precisely: “Risk communication is a key component of the risk analysis process, and is linked closely to risk assessment and risk management. Proactive risk communication, coupled with public involvement in the remedial process, is critical to the success of any remedial activity. Addressing public health concerns is a major communication challenge. The building blocks of an effective risk communication strategy are trust, transparency, ethics, technical accuracy, values, credibility and expression of caring. Different types of messages may be more – or less – suitable for different audiences (e.g. the general public, policy-makers, decision-makers, the mass media). Fears and perceptions need to be addressed – even if they are not commensurate with the actual risks. It is of utmost importance to prevent reactions that themselves carry risk (such as self-administration of potassium iodide), to allay unnecessary fears (such as avoidance of breastfeeding because of health fears), and to promote healthy coping mechanisms (such as social solidarity)” (*Health risk assessment from the nuclear accident after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami based on a preliminary dose estimation*, World Health Organization 2013, p.87.) In practical terms, risk communication policy in the Fukushima context consists in educating people to the nuclear culture and to encourage everyone to get used to a contaminated environment through educational workshops on radioactivity and cancer at schools, the dissemination of handbooks teaching how to manage life in a contaminated environment, and TV commercial campaigns on the virtues of fresh products from the contaminated areas.

As for the health effects of the Fukushima disaster, while experts from the UN Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) have been emphasizing since March 2011 that in Fukushima as in Chernobyl, the social and psychological impacts on health would be greater than the direct effects of radiation, they have also been asserting that “Radiation exposure following the nuclear accident at Fukushima-Daiichi did not cause any immediate health effects” and that “It is unlikely to be able to attribute any health effects in the future among the general public and the vast majority of workers” as was concluded during the 60th session of the Vienna-based UNSCEAR, on May 2013. A more recent report from IAEA reaffirmed the same stance, asserting that, “Because the reported thyroid doses attributable to the accident were generally low, an increase in childhood thyroid cancer attributable to the accident is unlikely” (...) “However, uncertainties remain concerning the thyroid equivalent doses incurred by children immediately after the accident”. According to the report, those uncertainties are largely due to a lack of reliable personal radiation monitoring data immediately after the disaster started, when radioactive iodine and other radioactive materials were spewed into the environment (Japan Times September 1st 2015).

Echoing such prophecy and uncertainty based science, the Fukushima Medical University Health Survey identified 98 residents 18 years old and younger diagnosed with thyroid cancer and 14 others diagnosed with possible thyroid cancer, but asserts that no causality relation with the Fukushima accident can be established (Mainichi, September 1st 2015). A child in Fukushima Prefecture has been diagnosed with

thyroid cancer in the latest health survey, which began in April 2014, and seven others are also suspected of having thyroid cancer but have not received a definitive diagnosis. They all tested negative in the first survey. "Despite the new results, I don't think we need to change our previous view" that they were not affected by radiation, said Hokuto Hoshi, who heads the panel (Japan Times, February 13 2015).

3 Source: Energy White Paper 2013, Outline June 2013, Agency for Natural Resources and Energy.

4 Le Monde, April 22, 2015.

5 Ministry of Finance, July 2015.

6 Les cahiers de Global Chance, n°36 novembre 2014.

7 Asahi, April 28, 2015.

8 Asahi, July 10, 2015.

9 Asahi, April 29, 2015.

10 The first proposed strategy report by the *Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies* (ISEP) after 3.11 for Japan's mid to long term reorganization of domestic energy was titled "unplanned electricity stoppage to strategically shift energy". It was released in March 2011. The strategy involves a shift towards a diversified energy policy to stabilize energy supply, work towards energy self-sufficiency, and curb global warming. The report sets a goal of reaching 30% renewable power generation by 2020 and 100% by 2050 (<http://www.isep.or.jp/en>).

11 Mainichi, February 21, 2015.

12 Mainichi, August 10, 2015.

13 Mainichi, August 5, 2015.

14 Reporterre, October 2, 2012.

15 Mainichi, June 10, 2015.

16 Mainichi, September 3, 2015.

17 Mainichi, May 25, 2015.

18 Mainichi, August 10, 2015.

19 Mainichi, August 11, 2015.

20 Mainichi, August 11, 2015.

21 Günther Anders, *La violence: oui ou non. Une discussion nécessaire*, Éditions Fario, Paris, 2014, p.30.

TEPCO had been warned (2)

September 26, 2015

Tepco rejected requests for anti-tsunami steps before 2011 nuclear crisis

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/09/26/national/tepco-rejected-requests-antitsunami-steps-2011-nuclear-crisis/#.VgY-rpfwmid>

Kyodo

Tokyo Electric Power Co. turned down requests in 2009 by the nuclear safety agency to consider concrete steps against tsunami waves at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which suffered a tsunami-triggered disaster two years later, government documents showed Friday.

“Do you think you can stop the reactors?” a Tepco official was quoted as telling Shigeki Nagura of the now-defunct Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, who was then assigned to review the plant’s safety, in response to one of his requests.

The detailed exchanges between the plant operator and the regulator came to light through the latest disclosure of government records on its investigation into the nuclear crisis, adding to evidence that Tepco failed to take proper safety steps ahead of the world’s worst nuclear accident since the 1986 Chernobyl disaster.

According to records of Nagura’s accounts, Nagura heard Tepco’s explanations of its tsunami estimates at the agency’s office in Tokyo in August and September 2009 as it was becoming clear that coastal areas of Fukushima and Miyagi prefectures were hit by massive tsunami following an earthquake in 869.

Tepco said the height of waves was estimated to be around 8 meters above sea level and will not reach the plant site, which was located at a height of 10 meters, they show.

But Nagura said he remembered thinking pumps with key cooling functions, which were located on the ground at a height of 4 meters, “will not make it” and told Tepco, “If this is the outcome, you better consider concrete responses.”

In refusing to immediately act, Tepco said it would wait for related studies to be carried out by the academic society of civil engineers, which it had requested to be done by March 2012.

Nagura also proposed placing the pumps inside buildings to protect them from being exposed to water, but a Tepco official told him, “Our company cannot make a decision without seeing the results of the (studies by the) society of civil engineers.”

Then another Tepco official told Nagura, “Do you think you can stop the reactors?” according to the government documents.

Nagura recalled in the documents, “I wondered why I had to be told such a thing.” But he also admitted that, after all, he only encouraged Tepco to “consider” tsunami countermeasures and did not request that it “take” specific measures.

The Fukushima crisis has revealed how Japan, which had boasted of possessing the world’s safest nuclear power plants, was ill-prepared against a severe nuclear accident.

Three reactors suffered core meltdowns after they lost their key cooling functions amid a loss of all electrical power following a huge earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

The government-appointed nuclear accident investigation panel has already issued a final report, and the government is now gradually disclosing the records of hearings conducted to people involved.

See also :

TEPCO rejected requests for antitsunami steps before nuclear crisis

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150926p2g00m0dm074000c.html>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. turned down requests in 2009 by the nuclear safety agency to consider concrete steps against tsunami waves at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, which suffered a tsunami-triggered disaster two years later, government documents showed Friday. [...]

Namie residents sue TEPCO

September 30, 2015

117 Fukushima town residents sue TEPCO, gov't over nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150930p2a00m0na015000c.html>

KORIYAMA, Fukushima -- Over 100 residents of Namie, Fukushima Prefecture, affected by the Fukushima nuclear crisis, have jointly sued Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the crippled nuclear plant, and the central government.

The 117 individuals from 32 households in the Tsushima district of the town, designated by the government as **a zone where residents will likely be unable to return in the foreseeable future**, filed their suit with the Koriyama branch of the Fukushima District Court on Sept. 29. **They are demanding that their hometown be restored to its original state through decontamination work and that the defendants pay them a total of some 6.5 billion yen in damages.**

This is the first class action by residents of an area designated a "difficult-to-return zone" because of the nuclear disaster, according to the attorneys for the plaintiffs.

In their suit, the plaintiffs are demanding that the whole Tsushima district be decontaminated to **reduce radiation levels to 1 millisievert per year -- internationally regarded as the upper limit on exposure to radiation, excluding that which exists in nature and the amount that people are exposed to in medical treatments and checkups -- by March 2020.** The residents are also demanding 30 million yen each in compensation if the defendants fail to meet the deadline for decontamination, citing the difficulty of rebuilding the community if the time limit is not met.

They are also **asking that the compensation they are receiving for mental anguish be increased** from the current 100,000 yen each a month to 350,000 yen. Moreover, they are calling for an additional 3 million yen each in damages for what they say was unnecessary exposure to radiation due to the defendants' failure to release their predictions on the spread of radioactive substances shortly after the onset of the nuclear crisis.

About an additional 480 residents from some 170 households in the district are expected to join the 117 plaintiffs in the lawsuit.

TEPCO officials referred to prosecutors over water pollution

October 2, 2015

TEPCO execs sent to prosecutors over contamination

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Oct. 2, 2015 - Updated 12:26 UTC+2

Fukushima police have referred former and current officials of Tokyo Electric Power Company to prosecutors over the pollution caused by the 2011 nuclear accident at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power

plant.

A group of residents filed a criminal complaint 2 years ago against the utility and 32 top officials over the leaks of highly radioactive wastewater from the nuclear plant into the sea.

The group says the company and the executives failed to properly manage storage tanks of contaminated water or build underground walls to block the flow.

Investigators say they have conducted interviews with TEPCO officials and analyzed various materials.

The Fukushima District Prosecutors' Office will determine whether it will lay criminal charges against the company and its officials.

Tokyo Electric Power Company officials declined to make specific comments, but said that they responded to the investigation in an honest manner.

Fukushima police to send toxic water case against TEPCO, execs to prosecutors

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151002p2a00m0na016000c.html>

FUKUSHIMA -- Police here will refer Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and 32 current and former TEPCO executives to prosecutors **in connection with leaks of toxic water into the Pacific** in the aftermath of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, investigative sources say.

The police will send papers on the case to the Fukushima District Public Prosecutors' Office **on suspicion TEPCO and the executives violated the environmental pollution offense law.**

Among the 32 individuals are TEPCO President Naomi Hirose, former Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and former President Masataka Shimizu. They are suspected of being negligent in their duties and releasing radioactively contaminated water into the ocean from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. An initial criminal complaint accusing TEPCO executives of professional negligence resulting in injury or death was filed jointly by individuals and representatives of a citizens' group. In September 2013, the same complainants filed with the Fukushima police against the TEPCO executives on suspicion of violating the environmental pollution offense law.

The complaint says the central government ordered TEPCO to build underground walls to prevent leaks of contaminated groundwater, but that TEPCO postponed taking the measure, citing costs and other reasons. Furthermore, the complaint accuses TEPCO of using weak water storage tanks resulting in the leak of some 300 metric tons of contaminated water, and of insufficient monitoring measures that led to the delayed discovery of the leak and increasing the volume of water that escaped.

JFBA calls for more gov't support for People affected by 3/11

October 2, 2015

Lawyers' group calls for more government support for those affected by Fukushima radiation

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/10/02/national/lawyers-group-calls-for-more-government-support-for-those-affected-by-fukushima-radiation/#.Vg_H4Zfwmic

Kyodo

CHIBA – Japanese lawyers urged the government Friday to enhance health support for people affected by the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, at a time when around 110,000 people are living away from their homes with the prospect of returning still uncertain.

“The state should provide periodical and continual medical checkups for free to those who lived or live in radiation-hit areas,” the Japan Federation of Bar Associations said in a resolution adopted during its annual human rights conference at the Makuhari Messe convention center near Tokyo.

“The results of the checkups should be widely shared, with consideration given to privacy, so experts can examine them to study the effects of low-dose exposure and map out countermeasures,” the JFBA noted.

Among the 110,000 evacuees, around 45,000 are living outside Fukushima Prefecture, home to the disaster-hit Fukushima No. 1 nuclear complex, and have to decide whether to return home.

“The evacuees may face difficulties even if they return home, as many communities have been disbanded during the four-and-a-half years since the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disasters, while medical and administrative services will not be sufficiently provided there,” the federation said.

“On the other hand, some of those who decide to stay where they are now will carry double debt loads for their old and present homes,” it said.

Given the situation, **the JFBA also pressed the government to expand support for housing and psychological counseling so evacuees can reconstruct their lives.**

The adoption of the resolution followed a symposium the previous day, at which lawyers, medical experts and municipal leaders discussed how to address nuclear-related issues generated by the triple meltdowns at the Fukushima plant.

Among the panelists was Masaharu Tsubokura, a physician involved in medical practices in areas neighboring the crippled plant.

“The health problems the evacuees face have been caused not only by radiation exposure but also the changes to their living conditions as a result of evacuation,” he said. “Amid social isolation, those suffering strokes and developing diabetes are growing.”

The resolution also touched on the issue of where to ultimately dispose of radiation-tainted waste from the Fukushima disaster, with the mayors of the two towns the central government has selected as candidate sites appearing at the symposium.

Shioya Mayor Kazuhisa Mikata and Kami Mayor Hirobumi Inomata said they opposed the government plan, as the chosen sites are vulnerable to natural hazards and the facilities, if constructed, would damage their municipalities' water resources.

Opposition to the sites has grown partly because the government failed to include local residents in the decision-making process and did not provide a clear explanation, the federation said.

Based on the view that the nuclear disaster violated people's fundamental human rights, including the right to healthy living, the JFBA urged the government during a previous human rights meeting to review its pro-nuclear energy policy and eliminate nuclear power generation.

Will TEPCO's executives be indicted?

October 3, 2015

Police push for charges against TEPCO, execs over pollution problems after nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201510030052>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUKUSHIMA--Police are pushing for criminal charges to be filed against Tokyo Electric Power Co. and 32 of its current and former executives over leakages of contaminated water from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Prefectural police officials here announced Oct. 2 that they had referred the case to prosecutors, but at the same time did not disclose if they had asked prosecutors to indict those named in the documents.

The TEPCO executives, as well as the utility itself, were listed as suspected violators of the pollution law for failing to prevent the leakage of highly radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean.

The Fukushima prefectural police sent papers to the Fukushima District Public Prosecutors Office in response to criminal complaints submitted against TEPCO and its executives since October 2013 by Fukushima residents who were affected by the 2011 triple meltdown at the Fukushima plant.

Among those named in the papers are TEPCO President Naomi Hirose and Tsunehisa Katsumata, a former chairman.

TEPCO executives were negligent in converting the temporary tanks holding contaminated water on the Fukushima No. 1 plant site to safer ones, according to the police. That failure led to the leakage of about 300 tons of contaminated water from the temporary tanks up until July 2013.

The executives were also blamed for delaying the installation of walls to prevent groundwater from flowing into the reactor buildings. This alleged failure meant that between 300 and 400 tons of contaminated water leaked from the reactor buildings on a daily basis from June 2011 to September 2013. After Fukushima residents filed the criminal complaint, prefectural police interviewed all current and former TEPCO executives named in the document.

An official with TEPCO refrained from commenting on the decision to refer the case to prosecutors.

Nuclear plant operators should be held liable for negligence

October 3, 2015

Who's responsible for the Fukushima disaster?

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/10/03/national/media-national/whos-responsible-fukushima-disaster/#.Vg_HrZfwmic

by Jake Adelstein

Special To The Japan Times

The International Atomic Energy Agency released its comprehensive — but mostly ignored — final report on Fukushima on Aug. 30.

It blamed the March 2011 triple meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 power plant on a blind belief in "the nuclear safety myth." In other words, the myth that Japan's "nuclear power plants were so safe that an accident of this magnitude was simply unthinkable."

"The regulation of nuclear safety in Japan at the time of the accident was performed by a number of organizations with different roles and responsibilities and complex interrelationships," the report said. "It was not fully clear which organizations had the responsibility and authority to issue binding instructions on how to respond to safety issues without delay. The regulations, guidelines and procedures in place at the time of the accident were not fully in line with international practice in some key areas, most notably in relation to periodic safety reviews, re-evaluation of hazards, severe accident management and safety culture."

I'm sure we all remember the "unforeseeable" accident that happened in Fukushima in March 2011, an accident that will take an estimated 40 years and billions of dollars to clean up, some of it already subsidized with taxpayer money and higher electric bills.

Having restarted a reactor at the Sendai nuclear power plant in Kagoshima in August, one might suspect that the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Kyushu Electric Power Co. don't appear to remember this accident very well.

For a start, putting the reactor in Kagoshima back online didn't exactly go according to plan. Despite months of inspection, seawater was detected in the reactor's cooling system in late August. Alarm bells sounded.

In spite of all the checks and balances that were introduced in the wake of the Fukushima disaster, power utilities are continuing to drop the ball as far as their reactors are concerned. How can we ensure such oversight is avoided?

Katsunoba Onda, author of "Tepco: The Darkness of the Empire," which predicted in 2007 the nuclear accident at Fukushima, and lawyer Hiroyuki Kawai, who established the National Network of Counsels in Cases against Nuclear Power Plants, have proposed a very simple way of ensuring this happens: **hold nuclear plant operators criminally liable for negligence. The threat of incarceration might help them take their work more seriously and less likely to cut corners.**

The Prosecutorial Review Board appears to back such a proposal, approving the first criminal prosecutions of three former Tepco executives last July. The board consists of a panel of 11 private citizens, who operate under a rarely used set-up in the Japanese legal system that allows outsiders to review prosecutors' decisions.

The panel ordered that Tsunehisa Katsumata, chairman of Tepco at the time of the accident, and two former heads of the utility's nuclear division, be charged with professional negligence resulting in death and injury.

Prosecutors, however, have to date been slow to pursue criminal liability in the case. They did accept submissions from the public but then leaked their decision not to prosecute just as Japan won the right to host the 2020 Olympic Games. The story, however, doesn't end there.

This decision was again sent to the Prosecutorial Review Board, which again recommended that a criminal case be filed. For the second year in succession, the Prosecutorial Review Board overruled the prosecutors.

Prosecutors have reportedly continued to reject the case because "it is not possible to prove negligence." The IAEA report is expected to be submitted as evidence showing the exact opposite.

"When you have a disaster of this scale, isn't it crazy not to pursue responsibility?" Kawai, who led the citizen's group that filed charges with the prosecutors, told Nikkan Gendai. "The common sense of the people overturned the judgment of prosecutors, prosecutors who favor large companies and the powerful. Tepco knew about the possibility of a large-scale tsunami and did nothing about it. The idea that if it's not easily foreseeable, no one is responsible is mistaken. Abe says 'Japan has the safest nuclear standards in the world.' He's the only one saying it. It's not true. The Abe administration's push for war and for nuclear energy are very dangerous — one mistake and this country will be destroyed."

If the Tepco executives are tried in court and found guilty, it wouldn't be the first time nuclear power operators were convicted of criminal negligence resulting in death. In 1999, two employees died in an accident at the Tokaimura power plant run by JCO, a nuclear fuel cycle company. Six of the company's executives were later charged and pleaded guilty to criminal charges of negligence resulting in the deaths. They were all given suspended sentences.

Dark Side of the Rising Sun is a monthly column that takes a behind-the-scenes look at news in Japan.

How did NRA nuclear files find their way online?

October 3, 2015

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151003p2a00m0na008000c.html>

The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) secretariat says it does not know how leaked nuclear-related files used in one of its training sessions got out.

The Mainichi Shimbun has confirmed that the files included instructional materials and training session footage. New employees underwent training from April to May last year. Fifty-eight books -- totaling about 3,800 pages -- including the training text, and about 60 hours out of a total of about 74 hours of training footage appear to have been leaked. The NRA secretariat has confirmed that the files are genuine.

Within the text are 80 pages describing the equipment of a boiling water reactor. In addition to diagrams of the reactor and the pumps and turbines within, the pages includes the steps between activating a reactor and getting it up to the status of normal operation, as well as water temperature and pressure data related to starting one of these reactors.

Most of the leaked data was classified at the **second-to-lowest level of a four-level scale of confidentiality, which "does not include classified information but could obstruct business operations."**

In recorded video of the training showing a debate about where the blame for the nuclear disaster lay, new employees said, "Looking at the Fukushima (No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant) accident, my personal opinion is that you can't say that Tokyo Electric Power Co. was entirely at fault," and, "It is not the fault of just one group, but the fault of both (power producers and regulators.)"

Training session files were found to have leaked in March this year, and 50 pages relating to the nuclear waste reprocessing facility in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, found their way online. That leak apparently occurred when a company hired by the NRA secretariat in October last year to translate the documents into English outsourced the work to a third party.

The latest leak was also of documents assigned for translation to this company, but the company claims it only outsourced a part of the work and denies involvement in the latest case. The source of the latest leak has yet to be determined.

The International Atomic Energy Agency asks all nations to carefully manage information on nuclear power facilities to prevent nuclear terrorism. In January this year, the NRA presented security guidelines for its employees regarding the handling of nuclear information. A representative from the NRA secretariat admits that the leaks have been a "problem."

More about NRA leaks

October 7, 2015

NRA secretariat says all nuclear files for training session possibly leaked

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151007p2a00m0na001000c.html>

A senior official of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) secretariat said on Oct. 6 that it was highly likely that all of the internal documents used in one of its training sessions for its new employees had been leaked.

"We have judged that there is a high possibility that all of the materials have been released," Katsumi Matsuura, director of the general affairs division at the NRA secretariat, said at a regular news conference on Oct. 6.

The NRA secretariat has been looking into the incident, including the possibility of the internal files leaking from inside in addition to the possibility of a leakage from a translation company the secretariat commissioned to translate the documents. But Matsuura said how the documents had actually been leaked has yet to be identified.

The internal documents in question are textbooks totaling 3,800 pages used in a training session held between April and May 2014 for the secretariat's new employees as well as a total of 74 hours of training footage.

The Mainichi Shimbun had earlier confirmed that all of the textbooks and about 60 minutes of training footage had been leaked, The revelations raised questions about the way the organization handling nuclear information manages sensitive data.

The leaked documents include data on procedures to operate nuclear reactors as well as data showing water temperatures and pressure levels in reactors.

The NRA secretariat set up an in-house investigation team last month.

Matsuura said at the news conference, "We will continue to look into the matter and consider preventive measures."

TEPCO faces multiple official compensation claims

October 12, 2015

TEPCO facing compensation demands from dozens of local gov'ts over nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151012p2a00m0na006000c.html>

Seventeen prefectures including Fukushima Prefecture and seven major cities have filed compensation claims totaling 56.36 billion yen against Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), citing damage caused by the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in 2011, the Mainichi Shimbun has learned. TEPCO has refused to pay over 20 billion yen of the claimed amount, and six prefectures and one ordinance-designated city either plan or already have filed for nuclear damage compensation under the **alternative dispute resolution (ADR) system**.

Development of a compensation system for such entities has been slow compared with individual residents or companies. An official from one of the municipalities says the national government needs to get involved with concrete measures.

The Mainichi Shimbun surveyed all 47 prefectures, including Tokyo, as well as the nation's ordinance-designated cities, over the amount and details of compensation they were demanding from TEPCO as of the end of August this year. All prefectures and ordinance-designated cities in the Kanto and Tohoku regions have filed for damages. Mie and Shimane prefectures in the west of Honshu Island have also asked the utility to pay for dosimeters and other devices that the prefectural governments purchased in the wake of the nuclear disaster.

According to sources related to prefectural and municipal governments, TEPCO has agreed to pay a total of 36.29 billion yen in compensation for the drop in revenues of public businesses such as those managing water and sewage systems, the cost of radiation tests on school meals and agricultural and livestock products, and the cost of processing and storing waste contaminated with radioactive substances, among other damage.

In some cases, however, TEPCO fixed the period for damage caused by the nuclear disaster. In addition, the utility has not agreed to cover the drop in residence tax and other tax revenues in Fukushima Prefecture, caused by many moving out the prefecture due to the disaster, or the cost of measures to curb harmful rumors regarding radioactive contamination in Akita Prefecture and the cost of extending assistance to nuclear disaster victims in Gunma Prefecture.

Dissatisfied with TEPCO's handling of the situation, the Aomori, Akita, Yamagata, Miyagi and Chiba prefectural governments have filed claims for damage via the ADR system. Gunma Prefecture and the city of Sendai are set to follow suit. The Iwate Prefectural Government has already reached a 250 million yen settlement with TEPCO.

According to Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures -- the three areas hit hardest by the 2011 triple disaster -- most municipalities have filed for compensation from TEPCO, with the total amount claimed reaching 62.88 billion yen. Of that, the utility has agreed to pay only 8.65 billion yen. In addition, some municipalities in other prefectures have also demanded that TEPCO pay compensation for damages. In total, prefectural and municipal governments across the country are reportedly seeking over 120 billion yen in damages from the utility.

A TEPCO official told the Mainichi Shimbun, "We are paying local governments compensation in amounts that fall within a necessary and logical range based on interim guidelines set by the Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation."

Japan pledges to help Iran on nuclear matters

October 13, 2015

Japan to provide expertise on nuclear energy to Iran

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/around_asia/AJ201510130043

By DAISUKE KANDA/ Correspondent

TEHRAN--Japan pledged Oct. 12 to provide personnel and expertise to Tehran to help it develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

Agreement was reached here during talks between Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida and his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif.

Kishida and Zarif agreed that Japan will provide its know-how on earthquake-preparedness at nuclear facilities based on its experience of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011.

Tokyo will also share its experience of emergency measures it took after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and other steps to improve safety at nuclear facilities.

"Japan will continue efforts to foster cooperation between the two countries by providing its expertise to Iran in fields with which it has advanced know-how," Kishida said during a news conference.

The two ministers also signed a bilateral investment pact to entice Japanese companies to make inroads into the Iranian market.

Under a historic accord Iran signed with a group of six nations led by the United States, Tehran can continue nuclear development to supply energy and for medical purposes. The United States had imposed sanctions against Iran over its uranium enrichment program.

In exchange, the pact requires Tehran to establish a "nuclear safety center" to obtain technological expertise on nuclear energy with support from the six nations and other countries.

According to a joint statement released after the ministerial meeting, Japan will dispatch nuclear experts to the center to help it map out strategies to cope with a nuclear accident.

Japanese experts will also provide training to their Iranian counterparts to explain the importance of building nuclear facilities capable of withstanding earthquakes and provide know-how on calculating and managing nuclear materials.

The experts are likely to arrive at the center next year or later when Iran is ready to implement the accord with the six countries.

The investment pact, which aims to assist Japanese firms as they tap into the Iranian market, was signed after only one month of negotiation. Teheran has signed similar investment accords with 52 countries, including Germany, France, China and South Korea.

Kishida also agreed to set up a Japan-Iran cooperation council to promote bilateral cooperation in economic, environmental and other fields.

During the news conference, Zarif expressed confidence in expanding bilateral cooperation, saying a very bright future lies ahead for the two countries' diplomatic relations.

US & the two Koreas

October 17, 2015

US ready to talk with North Korea 'if it is serious about denuclearization'

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/10/17/asia-pacific/politics-diplomacy-asia-pacific/u-s-ready-talk-north-korea-serious-denuclearization/#.VileXivwmos>

by Matthew Pennington

AP

WASHINGTON – The U.S. is ready to negotiate with longtime adversary North Korea as it has with Iran, but Pyongyang has to be serious about abandoning nuclear weapons, President Barack Obama said Friday. Obama was speaking after meeting with South Korean President Park Geun-hye, a close ally, who echoed the U.S. leader's view.

The North has conducted three nuclear tests since 2006 and is developing a mobile ballistic missile that could potentially hit the U.S.

Obama said Iran was prepared to have a "serious conversation" about the possibility of giving up the pursuit of nuclear weapons. He said there is no indication of that in North Korea's case.

International aid-for-disarmament talks with the North stalled seven years ago.

"At the point where Pyongyang says, 'We're interested in seeing relief from sanctions and improved relations, and we are prepared to have a serious conversation about denuclearization,' it's fair to say we'll be right there at the table," Obama told a joint news conference.

However, he added that North Korea's violations of past agreements calls into question its willingness to allow the kind of "rigorous" verification regimes put in place with Iran.

Park's visit follows heightened tensions this summer at the heavily militarized border between the two Koreas, and speculation that North Korea could be planning another nuclear test explosion or a rocket launch into space using ballistic missile technology.

In a joint statement issued after Friday's meeting, the U.S. and South Korea said that if North Korea takes such a step, "it will face consequences, including seeking further significant measures by the U.N. Security Council." The statement also said they will never accept North Korea as a nuclear weapons state.

Park has cultivated closer relations with China as she looks to coax Beijing away from its traditional embrace of Pyongyang.

Last month, she prompted hand-wringing in Washington when she attended a Chinese military parade marking the end of World War II that was snubbed by the leaders of most major democracies.

But Obama said he had no problem with Park meeting Chinese President Xi Jinping, and joked that Xi “was in this room, eating my food,” during a state visit to the U.S. last month.

“We want South Korea to have a strong relationship with China, just as we want to have a strong relationship with China. We want to see China’s peaceful rise. We want them to be cooperating with us in putting pressure on the DPRK,” Obama said, referring to the North’s official title, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

But he added that the U.S. expects South Korea to speak out if China fails to abide by international norms and rules.

The U.S. has voiced mounting concerns to Beijing over cybertheft and China’s massive island-building in areas of the disputed South China Sea.

Obama and Park discussed the often-touchy relations among China, Japan and South Korea, whose leaders are to hold a long-awaited summit in Seoul in early November. Park said that the summit will be an opportunity to improve South Korea’s relations with another key U.S. ally, Japan, which will be welcomed by Washington.

The U.S. retains 28,500 troops in South Korea, a legacy of the 1950-53 Korean War. Obama called the U.S.-South Korean alliance “unbreakable.” Park called it “the lynch pin of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific.” Her language may rankle a little with Japan, which is also a critical U.S. ally in the region, hosting nearly 50,000 American troops.

Obama commended Park’s handling of an August standoff between the two Koreas, when they threatened each other with war after two South Korean soldiers were wounded by land mines Seoul says were planted by the North. The tensions have since eased, and the two sides have agreed to resume reunions of Korean families divided by the Korean War next week.

The Obama administration has faced criticism from hawks and doves alike for a lack of high-level attention on North Korea, which estimated to have enough fissile material for between 10 and 16 nuclear weapons.

Shikoku Electric satisfied

October 26, 2015

Shikoku Electric welcomes governor's consent

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20151026_24.html

Oct. 26, 2015 - Updated 05:15 UTC+1

The president of Shikoku Electric Power Company has told reporters that the governor's agreement to the restart of the No. 3 reactor at the Ikata nuclear power plant was a big step forward.

Hayato Saeki said he will continue to make efforts to further improve the safety and reliability of the plant.

He said he will seek the restart of the reactor as early as possible.

But he refrained from commenting on the specific timing of the restart, saying that screening is still underway.

Feed-in tariffs review: Public consensus essential

October 31, 2015

Review of feed-in tariff system

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2015/10/31/editorials/review-feed-tariff-system/#.VjTi0yt1BLN>

A review of the feed-in tariff system, introduced in 2012 to promote introduction of renewable energy following the shutdown of nuclear reactors in the wake of the 2011 disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 power plant, is underway by a panel of experts at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

Planned amendments to the system, aimed at addressing several problems that came to light in its first three years, should be implemented in ways that contribute to boosting the scant share of renewable sources in the nation's electricity supply. The reform should also be accompanied by **greater efforts to build a public consensus on what cost the nation is ready to shoulder to establish a sustainable energy supply.**

Currently, electricity generated by renewable sources accounts for only 12.2 percent of the nation's total. The share of sources such as solar and wind but not including hydro stands at a mere 3.2 percent. To achieve the government's goal of boosting the renewable share to 22 to 24 percent in 2030 — and hopefully beyond — the system to expand renewable energy supply needs to be based on a long-term vision.

The feed-in-tariff system, which began in July 2012, makes it mandatory for power companies to buy electricity generated by renewable sources at fixed prices set by the government, so that the prospect of stable revenue will facilitate investment in renewable power generation. The system has indeed sharply boosted the introduction of solar power, whose facilities can be built relatively easily and quickly. **Solar power output during the peak-demand period in summer 2014 reached 6.33 million kilowatts — the equivalent of six nuclear reactors.**

However, much of the increase in renewable energy output capacity under the system — more than 90 percent of the total — has been concentrated in solar. This sharp increase in output led several major

power companies to suspend purchases of electricity from solar power operators, on the grounds that their power supply system could be disrupted.

It has also been pointed out that **many operators of solar power businesses that have obtained a government permit to sell the electricity at a high fixed price have not started producing power because they're waiting for the cost of solar panels and other items to decrease.**

The system should be corrected to prevent distortions in the way renewable energy develops. And yet it appears indisputable that the system is contributing to expansion of the use of renewable energy in this country. In the ongoing review, **the government should not lose track of the system's basic purpose — to reduce the risks for businesses that are serious about developing renewable energy, and to get all of society to share the cost of expanding the use of renewable energy.**

The fixed prices for purchase of electricity from renewable sources are set high to ensure a profit margin for the producers. The power companies' cost of buying such electricity is passed on to households and businesses.

During the current fiscal year, the total cost of purchasing renewable energy is projected to reach ¥1.8 trillion. The cost is expected to rise to as high as ¥4 trillion in 2030 if the renewable supply is doubled from the current level in line with government targets.

Reportedly under consideration in the ministry's review of the system is a mechanism to introduce an auction for energy operators if the output of solar power reaches a certain level, so that the purchase of power from more efficient operators would be prioritized and trim the overall cost.

Also called for in the review is a more balanced promotion of various renewable sources whose output is less affected by weather conditions than solar. **The ministry is believed to be weighing whether to fix purchase prices for wind, hydro, geothermal and biomass for several years ahead — instead of revising them annually — to promote investments in energy facilities that require a long period to be completed.**

This could reduce the risk of price fluctuations for prospective operators and encourage them to cut costs. Under the feed-in-tariff system, the additional charges that consumers pay for electricity will increase as the power supply from renewable sources rises. While the government and power producers should make sustained efforts to win the understanding and support of consumers, the latter will also need to think about the benefits and problems of the system as they weigh the impact on their pocketbooks.

To help build a popular consensus on the issue, discussions of the feed-in tariff system and other measures to promote introduction of renewable energy should be made transparent, rather than being monopolized by the bureaucracy and business interests.

Cancers after 3/11: But who to trust?

October 31, 2015

Cancer and Fukushima: Who to trust?

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/10/31/national/media-national/cancer-fukushima-trust/#.VjTiCit1BLN>

by Philip Brasor

Special To The Japan Times

South Korean director Kim Ki-duk is a noted provocateur. His latest movie, "Stop," is about a Japanese couple who were living near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant when it suffered a meltdown in March 2011.

They evacuate to Tokyo, where the wife is pestered by an underground cult that insists she abort her presumably irradiated fetus, and she becomes convinced she should. Her husband is equally convinced there is nothing wrong with the baby and ties his wife up to prevent her from doing anything. Kim's point seems to be that whichever position you take on the nuclear accident, it will invariably drive you insane. But these positions do divide families. In an interview that appeared Oct. 20 on Norikoe Net TV, writer Minori Kitahara remarks to filmmaker Hitomi Kamanaka that there are no men in her latest documentary, "Little Voices from Fukushima," which centers on a group of mothers trying to gain more information about the effects of radiation on their children's health, because the authorities give them none. Kamanaka says these women's husbands refused to appear on camera "even though they support what their wives are doing."

There are even more mothers involved in the movement whose spouses forbade them to participate in the filming. Because of their jobs, these men gravitate toward the establishment stance, which in this case holds that there is no solid evidence showing that the radioactivity released by the Fukushima accident has had a harmful effect on area residents, including children. **Public health in Fukushima is, according to Kamanaka, a gender-identified issue. "The nuclear industry is very much a man's world,"** she says.

The male-dominated media augments the confusion by throwing out stories related to radiation in Fukushima filled with unexplained statistics: three Fukushima hospitals ran tests on 2,700 children and discovered no radioactive cesium in their bodies; the International Atomic Energy Agency says an increase in the incidence of thyroid cancer in Fukushima is "unlikely." Then Toshihide Tsuda, a professor at Okayama University, contradicts the purport of these stories by publishing a study in the journal of the International Society of Environmental Epidemiology that found thyroid cancer incidence rates of Fukushima residents "under the age of 19" was 20 to 50 times the national level. News items that mention the study also point out that Tsuda's conclusions are questioned by experts who call them "premature" or indicative of a "screening surge," meaning that since so many people were tested more cancers than normal were bound to be found and these cancers may not have been caused by radiation.

Tsuda addressed these doubts last month during a press conference at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan, explaining that even if a screening surge is factored in, the incidence rate for thyroid cancer is well above the norm. Moreover, the rate of cancer incidence four years after the accident is comparable to the rate of thyroid cancer incidence in Belarus four years after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, and that led to 6,000 children undergoing surgery. He called on the authorities to undertake "better and broader" screenings and implement measures to address this probable increase in cancer cases.

The operative word here is "cancer," which dominates the conversation because of its terrifying overtones. However, it is treated by both sides as a quantitative matter: How many children will get cancer and how much of it was caused by radioactivity?

What's missing is the qualitative dimension. Katsuya Kodama, a medical researcher whose specialty is the effects of radiation on cells, pointed out during a recent discussion on the Internet news channel DemocraTV that DNA strands are always being damaged and repair themselves as a matter of course. Radiation above a certain level, however, can cause more permanent damage, which may lead to cancerous cell growth.

But all cancers aren't the same, and according to his research, the type of cell mutations found in the children in Fukushima don't usually lead to "shortened life spans." The small nodules found on the subjects' thyroid glands are cancerous but that doesn't mean they're fatal. Thyroid cancer develops very slowly, but once a parent hears from a doctor that his or her child "has cancer," the reaction is to have it removed immediately, even though it may not be necessary. Fifteen Chernobyl children diagnosed with thyroid cancer eventually died, but Kodama believes death was due to the effects of surgery and not the cancer itself. Though the number of thyroid cancer diagnoses has risen in the United States in recent decades, the number of annual deaths from the disease has remained unchanged. In Kodama's view, the argument has less to do with the effects of radiation than with how the medical community addresses cancer.

He isn't saying that radioactivity isn't dangerous or that people living in the area shouldn't be screened; he's saying the matter should be explained medically and not just statistically. Strangely enough, his research, like Tsuda's, has been rejected by the establishment. When he presented his findings to the Nuclear Regulation Authority, they told him they were afraid people would "misunderstand." **In accordance with the official line regarding the possible health crisis in Fukushima, it's better not to talk about it at all.**

This attitude only exacerbates the situation. Two years ago the government set up an advisory system for the regions affected by the nuclear accident. Residents could talk to experts about safety and relief measures. Last week, Tokyo Shimbun reported that the program has been a bust, since **residents don't trust anyone representing the authorities to give them straight answers.** As one person involved in the program told the paper, "Everyone has different opinions about the effects of radiation, and it always leads to conflicts."

Fukushima at Pugwash Conference

November 04, 2015

Fukushima in focus at Pugwash Conferences nuclear power debate

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201511040048

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

NAGASAKI--Lessons learned from the Fukushima disaster led a discussion on the risks of nuclear power generation at the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs here on Nov. 3.

Some experts called for a cautious approach in response to the 2011 meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Others presented the case for continued use of atomic energy.

Kiyoshi Kurokawa, professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo, who served as chairman of the Parliamentary Investigation Commission on the Fukushima Nuclear Accident, was a panelist at the plenary session titled "The Risk of Civil Use of Nuclear Energy."

"Awareness of safety was lacking (in Japan about nuclear power plants)," he said, referring to the Fukushima plant.

He suggested that measures to deal with nuclear accidents be formulated in an open forum with international experts contributing.

Sharon Squassoni, a researcher for the U.S. think tank Center for Strategic and International Studies, also took a cautious stance.

She said that cheaper methods to obtain energy are available, and that the Fukushima disaster clearly showed a gap between expectations of nuclear power generation and its reality.

Squassoni also spoke of the need to consider the scope of the safety that must be guaranteed.

But Ramamurti Rajaraman, an Indian physicist, argued for the promotion of nuclear energy. He said that its risks have to be compared with those of not possessing electricity.

An audience member also said that the energy source is necessary.

“Atomic energy is helpful for (economic) growth of developing countries. Although there were accidents in Chernobyl, Three Mile (Island) and Fukushima, we must not get emotional,” the individual said.

The Pugwash Conferences were started by scientists in Canada in 1957 to discuss ways to abolish nuclear weapons. Since the 2011 Fukushima accident, participants in the international event have also discussed the dangers of the nonmilitary use of nuclear energy.

The current event, the 61st in the series, runs until Nov. 5.

MHI buys stake in Areva

Mitsubishi Heavy to buy stake in French nuclear giant's reactor subsidiary

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/business/AJ201510310044>

October 31, 2015

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. (MHI) will take an equity stake in Areva NP, the reactor manufacturing subsidiary of struggling French nuclear giant Areva, the Japanese company said Oct. 30.

MHI also said it is discussing a deal to take a stake in the parent company of the state-owned group of nuclear power businesses.

“The capital investment will be highly recoverable from the initial investment,” Mitsubishi Heavy President Shunichi Miyanaga said at a news conference in Tokyo to announce the company’s financial statements. “We believe there is no potential risk in the deal.”

Miyanaga also said MHI is “productively considering” a proposal to invest in the parent company, which specializes in fuel-related businesses.

The leading Japanese heavy machinery manufacturer and Areva, which is trying to rejuvenate its business, have joined forces to develop an advanced medium-size nuclear reactor called Atmea 1. It will be delivered to a Turkish nuclear power plant currently under construction.

MHI decided to inject capital into Areva NP because the reactor maker’s advanced technology is essential in developing Atmea 1 and the nuclear venture in Turkey is projected to generate long-term profits.

Areva and the state-owned power utility Electricite de France SA (EDF), which plans to hold an equity stake in Areva NP, are willing to sell maximum 34 percent stakes in Areva NP.

MHI and the two French entities will negotiate the scale of the investment before signing a basic agreement in January or February next year.

A-bomb survivors demand extension of black rain area

November 5, 2015

Hiroshima A-bomb survivors demand recognition as 'black rain' victims

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201511050052

By GEN OKAMOTO/ Staff Writer

HIROSHIMA--A group of atomic bomb survivors here has filed a lawsuit against local governments demanding recognition as victims of radioactive "black rain" and access to free medical checkups. In the suit filed at the Hiroshima District Court on Nov. 4, the 64 plaintiffs said the Hiroshima prefectural and municipal governments should retract their earlier rejections and certify the victims as hibakusha atomic bomb survivors.

The plaintiffs argue it is unacceptable that they have not received the hibakusha certificates despite their exposure to black rain.

The plaintiffs said they believe this is the first group lawsuit demanding recognition as victims of the radioactive black rain that fell shortly after the atomic bombing of the city on Aug. 6, 1945.

The central government in 1976 officially recognized atomic bomb survivors who were exposed to black rain in an area near ground zero. The decision was based on 1953 findings by the Hiroshima local observatory, which concluded that there was "heavy" precipitation of radioactive black rain in that area. Survivors in this area have been given free health checkups. If they develop cancer or cirrhosis, they can receive financial assistance for treatment as certified hibakusha.

But those exposed to black rain in other areas are not eligible for the relief measures. The Hiroshima prefectural and municipal governments have not issued certificates to these people in line with the central government's designation.

The plaintiffs said the central government's judgment was "extremely unfair."

"Some of us have suffered cancer and other illnesses and have been worried about our health over the years due to our exposure to black rain," one of the plaintiffs said.

After the suit was filed, Hiroshima Mayor Kazumi Matsui and Hiroshima Governor Hidehiko Yuzaki released statements that said they were taking seriously the fact that victims have resorted to legal action to seek relief measures.

The municipal and prefectural governments, they said, had no choice but to reject the plaintiffs' requests because the central government has not expanded the recognized area of heavy black rain.

The local governments have asked the central government to widen the recognized area for relief sixfold based on their study conducted in fiscal 2008.

But the central government declined that request in 2012, citing a health ministry panel report that concluded the proposed expansion lacked scientific grounds.

A-bomb survivors file suit demanding 'black rain' area be expanded

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151104p2a00m0na020000c.html>

HIROSHIMA -- A group of 64 Hiroshima atomic bombing survivors have filed a suit demanding local governments expand areas covered by free checkups for people exposed to radioactive "black rain" after the bombing.

The plaintiffs -- all residents of Hiroshima Prefecture -- are currently not receiving assistance under the Atomic Bomb Survivors' Assistance Law as they were outside the black rain area recognized by the government. They had earlier applied to the Hiroshima prefectural and municipal governments for A-bomb survivors' certificates, but their requests were rejected.

The group filed the suit with the Hiroshima District Court on Nov. 4, demanding the Hiroshima prefectural and municipal governments issue A-bomb survivors' certificates to them. While the Hiroshima Municipal Government is demanding the black rain area recognized under the assistance law be expanded, the national government has been lukewarm to the idea. Through the lawsuit, the plaintiffs are seeking to have the government review the system for recognizing A-bomb survivors and expand the designated black rain area.

According to the complaint, the plaintiffs -- who were 5 months to 20 years old at the time of the Aug. 6, 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima by U.S. forces -- currently suffer from cancer, anemia, hypothyroidism and other symptoms due to their exposure to the radioactive black rain, which hit the city shortly after the bombing.

In March this year, the plaintiffs started applying for A-bomb survivors' certificates and another type of certificate that could be converted into the first type once they develop certain diseases with the Hiroshima prefectural and municipal governments, claiming that they were "under circumstances susceptible to radiation from the atomic bombing" and were therefore eligible for the certificates. Their requests, however, were turned down.

In the suit filed with the Hiroshima District Court, the plaintiffs are demanding the Hiroshima prefectural and municipal governments nullify their decisions to turn down their applications for those certificates. However, because the local governments' decisions were based on current laws and ordinances, the plaintiffs are also contesting the relevance of the national government's relief measures for A-bomb survivors.

In 2010, the Hiroshima prefectural and municipal governments asked the national government to expand the recognized black rain area by six times the current size after conducting an independent survey on A-bomb survivors. However, the national government concluded in 2012 that it would not expand the recognized area on the grounds that an expert panel to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare decided that there were "no scientific grounds" in the survey results.

Masaaki Takano, 77, head of the plaintiffs' group and chairman of an association of Hiroshima Prefecture black rain victims' groups, said, "The national government failed to recognize our longtime pleas and the prefectural and municipal governments' requests to expand the recognized area. We have no choice but to bring the case to court."

In comments released after the filing of the suit, Hiroshima Mayor Kazumi Matsui and Hiroshima Gov. Hidehiko Yuzaki said they understood that people who were not recognized by the law as A-bomb survivors felt compelled to opt for seeking legal judgment. In the meantime, they also said that they had no choice but to reject survivors' applications based on the current laws and government decrees, adding that they would respond to the matter properly after consulting with the national government.

Fukushima at Pugwash Conference (2)

November 4, 2015

Pugwash Conference discusses risk of peaceful use of nuclear energy

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151104p2a00m0na010000c.html>

NAGASAKI -- A special session focusing on the risk of peaceful use of atomic energy was held here as part of the 61st Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs on Nov. 3, where participants discussed the Fukushima nuclear disaster and the role of scientists.

Kiyoshi Kurokawa, former chairman of the National Diet of Japan Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission, said about the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co., "The accident occurred against the backdrop of closed and non-transparent bureaucratic and corporate culture, among other factors."

In order to prevent a recurrence of such a disaster, "**We must think about nuclear energy as responsible citizens, not as individuals belonging to organizations**," he said.

In a lecture delivered during the conference, Osamu Shimomura, a 2008 Nobel Prize in Chemistry laureate, recounted his experience of the Aug. 9, 1945 atomic bombing of Nagasaki and said, "Everything derives from wars. I hope that we can live in a world without wars or nuclear weapons."

Time for "honorable retreat" from Tokyo Olympics

November 4, 2015

Let's call the whole thing off: The former Japanese ambassador to Switzerland, Mitsuhei Murata, recently suggested that Japan should stage an 'honorable retreat' from hosting the 2020 Olympics due to the unpredictable situation at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. | KYODO

Voices | HOTLINE TO NAGATACHO

Time has come for an 'honorable retreat' from Tokyo 2020 over Fukushima

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2015/11/04/voices/time-come-honorable-retreat-tokyo-2020-fukushima/>

Dear Olympics minister Toshiaki Endo,

Let me begin this message by offering you my sincerest condolences. Condolences for what? For the death of the belief that a trouble-free 2020 Tokyo Olympics would serve to showcase Japan's economic revival.

Up to this point, the exact opposite has been the case, due to the scrapping of plans for a very expensive new National Stadium, the scuttling of the Olympic logo amid charges of plagiarism and newspaper headlines alleging, for example, that "Japan's Olympics fiascoes point to outmoded, opaque decision-

making.” Even more recently, Japan sports minister Hakubun Shimomura offered to resign over the Olympic stadium row.

Among these developments, the charge alleging “outmoded, opaque decision-making” is perhaps the most troubling of all, because it suggests that both of the major setbacks the 2020 Olympics has encountered are systemic in nature, not merely one-off phenomena. If correct, this indicates that similar setbacks are likely to occur in the future. But how many setbacks can the 2020 Olympics endure?

At this point it may be apt to recall the warning of 13th-century Zen master Dogen: “If there is the slightest difference in the beginning, the result will be a distance greater than heaven is from Earth.”

One lesson to be learned from Dogen’s words is that in order to understand the mess you are in now, you should reflect on how you got into it in the first place. When this is done, the “beginning” becomes clear, i.e., Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s 2013 statement to the International Olympic Committee that the situation at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant was “under control.” The prime minister went on to tell the Diet, “The effect of radioactive substances in the nearby waters is blocked within 0.3 sq. km of the plant’s harbor.”

One needs only to look at recent stories describing the torrential downpours in the Fukushima area to know that this claim, if it were ever true, is clearly no longer valid. Even Tepco stated: “On Sept. 9 and 11, due to typhoon No. 18 (Etau), heavy rain caused Fukushima No. 1 drainage rainwater to overflow to the sea.” This is not to mention the high probability that relatively decontaminated areas have been contaminated once again by the heavy rains carrying radioactive particles lodged in the nearby mountains down onto the plains. Nor does it take into account that no one knows the location or condition of the melted fuel in reactors 1, 2 and 3.

Unfortunately, Zen master Dogen didn’t explain what to do when you find yourself in a spot where heaven is already far removed from Earth — or the truth, in this instance. Fortunately, the former Japanese ambassador to Switzerland, Mitsuhei Murata, recently proposed an eminently reasonable solution. It is time, he says, for Japan to stage an “honorable retreat” from hosting the 2020 Olympics while there is still time to select and prepare an alternative site.

In an article in the September issue of *Gekkan Nippon*, Murata buttressed his proposal by pointing out another misstatement in Abe’s IOC testimony, namely, “(Fukushima) has never done and will never do any damage to Tokyo.” In response, Murata pointed to a number of incidents showing that Tokyo was affected by Fukushima radioactive fallout, including the discovery on March 23, 2011, that water from the purification plant in the Kanemachi district of Tokyo contained more than 200 becquerels per liter of radioactive iodine, double the recommended limit for young infants stipulated in the Food Sanitation Act. Murata’s major concern, however, was not about the past but the present and future. He noted the danger still posed by large numbers of spent fuel rods suspended in spent fuel pools in reactors 1, 2 and 3. Unlike the spent fuel rods in reactor building 4 successfully removed by the end of 2014, the remaining rods can’t be removed from the damaged reactor buildings due to the high levels of radioactivity surrounding these reactors, all three of which suffered meltdowns.

Murata’s gravest concern is a number of troubling indications of recurring criticality in one or more of the reactors at Fukushima No. 1. For example, he notes that in December 2014, both radioactive iodine-131 and tellurium-132 were reported as having been detected in Takasaki city, Gunma Prefecture. Given the short half-lives of these radioactive particles, their presence could not be the result of the original meltdowns at Fukushima.

Murata is not opposed to the Tokyo Olympic Games per se, but finds them a major distraction to what needs to be done immediately — namely, gathering the best minds and expertise from around the world and, with the full support of the Japanese government, doing everything humanly possible to bring

Fukushima No. 1 truly “under control.” This will help to ensure the Pacific Ocean is no longer used as an open sewer for Fukushima-produced radiation, and also address the ongoing pain and distress of the residents of Fukushima Prefecture and beyond.

As Murata noted in the conclusion of his article, “Heaven and Earth will not long countenance immoral conduct.” Recognizing this, Minister Endo, will you join the call for an “honorable retreat”?

BRIAN VICTORIA

Kyoto

MHS closer to investing in Areva

November 6, 2015

Source : Bloomberg

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-11-06/mitsubishi-heavy-steps-closer-to-investment-in-france-s-areva>

Mitsubishi Heavy Steps Closer to Investment in France's Areva

Masumi Suga

November 6, 2015 — 10:21 AM CET

- Couches proposal in terms of wider Franco-Japan collaboration
- Two nuclear companies have relationship going back to 2006

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. moved closer to investing in Areva SA's reactor unit after it said it has begun examining a “concrete proposal” to take a minority stake, a step that would deepen ties between Japan and France in the generation of nuclear energy.

Japan's sole producer of pressurized water reactors said Friday that in coming weeks it will consider the conditions for making an offer for Areva NP, including “ownership ratios,” and will also “work up a proposal of Japan-France collaborative measures” around the safety and reliability of nuclear power plants.

The Tokyo-based company's statement comes a month after French Prime Minister Manuel Valls sought Japanese investment in the Areva unit as part of wider collaboration between the two governments over nuclear energy. Any deal would help state-owned Areva shore up its finances after losses caused in part by the retreat from atomic energy in countries including Japan and Germany.

Mitsubishi's investment would deepen a partnership with Areva that began in 2006. The two companies signed a \$22 billion agreement in May 2013 to build a nuclear power plant in Turkey, the first major order for a Japanese firm since Fukushima. It would also signal the importance to Mitsubishi of seeking overseas contracts to replace domestic sales lost by the shuttering of Japan's atomic reactors in the wake of the 2011 disaster.

Nuclear Cooperation

Mitsubishi would join Electricite de France SA in owning Areva NP. EDF, the world's biggest operator of nuclear plants, said in July it plans to take a majority stake in the reactor unit as part of a rescue plan for

the unprofitable Areva. The two state-controlled companies also agreed to set up a venture to manage new projects, including exports, that would be led by EDF.

Mitsubishi first said it was interested in investing in Areva NP June. This week, Areva SA said China National Nuclear Corp. may buy a minority stake in the parent company as part of wider ranging nuclear cooperation.

Mitsubishi is a maker of ships, planes and rockets. Its recent success has been in power systems that now account for 40 percent of revenues. Its thermal business is conducted in partnership with another Japanese conglomerate, Hitachi Ltd.

Japan restarted the first of its 43 operable atomic reactors in August despite public opposition. The government anticipates that nuclear will account for as much as 22 percent of electricity generation by 2030.

Mitsubishi built about half of the nuclear reactors in Japan. For its project, the Turkish government chose a 1,100-megawatt unit, called Atmea, which was jointly designed by Mitsubishi and Areva.

Keeping Monju is like flogging a dead horse

November 5, 2015

NRA's 'new management' call for Monju reactor proves divisive

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/11/05/national/nras-new-management-call-monju-reactor-proves-divisive/#.Vjsv3St1BLM>

by Eric Johnston

Staff Writer

OSAKA – Two decades after a sodium leak and fire shut it down and nearly six decades after it was first conceived, the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, suffered another blow Wednesday when the Nuclear Regulation Authority called for it to be turned over to another operator.

To date, over ¥1 trillion has been poured into Monju — a plant that has never produced commercial electricity. **Despite remaining inactive, safety measures alone cost ¥50 million a day.**

Anti-nuclear activists have hailed the NRA's unusually critical language as an important step toward scrapping the reactor, which was supposed to burn plutonium mixed with uranium.

Fukui politicians who heavily support Monju, including the prefecture's governor and the mayor of Tsuruga, doubt that another operator can be found. They also worry that scrapping it would create local concerns as well as safety issues.

"What does it mean when the NRA says that it can't leave Monju's operations to the (government-backed) Japan Atomic Energy Agency? There aren't any other organizations it can be left to," Tsuruga Mayor Takanobu Fuchikami told reporters after the decision.

Fukui Gov. Issei Nishikawa also criticized the decision, saying such advice was "lacking in kindness."

"Monju's system should be rebuilt as a research facility, as part of Japan's national strategy," Nishikawa said.

Monju, conceived in the 1950s, has faced nothing but technical trouble, domestic and international controversies, and scandals.

Originally slated to go live in 1970, monju did not reach criticality until 1994. It was shut down following a December 1995 leak and fire involving liquid sodium. The incident was at that time Japan's worst nuclear-related accident.

Further delays and scandals meant that by 2005, when Monju was taken over by JAEA after its predecessor organization was disbanded, officials hoped it would be commercially viable by around 2050. But after it was revealed in 2012 that JAEA had failed to inspect nearly 10,000 reactor components in and after 2010, the NRA ordered Monju not to engage in preparatory work until it was satisfied safety had been improved.

Despite the technical difficulties and official denials, **fears Japan might somehow use Monju to produce nuclear weapons were also heightened after statements from senior Japanese officials, including Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.**

In 2002, Abe, while serving as deputy chief Cabinet secretary, said Japan could legally possess nuclear weapons so long as they were small and strategic. That same year, Ichiro Ozawa, then the leader of the Democratic Party of Japan, suggested plutonium at Japanese nuclear power plants made it possible for Japan to produce 3,000 to 4,000 warheads.

Activists are urging the government to give up on the project.

"Monju should be permanently shut down. **If the Japanese government is capable of immediately and permanently scrapping Monju, we can gain some trust that it intends to have a logical, functional basic energy policy,**" said Aileen Mioko Smith, executive director of Kyoto-based anti-nuclear group Green Action. "If it continues the status quo by flogging a horse that has been dead for 20 years, it bodes badly for Japan's energy future."

The Tokyo Olympics "belittle the Fukushima crisis"

Tokyo, 10 October, 2015

The Tokyo Olympic Games and the Fukushima Crisis

Mitsuhei Murata

Executive Director, Japan Society for Global System and Ethics

Former Japanese Ambassador to Switzerland

Preface

The lack of the sense of crisis over Fukushima is in stark contrast to the gravity of the crisis. Fukushima is now undeniably a global security issue. The unstoppable contamination of the Pacific Ocean and the atmosphere is seriously menacing the West Coast of the United States. Japan should make utmost efforts to cope with the Fukushima crisis by retreating from the Tokyo Olympic Games that disseminate the false impression that Fukushima is under control.

Deteriorating situation in Fukushima

Japan is laboring under the consequences of the Accident never before experienced by humanity. Four and half years after the 3.11 disaster, it has been shown that a severe nuclear accident cannot be brought under control by a single state. The Japanese government is bent on restarting nuclear reactors and exporting nuclear technology without clarifying the causes of the accident. The majority of the Japanese severely criticize this move as immoral and irresponsible. It is questioned if Japan is in possession of the governability and the capacity needed to cope with the impending crisis.

Units 1, 2 and 3 remain inaccessible because of lethal levels of radiation surrounding the buildings. Their containment vessels need a constant flow of nitrogen to maintain low levels of oxygen in order to prevent hydrogen explosions.

If the molten nuclear fuel rods are exposed through cracks to the atmosphere due to a mega earthquake or the liquidization of the site that causes the collapse or the inclination of a nuclear reactor, Japan's landmass would become uninhabitable to a large extent. The problem of workers on the site is very serious. The average number of daily workers is now more than 7.000. This requires numerically more than 2.5 million workers a year. Decommissioning of the reactors on the site will take decades. It makes one shudder.

The restart has taken place without clarifying where the responsibility lies for another accident and without establishing truly reliable systems for evacuating residents.

The whole of Japan is threatened by the worsening situation emanating from the molten fuel rods, suspected to be widely disseminating neutron and tritium radiation. Limitless steam observed at the site evokes the possibility of re-criticality at the site. The undeniable necessity for international verification of the suspected re-criticality at the site should bring about the indispensable international cooperation to cope effectively with the Accident.

The ongoing radioactive contamination of the sea with no prospect for a solution is dishonoring Japan, being criticized as harming the global environment. In spite of all this, attempts are shamefully being made to hide Fukushima. The Tokyo Olympic Games 2020 was decided with the false assurance that Fukushima had been brought under control.

The United States is menaced by the spreading contamination

Recently, a serious typhoon hit eastern Japan creating flooding that has not occurred for at least 50 years. You can imagine the extraordinary amount of radioactive cesium, strontium, and other isotopes spread hundreds of miles from the nuclear catastrophe site yet to be cleaned up and now displaced by the flood into newly contaminated villages.

The consequences of the radioactive contamination of the Pacific Ocean from Japan to the West Coast of the United States are drawing increased attention. Some experts now estimate that the wave of radiation from Fukushima will be 10-times bigger than all of the radiation from the entire world's nuclear tests throughout history combined. There are reports stating that dangerous radiation levels have been detected in snows found in Texas, Colorado and Missouri, warning that the US, indeed, is going to face the severest consequences of the ongoing historic, and seemingly unstoppable, nuclear disaster.

The daily increasing contaminated water has been put in nearly 1000 hastily fabricated and often leaking storage tanks. Its total volume surpasses more than 600,000 tons and approaches the limitations possibly to end by being totally released into the sea.

The protection of the health of the residents of the US West Coast will soon become a central political issue for the Obama Administration. It cannot but awaken the whole world to the uncontrollable and spreading consequences of the Fukushima Accident.

The Tokyo Olympic Games belittle the Fukushima crisis

It is undeniable that the Tokyo Olympic Games constitute serious impediments for coping with the consequences of the March 11 Disaster by raising the prices of construction materials and aggravating the serious labor shortage in the region.

My interview article was published in the magazine "Monthly Japan" (September). It is entitled "An honorable retreat from the Tokyo Olympic Games" and is given a central place. Reactions are noteworthy and expanding.

In my recent message addressed to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, I suggested to him to cancel the Tokyo Olympic Games, announcing at the same time the candidature for 2028 or 2032 games.

The estimation of the total cost, 2 trillion yen according to the Organizing Committee, has shocked the public. More than 50 times less funding (34.5 billion yen) has been spent for coping with the contaminated water problem at Fukushima Daiichi!

The Tokyo Olympic Games seems to be being utilized to divert attention from Fukushima and to give the impression to the world that Fukushima no longer poses a threat. Shrewd observers point out that there is 'the front and the back' relationship between the Tokyo Olympic Games and nuclear reactors. The two are interrelated. The setback of the one will mean that of the other.

The initial commitments of the Tokyo Olympic Games have now been all broken. The original plan of the National Stadium has been cancelled. The emblem of the Tokyo Olympic Games, suspected of plagiarism, has been abandoned. The editorial of the Asahi News Paper dated 25 September 2015 expresses its amazement at the irresponsibility and the carelessness of the Organizing Committee. The IOC could disqualify Tokyo. Japan is now obliged to choose between an honorable retreat and a shameful disqualification. The future of the Olympic Games is at stake. It is as a believer in the

spirit of the Olympic Games and the Olympic Movement that I am pleading for an honorable retreat, and this, in order for Japan to consecrate maximum efforts to control the Fukushima crisis.

**see also these two articles from the Asahi Shimbun:
EDITORIAL: 2020 Tokyo Olympic organizing committee needs major
reorganization**

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201510050019>

October 05, 2015

Following a fresh start to design the new National Stadium, the effort to develop a new logo for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics has also been launched.

As a new team to carry out the mission, the Tokyo Games organizing committee has set up the Tokyo 2020 Emblems Selection Committee comprising figures in the sports and academic communities as well as art experts.

With an eye to announcing the official Olympic logo next spring, the new panel will decide by mid-October the requirements for accepting applications such as ages and qualifications along with the screening method.

As it established the emblem selection panel, the Tokyo Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games published the results of its postmortem on the logo debacle. At the request of designer Kenjiro Sano, the organizing committee decided on Sept. 1 against using his emblem design amid accusations of plagiarism.

Toshiro Muto, director general and chief executive officer of the organizing committee, and his two deputies have decided to voluntarily return part of their pay to take responsibility for flawed operations and supervision.

This is a review of the logo selection process made internally, not by independent outsiders. The findings of the inquiry nevertheless highlight the organizing committee's outrageous sloppiness and irresponsibility.

Unless the committee, which clearly lacks transparency, is transformed into a much improved organization, there remain concerns that similar problems will turn up again.

The report on the investigation fully acknowledges that the selection process was seriously flawed in all aspects, including the requirements for applications for the emblem competition, the selection of the members of the screening panel, the screening method and adjustments made to the original design.

At the beginning, the report argues that basic concepts for the emblem, such as its principal message, were not worked out sufficiently, with no clear idea given about what kind of emblem was suitable for the 2020 event.

Since the most basic ideas about the logo design were not thought out well, it was probably inevitable that the emblem thus selected would have to be scrapped.

This report on the internal probe into the selection process, however, is far from satisfactory.

The original emblem design was modified twice in response to requests by some senior officials of the organizing committee. But the report offers no detailed explanation about how that occurred.

It has yet to be made clear what kind of closed-door discussions were behind the modifications to the design, which had been picked through a public selection process based on an international competition. At a meeting of the organizing committee's councilors where the results of the review were reported, there were no references to the responsibility of Yoshiro Mori, the president, and other top committee officers for the emblem fiasco.

The fact that the committee is eschewing the crucial debate over who should be held accountable for the logo debacle--and the stadium snafu for that matter--raises serious doubts about whether it is a healthy organization.

The newly created emblem committee stresses its intention to ensure that the selection will be made through an open process.

"We will try to figure out an approach that gets many people involved in both the application and selection phases," said Ryohei Miyata, president of the Tokyo University of the Arts, who serves as chairman of the panel.

No matter how the selection committee is revamped, however, it is impossible to win public support for the selection process without a fundamental reform of the organizing committee itself, which supervises the project.

There is still a clear need for an exhaustive third-party investigation into what occurred. The committee should first make clear who are responsible for the blunder and then consider seriously its own reorganization to avoid making the same mistake.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Oct. 4

Sports minister, blamed for Olympic debacle, to remain in Cabinet until reshuffle

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201509250081

September 25, 2015

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Sports minister Hakubun Shimomura took a pay cut for the fiasco over the new National Stadium for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and will be replaced when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe reshuffles the Cabinet.

Shimomura said at a news conference on Sept. 25 that he called Abe the previous evening to express his intention to step down.

However, Abe, an ideological soul mate of the conservative politician, asked Shimomura to remain at the post until the Cabinet reshuffle expected in early October. Shimomura said he agreed to that proposal.

Shimomura said he decided to resign hours after a third-party committee released a report on Sept. 24 about the confusion over the construction of the new National Stadium, the main venue of the 2020 Summer Games in Tokyo. The initial design was scrapped amid public outrage after the expected construction costs ballooned to more than 250 billion yen (\$2.1 billion) from an initially envisaged 130 billion yen.

The report named Shimomura as one of those most responsible for the failed plan, saying he "could not create an appropriate organizational structure" to oversee the planning and construction of the stadium. Shimomura said he will return about 900,000 yen to central government coffers, a figure including six months' salary as minister of education, culture, sports, science and technology.

"Although there was no illegal act on my part, I felt I bore political responsibility for not being able to stand in the forefront of a national movement to build up momentum (for the Olympics)," Shimomura said at the Sept. 25 news conference. "I made the decision with the release of the report."

Other top officials will also return part of their pay.

Shinichi Yamanaka, who stepped down on Aug. 4 as vice education minister, will return 10 percent of two months' salary, while the same will be done by Ichiro Kono, the president of the Japan Sport Council, which is in charge of the project to build the stadium.

Kono will resign as president on Sept. 30 and be replaced by Kazumi Ohigashi, a former J.League chairman.

Kono was also singled out by the sports ministry's third-party committee for failing to fulfill his responsibility of overseeing such a difficult and complicated project as building a new National Stadium. The report also criticized what it called a "top-heavy" decision-making process symbolized by an advisory panel to Kono that consisted of such individuals as former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, representatives of various sports organizations and heavyweights in the cultural sector.

The report said the panel transformed from a simple advisory panel to effectively the ultimate decision-making organ in the process behind the construction of the stadium.

(This article was compiled from reports by Atsushi Akutsu and Akio Harada.)

Nuclear nations cling to their A-bombs

November 6, 2015

Editorial: Nuclear powers cling to their A-bombs, letting disarmament efforts wilt

O <http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20151106p2a00m0na007000c.html>

On Nov. 2, the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, dedicated to disarmament issues, voted on a Japan-backed draft resolution on "united action with renewed determination towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons." Especially for the only nation ever to be attacked with nuclear arms, the result was not a truly happy one.

The vote was 156 nations in favor, making 2015 the 22nd year in a row the resolution has been adopted -- a welcome development to be sure. This year, however, the United States, Britain and France -- which had all backed the draft last year -- abstained. Meanwhile, two countries that had abstained last year -- China and Russia -- voted against the resolution this year.

Until 2015, the United States had voted in favor of the resolution every year since Barack Obama took over as president in 2009. This year's version, however, contains some new wording, such as expressing "deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons," and encouraging "every effort to raise awareness of the humanitarian impact of the use of nuclear weapons, including through, among others, visits by leaders, youth and others, to the cities devastated by the use of nuclear weapons." The draft also contained the term "hibakusha" (atomic bombing survivors) in the Latin alphabet.

The phrase "humanitarian consequences" appears to have sparked the greatest alarm among all the new additions. The U.S., Britain, France, China and Russia are all permitted to possess nuclear arms under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which calls on all of them to make sincere efforts at disarmament. In recent years, however, they have been going in the opposite direction, expanding and modernizing their atomic arsenals.

That being the case, this document decrying the inhumanity of nuclear arms, and the strengthening movement for a new international legal framework including a treaty to supersede the NPT, has the U.S. and Britain on guard. Meanwhile, though Japan is calling for nuclear arms reductions under the NPT framework, does it in fact favor a new treaty banning the weapons outright? The U.S., Britain and other atomic powers have likely developed concern about that possibility as well.

The average age of the atomic bombing survivors is now over 80, and it has been 70 years since the bombs were dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The Japanese government submits the nuclear weapons abolition resolution every year, and it's no surprise that Japan included a few new phrases in the 2015 resolution. **The problem is really the obstinacy of the nuclear powers, those countries clinging to their A-bombs as they make what look like half-hearted efforts at fulfilling their nuclear disarmament duties.**

It is also inappropriate to dredge up historical issues in this discussion. In opposing the resolution, China referenced Japan's wartime aggression, and said that Japan was attempting to use the resolution provision on visiting Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a tool to twist history. At the NPT conference in April and May this year, too, China made similar claims against Japan. But then nuclear disarmament is an issue concerning the entire world, and the future of humanity itself. In this context, using Japan's past misdeeds as ammunition against it in the present is simply meaningless.

Now that the resolution has been approved by the First Committee, it will go to a General Assembly vote in December. No country is likely to change their vote in the meantime, but **we would very much like to see the ostensibly anti-nuclear Obama administration take a proactive stance on the resolution and support it.** The U.S. must be aware of the slow hollowing out of the NPT. If things keep progressing as they are, North Korea will become a nuclear power and the entire anti-proliferation effort will be set adrift. The U.S. should have a greater sense of urgency on this problem.

Meanwhile, even as Japan has sponsored the nuclear abolition resolution, it has taken a far more cautious attitude to a related proposal on a nuclear abolition treaty, maintaining its status as a bridge between the nuclear and non-nuclear powers. As the gap in opinion on either side of that bridge begins to widen, however, Japan will eventually be forced to change its approach. **First of all, it must re-evaluate its own position as mediator, and then be a truly proactive intermediary in the pursuit of nuclear disarmament.**

The Fukushima crisis even "destroyed" elections

November 10, 2015

Namie mayoral candidate seeks votes of Fukushima evacuees in Tokyo's Shibuya

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201511100060>

By CHIKAKO KAWAHARA/ Staff Writer

In front of bustling Shibuya Station in Tokyo, passers-by paid little attention to a candidate stating his campaign platform.

It's likely that most wouldn't have been interested anyway in the issues in the mayoral election in far-off Namie, Fukushima Prefecture.

But due to the nuclear accident following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, Namie residents have evacuated far and wide.

"The accident even destroyed the election, which forms the basis of democracy," the candidate said on Nov. 9 in his stump speech in the nation's capital.

After the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, Namie, located north of the crippled plant, was entirely evacuated with residents spreading out across Japan. About 30 percent of them moved to 45 prefectures outside Fukushima Prefecture.

The candidate left Nihonmatsu, Fukushima Prefecture, where he evacuated to, early in the morning on Nov. 9 and drove to Tokyo in his election campaign car. About 20 Namie residents gathered near the station to listen to his campaign message and get an update on the current situation in their hometown. A 49-year-old female part-time worker who evacuated to Saitama from Namie was among his sparse audience.

"I am sad that no one stops to hear his speech," she said, adding that she came here instead of her parents, who are in their 80s.

The candidates for the Namie mayoral election were announced on Nov. 5. The three candidates who are running in the poll, which will be held Nov. 15, are Keizo Oguro, the 59-year-old former chairman of the Namie town assembly; Bunsei Watanabe, the 65-year-old former vice mayor of Namie; and Tamotsu Baba, the 66-year-old incumbent Namie mayor.

Oguro and Watanabe are running for mayor for the first time while Baba is seeking a third term. None of the candidates are affiliated with any party. The election results will be announced on the same day.

Registered voters living outside Fukushima Prefecture can obtain a ballot through the mail and cast their vote at the election commission offices in the municipalities where they evacuated to.

M. Nasu: "...democracy and peace are like air"

November 11, 2015

Hibakusha: Author ends 'hilarious trio' series due to increasingly oppressive political climate

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/features/news/20151111p2a00m0na024000c.html>

The no-war policy that has long supported post-World War II Japan is being undermined by newly railroaded security legislation that would allow the overseas dispatch of Japan Self-Defense Forces. Additionally, Japan abstained from a Nov. 5 United Nations General Assembly First Committee vote on a draft resolution that would establish a working group to consider a worldwide nuclear weapons ban treaty.

Amid such circumstances, the 2015 autumn series of "Hibakusha" will kick off with a children's book author who is ending his long-running series, "Zukkoke sannin gumi" (Go, Hilarious Trio!) in response to the recent political and social climate.

Since the first installment of "Go, Hilarious Trio!" featuring 6th-grade boys was published in 1978, the series has sold over 25 million copies, and is the longest-selling children's literature series in the country. The installment set to come out in December, however, will be its last.

At his home in the Yamaguchi Prefecture city of Hofu in late October, author Masamoto Nasu raised his voice. "The security-related legislation is unconstitutional, and must be repealed."

Having experienced the atomic bombing of Hiroshima 3 kilometers away from ground zero as a 3-year-old, and having grown up on democracy-oriented education adopted after the war, Nasu had been vocal about his opposition to the government-backed security legislation, characterizing it as "evil laws that signal a massive shift in our 70-year, post-war history."

Since 2005, the series has featured the three boys as middle-aged men taking on real-life problems that forty-somethings commonly face, such as child rearing and care for aging parents. Their close friendship has remained unchanged over the years, and helps them overcome obstacles.



Children's book author Masamoto Nasu holds up a sample cover of his final installment of the "Go, Hilarious Trio!" series at his home in Hofu, Yamaguchi Prefecture, on Oct. 27, 2015. Nasu is also an anti-nuclear power activist, and has written stories about the Battle of Okinawa and "Manmo-Kaitaku-Seishonen-Giyugun" (Emigration of Youth Troops to Manchuria-Mongolia Areas). (Mainichi)

Children's book author Masamoto Nasu holds up a sample cover of his final installment of the "Go, Hilarious Trio!" series at his home in Hofu, Yamaguchi Prefecture, on Oct. 27, 2015. Nasu is also an anti-nuclear power activist, and has written stories about the Battle of Okinawa and "Manmo-Kaitaku-Seishonen-Giyugun" (Emigration of Youth Troops to Manchuria-Mongolia Areas). (Mainichi)

Click to enlarge

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/features/news/20151111p2a00m0na024000c.html>

While Nasu was working on the latest installment, however, the security legislation was passed in the Diet. As a witness to a changing Japan, Nasu wrote the following afterword:

"The trio was a product of peace and democracy. The reason they go around freely having so much fun was because they lived in a peaceful and democratic Japan. It looks like times are going to change for the worse now. I don't want to portray the trio living in a world like that."

When he was a child, Nasu learned about the Constitution from his father, Shigeyoshi, who passed away in 1978 at the age of 79. Upon Japan's surrender in 1945, Shigeyoshi had quit his job as a teacher and began working for a company. One day, a typically patriarchal Shigeyoshi held a family meeting and declared, "We're entering an age of 'democracy.' If you have anything to say to me, you say it."

In elementary school, all decisions were made through classroom discussions. Nasu recalls that upon hearing that Japan was never going to war again, he thought, "Japan's going to become a great country."

"When I was going through my father's things (after he passed away), I discovered a copy of the Constitution that was falling apart. My father had underlined a lot of passages in red."

Nasu says he wanted to write stories in which children themselves figure out how to solve their problems. The lives led by the trio in his series were based on his own. "We lived through the best era of democracy," Nasu says. The three boys-turned-men were a physical manifestation of that.

However, what he believed long ago would "become a great country" is now turning into a very oppressive country for Nasu. While there was strong public opposition to the security legislation that was passed, public opinion polls show that around one-third of the Japanese public remain uninterested. That scares Nasu. "For many who grew up in the post-war era, democracy and peace are like air."

This is precisely why Nasu is determined to take the next step. The "Go, Hilarious Trio!" series may end, but Nasu has no intention of putting down his pen. He wants younger generations to think about war and peace as their own problems through the war that he will portray in his new stories. That, he believes, is his responsibility as a generation that has declared it would never go to war again.

November 11, 2015 (Mainichi Japan)

"Let's continue our opposition"



Koichi Kawano takes part in a sit-in in Nagasaki on Nov. 9, 2015. The sit-ins are

held monthly in memory of the Aug. 9, 1945 atomic bombing of the city. (Mainichi)

November 12, 2015

Hibakusha: Continuing calls for abolition of Japan's new security laws

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/features/news/20151112p2a00m0na014000c.html>

NAGASAKI -- On the late autumn day of Nov. 9, residents gathered in front of the Peace Statue at Nagasaki Peace Park. The residents stage sit-ins on the ninth of every month in memory of the devastating atomic bombing of Nagasaki on Aug. 9, 1945. Within the ring of residents sat 75-year-old Koichi Kawano, chairman of the Japan Congress against A- and H-Bombs.

With a stern expression, Kawano spoke out against security-related legislation that was recently railroaded into law.

"Let's continue our opposition," Kawano said, clutching a microphone. "We have to raise our voices more." Less than two months after the legislation was passed, topics of conversation and interest in society are turning toward economic policies and other issues. Kawano seemed almost desperate.

Kawano was hit by the atomic bombing of Nagasaki when he was 5 years old. At the time he was on a street near his home 3.1 kilometers from the hypocenter. He spotted a U.S. B-29 bomber flying overhead and right afterwards, when the blast of the bomb hit, it hurled him 10 meters.

Fortunately he was not injured, and the other members of his family were safe. In the bomb shelter, Kawano's grandparents forbade the children from going outside, telling them that there were many people burned so badly one couldn't tell if they were men or women. On a mountainside that evening, as the family headed to a bigger bomb shelter, Kawano saw the city burning red.

Later, when Kawano was in his second year of elementary school, his teacher entered the classroom one day with a happy expression on her face.

"Listen, everybody, Japan has become a country that doesn't wage war," she said. The teacher earnestly taught the students the significance of Japan's new Constitution, which came into effect in May 1947. She focused especially on war-renouncing Article 9.

At the time there wasn't enough food, and there were many war orphans. But when he thought, "So we're going to have peace from now on," Kawano was filled with hope. This marked his encounter with Japan's pacifist Constitution.

After graduating from high school, Kawano began working for the Nagasaki Prefectural Government, and devoted himself to labor union activities. Both as an atomic bomb survivor, or hibakusha, and as chairman of the Japan Congress against A- and H-Bombs, Kawano spoke out against war and nuclear weapons. The day after Japan's security-related legislation was rammed through a special committee of the House of Councillors on Sept. 17, Kawano held a news conference in Nagasaki.

"Do politicians know just how many people suffered in the atomic bombings? This is the worst stain in the history of Constitutional politics," he said.

Being one of the younger hibakusha, Kawano plans to take part in demonstrations and gatherings to call for abolishment of the security legislation. In Nagasaki, young people launched a group opposing the security legislation, and they continue to hold regular demonstrations.

Seeing demonstrators calling out "No more Hiroshimas, no more Nakasakis," Kawano feels he can depend on them.

"Fortunately, the Constitution has not been changed. We must not give up," he said. He repeated his words a second time, and then a third, as if he were speaking to himself. (By Asuka Ohira, Nagasaki Bureau; photo by Toyokazu Tsumura)

(This is the second part of a six-part series.)

Expensive, underused nuclear fuel carrier

November 12, 2015

Nuclear fuel carrier criticized at review session for wasteful gov't projects

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151112p2a00m0na008000c.html>

The government's Headquarters for the Promotion of Administrative Reform held an open review session on Nov. 11 to check whether there is any wasteful spending in government-sponsored projects.

As for projects related to the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA), which operates the trouble-plagued Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor, many participants in the review session criticized the fact that **1.2 billion yen has been spent each year mainly to maintain a nuclear fuel carrier which has rarely been used.** Some of the participants urged the government to present "options that include termination or review (of the project) in the future."

In connection with the open verification session on budgets related to the nuclear fuel cycle project, large parts of the JAEA's materials on bids and contracts are undisclosed. Taro Kono, state minister in charge of administrative reform, lashed out at the situation, saying, "We cannot spend money on things we cannot explain to the public."

The "Kaiei Maru" spent nuclear fuel carrier was built in fiscal 2006 to transport nuclear material such as spent fuel generated at the "Fugen" prototype nuclear test reactor in Fukui Prefecture, which is being dismantled after its shutdown in 2003. A cumulative total of 10 billion yen has been spent to develop and maintain the ship, but the vessel has been used to transport nuclear fuel only four times in the past. The ship has not been used at all since November 2009. Many experts participating in the review session said something like "We don't understand why they need it."

A project related to the Oma Nuclear Power Plant in the Aomori Prefecture town of Oma also came under fire. The Electric Power Development Co., commonly known as J-Power, has applied for funds for the project that is supposed to be subsidized by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. The reactor at the power station would be the world's first full-MOX commercial reactor using uranium-plutonium mixed oxide fuel in the reactor cores. The industry ministry has granted a total of 29 billion yen in subsidies to J-Power for technological development since fiscal 1996. But the budget execution rate has been 0 to 4 percent in the last three fiscal years. An expert urged the government to have J-Power take funds equivalent to the amount of the subsidies from its profits and return them to government coffers, saying, "It should be thoroughly reviewed."

Nonetheless, open verification sessions are not aimed at questioning the pros and cons of national policies. Discussion on whether there is the need for the nuclear fuel cycle project the government has been pursuing under the Basic Energy Plan is not subject to the review session. Therefore, whether the Monju reactor should be kept alive or dismantled was not discussed.

Among other issues discussed at the open verification session was the outlay (5 billion yen) for conducting a "national survey on academic ability and learning" under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Currently, all sixth-grade students at elementary schools and third-grade students at junior high schools are subject to the survey, but some participants said: "Sample surveys should be considered," and "Results of the survey should be released proactively." The administrative project review is different from the budget screening designed to determine whether each project should be scrapped or kept alive. It is a system in which each government ministry or agency checks whether there is any wasteful project on its own and releases the results of its review. **The total of 55 projects reviewed in the latest session included 19 nuclear-related projects that were selected to be subject to the open verification session in line with Kono's intention. But the review results are not binding.** Kono has expressed his intention to negotiate with each Cabinet minister ahead of the compilation of the state budget for fiscal 2016.

Time to scrap Monju's "financial folly"

November 13, 2015

EDITORIAL: Scrap Monju reactor project and use money to develop renewable energies

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201511130034>

The annual public review of policy programs by the government to identify wasteful spending ends on Nov. 13. For three days, the government's administrative reform promotion council has been scouring the budgets of ministries and agencies for savings.

The focus of the budget review this year is the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority recently recommended that the operator of the troubled-plagued experimental reactor, the government-affiliated Japan Atomic Energy Agency, should be replaced.

Certain expenditures related to the Monju project, mainly state subsidies, were examined in the public review. But the council should take this opportunity to scrutinize all aspects of the controversial project instead of evaluating only the subsidies. We are keen to see the panel demonstrate that continuing the project doesn't make sense and the reactor should be decommissioned from the viewpoint of administrative reforms.

It is already clear that the Monju project is a financial folly.

The construction cost, which was originally estimated at 35 billion yen (\$285 million) when the project was in an early planning stage in the 1970s, has ballooned to 1 trillion yen. Although the reactor has been offline for more than 20 years due to a series of accidents and scandals, 20 billion yen is still spent annually, or 50 million yen a day, for maintenance.

The maintenance costs of the reactor under the initial budget for the current fiscal year are almost equivalent to the amount (23.8 billion yen) being shelled out to promote renewable energy projects for local power production and consumption.

The outlays for the Monju project are far larger than the spending on a demonstration project to build a transmission network for wind power generation (10.5 billion yen) or the appropriation to support research for the development of geothermal power sources (8 billion yen).

Following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, Japan widened the scope of its energy policy to make greater efforts to develop and promote alternative power sources, including renewable energy.

Instead of spending a huge amount of taxpayer money to keep Monju alive, the government should use the cash to build a new, cleaner energy future for this nation.

Japan is facing a serious fiscal crunch. The government is drowning in a sea of debt as its welfare spending is surging amid the rapid aging of the nation's population.

The government has no choice but to raise taxes while cutting its expenditures on social security, education and other programs. It cannot afford the luxury of pouring a hefty sum of money into a questionable nuclear reactor with no prospects for practical operation.

The Monju project has survived for so long despite its troubled history because nobody loses money when the reactor is out of operation.

When a reactor operated by an electric utility is shut down because of an accident or a scandal, the company will immediately face a rise in costs that hurts its financial standing.

In contrast, Monju is treated as a research reactor, and the national program gets funded almost automatically.

Both the industry ministry and the science and technology ministry, which are in charge of the nuclear power policy, have a clear interest in supporting the continuation of the Monju project.

If this project is terminated, these ministries will be forced to make a sweeping review of the entire nuclear fuel recycling program and tackle the formidable challenge of disposing of plutonium extracted from spent nuclear fuel.

This year's public budget review is led by Taro Kono, the newly appointed minister in charge of administrative reform who has been a champion of the cause.

We urge Kono to make the decision to scrap the Monju project as a step to press ahead with meaningful administrative reforms.

There is definitely no reason for approving annual spending of 20 billion yen as the cost of postponing this decision.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Nov. 10

Toshiba didn't report massive losses in its nuke business

November 13, 2015

Toshiba's American nuclear unit reports 1.3 billion dollar loss

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151113p2a00m0na004000c.html>

Nuclear power giant Westinghouse Electric Co., an American subsidiary of electronics manufacturer Toshiba Corp., booked a combined impairment loss of 1.3 billion U.S. dollars (about 160 billion yen) in fiscal 2012 and 2013, it's been learned.

The weak performance in the company's nuclear plant construction projects caused Westinghouse to revalue its assets, heightening the uncertainty of the core business of Toshiba following a massive accounting scandal that has hurt the Japanese electronics giant.

In the meantime, Toshiba has not reflected the losses in its consolidated financial reports, which is likely to spark criticism from the market.

When a company's earnings slump in certain business units, it can report the losses by stating the value of its assets in relation to the poorly performing units.

Since the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in March 2011, electric power companies and other businesses have held back on building new nuclear stations. Under such circumstances, Westinghouse was unable to receive orders for nuclear plant construction and has come under pressure to re-evaluate its future earnings. The company reported 900 million U.S. dollars (approximately 110 billion yen) in impairment losses in fiscal 2012 and marked an additional loss of 400 million dollars (about 50 billion yen) the following year.

In both business years, Westinghouse's businesses ended in the red, but **Toshiba did not disclose details of its nuclear unit's financial reports.**

Since Westinghouse is an unlisted company, the fact that Toshiba did not reveal its business reports is legal under the Financial Instruments and Exchange Act. Toshiba has repeatedly stressed that there is no need to make a downward revision in its Westinghouse-related assets in its consolidated financial reports, saying that its businesses related to maintenance and inspection of existing nuclear stations and nuclear fuel projects are doing well. **Toshiba, however, has failed to sufficiently explain why it, as a parent company, has not made downward revisions in its consolidated reports when one of its subsidiaries has reported losses of the equivalent of 160 billion yen.**

As there is no prospect of Toshiba's business expansion in new nuclear plant projects, speculation could arise over the company's need to report massive losses in its nuclear power business.

Restricting citizen's activities in public halls?

November 24, 2015

Editorial: Free exchange of opinions should be guaranteed at public facilities

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/perspectives/news/20151124p2a00m0na020000c.html>

There are moves to limit the use of municipal and other public halls for citizens' activities in relation to the Constitution and nuclear power among other key issues, giving the public an oppressive feeling. Freedom to use such facilities should be guaranteed as much as possible.

The Saitama Municipal Assembly revised an ordinance on the management of a city-owned facility for citizens groups this past October. Following such revisions, the municipal government will terminate its contract with a nonprofit organization (NPO) to manage the conference hall and place the facility under the direct control of the city in spring next year.

The change was sparked by calls by a Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) member of the city assembly. "There are some citizens' organizations that are engaged in political activities. These organizations are given priority in using the hall, raising questions about fairness. The hall should be placed under the city's direct control and standards for managing the facility should be reviewed," the assembly member said.

Specifically, questions were raised over the use of the city-run facility by 14 citizens' organizations that are involved in such activities as those on war-renouncing Article 9 of the Constitution, atomic power policy and the abduction of Japanese nationals by North Korea.

The NPO -- the Saitama NPO Center -- has demanded that the revisions to the ordinance be retracted on the grounds that it would restrict freedom of citizens' activities and that no particular organization has been given priority in using the facility.

The Saitama NPO Center has been commissioned by the municipal government to manage the facility since 2007. Approximately 1,700 registered organizations use the hall for meetings and other purposes. Under the Act on Promotion of Specified Non-profit Activities, political issues are recognized as part of NPOs' activities. The Saitama Municipal Government's ordinance on NPOs has been enforced pursuant to the law. There is no ground for determining that NPOs' activities regarding Article 9 of the Constitution and nuclear power run counter to the ordinance.

Courts have handed down numerous rulings that respect freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, which are guaranteed by the Constitution, to the maximum extent. The Supreme Court has ruled that the managers of halls and other public facilities can refuse to lend such facilities for meetings and other events only in cases where it is clearly predicted that the gatherings would cause danger.

However, apart from the Saitama Municipal Government, **some universities and other institutions are also trying to distance themselves from citizens' activities regarding politics.** Rikkyo University refused to lend a hall in October for a symposium organized by the Association of Scholars Opposed to the Security-related Laws.

The university explained that the symposium is not purely an academic gathering as the reason for its decision. However, some members of Rikkyo University's teaching staff who negotiated with the university said they had been told that "the symposium could have political implications."

According to citizens' organizations across the country, there have been cases in recent years in which the managers of public conference halls expressed a reluctance to lend rooms for rallies on Article 9 of the Constitution and security-related legislation. **If an atmosphere is to be prevalent in which political activities are rejected or unwelcomed, it could restrict citizens' activities.**

It is important to guarantee sites for free debate particularly on themes over which public opinion is split. If the public were to be deprived of such sites, it would obstruct the development of a wholesome civil society.

Credit: Brandalism



In Paris false ads denounce the lies of the sponsors of the COP21 Conference.

For more information on these activists:
<http://www.brandalism.org.uk/>

Not sure what this means

December 2, 2015

Business lobby chief: Fukushima nuclear accident an 'extremely localized event'

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201512020049

By GO KOBAYASHI/ Staff Writer

The crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant is a “localized event,” according to the chairman of Keizai Doyukai (Japan Association of Corporate Executives), one of the nation’s top business organizations.

Chairman Yoshimitsu Kobayashi made the remarks at a regular news conference in Tokyo on Dec. 1 when he was punctuating the dangers of global warming.

“The nuclear plant (accident) was an extremely localized event if seen on a terrestrial globe,” said Kobayashi, who is also chairman of Mitsubishi Chemical Holdings Corp. “While the accident is as

regrettable as anything, it is like fulminant hepatitis in a sense that only a localized area is affected instantaneously.”

Kobayashi also likened carbon dioxide, which is considered the primary greenhouse gas causing global warming, to “chronic diabetes.”

“If the global temperature rises by 5 degree by 2100, the sea level will rise by 80 centimeters or so, and island countries in the southern oceans will not survive as nations,” he said. “CO2 is that dangerous disease.”

Workers are still battling to keep the situation under control at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, which suffered a triple meltdown after it was hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011. About 100,000 Fukushima residents are still living as evacuees.

After the news conference, Kobayashi defended his remarks, saying he meant to send a warning that “global warming could pose dangers as serious as the nuclear accident.”

Keizai Doyukai earlier this year urged the central government to maintain at least a 20-percent dependence on nuclear energy in 2030.

Ratio of energy sources won't have to be revealed

December 4, 2015

Utilities not required to reveal electricity sources under new ministry rules

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201512040071

By SHINYA TAKAGI/ Staff Writer

Power companies will not be required to disclose the ratio of their electricity sources when the liberalization of power sales begins in April, The Asahi Shimbun has learned.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry will not impose the requirement as utilities are cautious about the disclosure.

Consequently, consumers will not know the ratio of electricity sources when they are deciding which company to buy power from.

The ministry plans to solicit feedback on the policy from a panel of experts and the public by year-end before finalizing the guidelines, which are based on the Electric Utility Industry Law.

Under the new guidelines, which take effect early next year, when utilities begin sales promotions ahead of the deregulation, they will not be obligated to provide a ratio of their electricity sources, which include nuclear power and renewable energies.

The guidelines will encourage utilities to voluntarily disclose their ratio of electricity sources, although they will not be required to do so. The guidelines describe this admission and the voluntary disclosure of carbon dioxide emissions as “desirable acts.”

The guidelines do not mention disclosure of the amount of radioactive waste generated.

Power companies that volunteer the information will be required to provide the planned ratio and the actual ratio because electricity generation often cannot be implemented as planned.

Renewable energies that use the feed-in-tariff (FIT) system will be described as, for example, “FIT electricity (solar).”

In European countries such as Britain, Germany and France, where liberalized electricity retailing has already been established, power companies are required to provide the ratio of their electricity sources for the previous year.

In Japan, consumers' groups and other organizations have been demanding that the ministry require utilities to disclose the ratio.

However, electric power companies are wary, arguing that **disclosure would increase costs. It is also believed they fear that consumers will shun utilities that generate electricity through nuclear power or coal-fired thermal power.**

Has survey on evacuees' wishes been used against them?

December 5, 2015

Nuclear evacuees surveyed about living in public housing later became non-eligible

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20151205p2a00m0na013000c.html>

Fukushima Prefecture included more people in surveys for 2013 estimates on demand for new public housing after the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant meltdowns than it ended up allowing into the housing, and the estimates based on those surveys were never publically released, it has been learned.

The estimates were reported in a document obtained by the Mainichi Shimbun. **This document was created in May 2013 by a Tokyo consulting company paid around 30 million yen by the Fukushima Prefectural Government for the work.** The estimates were based on fiscal 2012 surveys by the Reconstruction Agency and the Fukushima Prefectural Government of evacuees from 11 municipalities near the crippled plant.

The estimates were made based on three types of evacuees seeking a place in the housing: people wanting to live there until evacuation orders for their home municipalities were lifted; people wanting to live there after evacuation orders for their home municipalities were lifted but until a livable environment had been established; and people wanting to live in the housing permanently.

The estimated numbers of residences required for the three types of evacuees were between 3,136 and 5,663 for the first group; between 2,743 and 4,172 for the second group; and between 3,366 and 4,837 for the third group. Only the first category, however, matches up with the standards for "**long-term evacuees**" -- the only type of evacuee allowed to apply for the residences. Additionally, two of the 11 municipalities covered by the estimates, the city of Tamura and the town of Naraha, had their evacuation orders lifted in April 2014 and September 2015, respectively, making their residents ineligible for the housing.

The units were first proposed during the Democratic Party of Japan administration, and in September 2012 the Fukushima Prefectural Government announced preparations to build the first 500 residences. At this point, the project was being funded from reconstruction funds, and which evacuees would be eligible for a place had not yet been decided. At the end of that year, however, the Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito took over the government, and at a January 2013 meeting on disaster recovery, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe ordered the creation of a plan to allow evacuees to return home quickly, and to secure homes

for long-term evacuees. **The Act on Special Measures for the Reconstruction and Revitalization of Fukushima was revised in April 2013 to allow special government funding for the new housing, and to restrict eligibility to long-term evacuees.**

The unreleased documents obtained by the Mainichi state explicitly that "under the current system to restrict entry into publically-managed housing to long-term evacuees," others hoping to keep living in the units after their evacuation orders have been lifted "may not be included."

A representative for the Fukushima Prefectural Government said, "It's not good to say that the national government 'toyed with us' by its policy shift, but the survey on evacuees' wishes and the establishment of the new fund (with its eligibility restrictions) happened in parallel." The official added that prefectural staff had to start applying the restrictions "in a hurry" to keep in line with national government policy.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government has announced 4,890 planned public housing units for nuclear disaster evacuees, but even when combined with around 2,800 such residences for tsunami survivors, the number of residences covers only 17 percent of the around 43,700 Fukushima households that remained without a permanent home as of the end of last year.

States secrets law seriously flawed

December 7, 2015

State secrets law still deeply flawed

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2015/12/07/editorials/state-secrets-law-still-deeply-flawed/#.VmVvt78R-ov>

Nearly a year after it entered into force on Dec. 10, 2014, the problems of the state secrets law remain unaddressed, including the opaque aspects of its implementation. The law's biggest flaw is that its definition of information that can be designated as state secrets is so vague and wide-ranging that it could be abused by officials who handle the information. In theory, some types of information can remain classified indefinitely if the government wishes so. The government and the Diet should at the very least make the oversight mechanism effective so that arbitrary classification of state secrets will not take place. They also should discuss creating a system under which citizens and journalists can request that designated secrets be declassified.

As part of the oversight mechanism to prevent misuse of the law, the government has set up a supervisory committee within the Cabinet secretariat, made up of vice minister-level bureaucrats from each ministry and headed by the chief Cabinet secretary. It has also created a position within the Cabinet Office, filled by a senior bureaucrat, to check whether designation of state secrets and their management are properly done. A 20-member section to assist the official has been established.

Although the supervisory committee and the officer are empowered to call on government organizations handling state secrets to submit relevant materials and take corrective steps if necessary, the fact remains that designation of state secrets by government officials is monitored only by fellow bureaucrats. Under government guidelines, 19 ministries and agencies, including the Defense Ministry, the Foreign Ministry, the Cabinet secretariat, the National Security Council, the National Police Agency and the Nuclear

Regulation Authority, may classify information in 55 categories in the areas of defense, diplomacy, counter-intelligence and counterterrorism.

Given the nature of those oversight bodies, it is legitimate to ask whether they can be effective in preventing improper classification and management of secrets. So far, the supervisory committee held meetings only twice, in January and April. Although the supervisory officer is obliged to submit a report to the prime minister once a year, currently there is no prospect that such a report will be delivered anytime soon. It also must be pointed out that the oversight bodies are not empowered to enforce the declassification of secrets even if they determine that they were unjustifiably designated as such.

The protection of officials who report wrongful designations of secrets is also insufficient. Although hotlines have been established under the law for whistleblowers to raise alerts, they are allowed only to summarize the information they think has been inappropriately classified. If their summaries are judged to include crucial or a major part of the classified information, they could be charged with leaking the secrets. Such a system would only discourage officials from revealing wrongful acts.

Each chamber of the Diet has a board of oversight and review of state secrets. As of the end of June, the Defense Ministry and nine other organizations had designated 417 pieces of information as state secrets. The government submitted a report on its designation of state secrets up to the end of 2014 to the Diet panels in June for their reviews, but the boards' power is weak. They can ask the government to present state secrets if necessary, but the government can turn down the request if it determines that doing so would be detrimental to national security. Although the Diet bodies can call for improvements in the operation of the law, such requests have no binding power.

In addition to the flaws of the oversight system, there are other problems that must be addressed.

Although the law requires the government to pay due consideration to the people's right to know and freedom of the press, there remains the possibility that depending on the situation, members of the press or civic groups seeking disclosure of government information could be charged with and punished for "instigating" leaks of state secrets by bureaucrats. People judged to have obtained state secrets through illicit means could face an imprisonment for as long as 10 years. As such, the law clearly has an intimidating effects on journalists and citizens.

Under the law, the government can keep designated state secrets classified for up to 30 years. But that period can be extended to a maximum of 60 years if the Cabinet sees it as necessary from a national security standpoint. Certain types of secrets in seven categories, including information on ordnance and intelligence gathering capabilities, can remain classified even longer.

The United States has a system that enable citizens to request that state secrets be declassified on the strength of the Freedom of Information Act or executive orders of 1995 and 2009. The Interagency Security Classification Appeals Panel, consisting of senior level representatives appointed by six government bodies including the Departments of State, Defense and Justice and the National Archives rules on appeals by citizens whose requests for declassification under the executive orders have been rejected at the agency level. According to the Information Security Oversight Office's report for 2013, the ISCAP acted on a total of 1,509 documents since its inception in 1996 and declassified 409 of them in their entirety and 640 others in part and accepted the declassification decisions of agencies in 460 others. In Japan, the state secret law does not accord to citizens the right to seek the declassification of state secrets. A Freedom of Information Law exists, but it is difficult for citizens to utilize it because a meaningful summary list of information designated as state secrets is not publicly available. If citizens make a disclosure request under the law, the probability is high that the government will reject it on the grounds that the disclosure would damage the nation's security or diplomatic interests. If citizens turn to

the courts to seek the disclosure of information, it would be extremely difficult for them to win because the law does not give courts the authority to review classified documents.

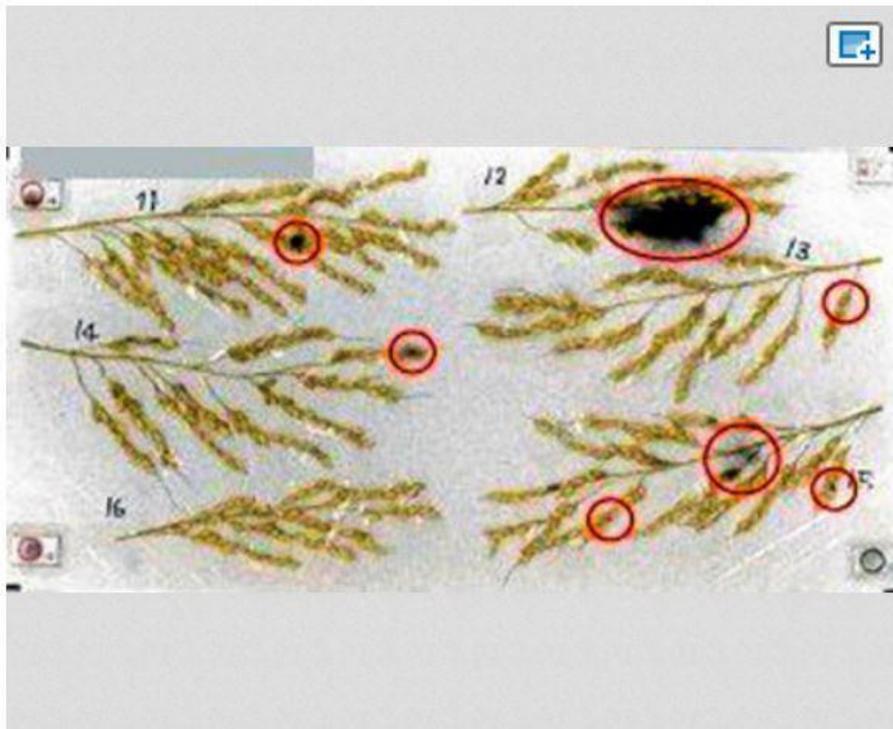
The Diet should either drastically revise the state secrets law to fix these serious flaws, including creating a system allowing citizens to seek the disclosure of classified documents, or abolish the law and begin discussions from scratch on checks and balances concerning the handling of state secrets.

Radioactive rice : Cover-up suspicions?

December 9, 2015

City to investigate NRA's conclusion that radioactive rice unrelated to Fukushima plant work

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201512090084>



The black marks on rice stalks harvested in Minami-Soma show radioactive substances. (Provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries)

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Addressing **cover-up suspicions**, the city assembly here will investigate **how the Nuclear Regulation Authority concluded that work at the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant was not the cause of radioactive contamination of rice paddies.**

The assembly unanimously decided to investigate during a regular session that started on Dec. 2 in response to a petition submitted by a citizens group called “Genpatsu-jiko no Kanzen-baisho o Saseru Minami-Soma no Kai” (Minami-Soma’s group that requires complete compensation for the nuclear accident).

The group doubts the NRA’s assertion that the contamination of rice harvested in the city in 2013 was not related to debris-removal work at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. It has also expressed **outrage that the government has stopped trying to confirm the cause.**

“The government should continue a scientific investigation so that farmers can be engaged in rice farming without anxieties, and accurate information can be conveyed to citizens in evacuation,” the petition said. “Suspicious remain that the NRA concealed facts with the intention of reaching that conclusion.”

The agriculture ministry had raised the possibility that work to remove debris at the Fukushima plant in 2013 scattered radioactive substances that contaminated rice paddies in Minami-Soma more than 20 kilometers away.

However, **the NRA reached a different conclusion, saying that while radioactive substances were stirred up by the work, they remained within the nuclear plant compound,** south of Minami-Soma.

The NRA did not specify the likely source of the contamination, and the government discontinued the investigation.

The citizens group’s petition, submitted to a regular assembly session in September, asked the city to scrutinize the process in which the NRA reached its conclusion and to gather views from several scholars. The NRA’s public relations office declined to comment on the issue on Dec. 8.

“As the documents of the petition were not issued to the NRA, we cannot make a comment,” the office told The Asahi Shimbun.

As for the issue of determining the cause of the contamination, NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka has said that it is a job for the agriculture ministry.

“I absolutely cannot accept (Tanaka’s remark),” Minami-Soma Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai said.

December 9, 2015

City to investigate NRA's conclusion that radioactive rice unrelated to Fukushima plant work

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201512090084>

Nuclear pact with India

December 11, 2015

Abe off to India for talks with Modi on nuclear technology pact

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/12/11/national/abe-off-india-talks-modi-nuclear-technology-pact/#.VmrpTr8R-os>

Jiji, Reuters

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe left Friday for a three-day visit to India, where he will meet with his Indian counterpart, Narendra Modi, to discuss a proposed bilateral nuclear cooperation treaty.

Speaking to reporters at his office before departure from Tokyo International Airport at Haneda, Abe expressed his intention to make efforts to reach an agreement on measures to prevent Japanese nuclear technologies sold to India from being diverted to military use.

“Japan is the only country in the world that has ever suffered an atomic bombing,” Abe said. “We’re holding negotiations based on this fact.”

India is not a signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. The nuclear cooperation agreement with India would be Japan’s first with a country outside the NPT regime.

Japan and India started negotiations on a bilateral nuclear cooperation treaty in 2010. They are in the final stages of discussions on whether to stipulate in the treaty that bilateral nuclear cooperation would be suspended if India conducts a nuclear test again. India has not carried out a nuclear test since 1998.

At their meeting slated for Saturday in New Delhi, Abe and Modi are also expected to reaffirm that their countries will strengthen cooperation with the United States at a time when China is accelerating its maritime expansion.

“I’m aiming for results (from the meeting) that will add strong momentum to the further development of the relationship between Japan and India,” Abe said.

The two leaders are also seen agreeing on the use of Japan’s shinkansen system for a planned high-speed railway between Mumbai and Ahmedabad in western India. Japan is planning to support the project with a large amount of low-interest yen loans.

On Thursday, an Indian government minister and official said India’s Cabinet has cleared a \$14.7 billion Japanese proposal to build its first bullet train line, one of India’s biggest foreign investments in its infrastructure sector.

The decision ahead of Abe’s visit gives Japan an early lead over China, which is also bidding to build high-speed rail lines across large parts of India’s congested and largely British-era system.

Japan had offered to finance 80 percent of the cost of the train, which would link the financial capital Mumbai with Ahmedabad, the commercial center of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s home state of Gujarat, at an interest rate of less than 1 percent.

“It’s been done,” said a government minister who attended the Cabinet meeting headed by Modi late on Wednesday.

An official in Modi’s office confirmed the decision, saying there were some issues relating to the bullet train that had since been sorted out in time for Abe’s visit.

“We expect to make an announcement during the visit,” the official said. Both the minister and the official declined to be identified.

Broad agreements are also likely to be reached on two bilateral treaties that would enhance defense cooperation between Japan and India.

One is designed to prevent the transfer of defense technologies to a third country, while the other will specify rules for information protection.

This is Abe’s third trip to India, including during his first tenure between 2006 and 2007. It will be the fifth time for him to have bilateral talks with Modi.

Abe and Modi will together visit the sacred Hindu city of Varanasi on Saturday in a gesture to further deepen their personal relationship of trust.

State secrets law: "Chilling effect" on media independence

December 11, 2015

Secrets law, one year later

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2015/12/11/commentary/japan-commentary/secrets-law-one-year-later/#.Vmrqc78R-ov>

by Mina Pollmann

On Dec. 10, 2013, a new state secrets law was passed by the Diet, even as thousands turned out to protest. The new law was criticized for its vagueness, severity and lack of independent oversight. One year later, on Dec. 10, 2014, the controversial legislation went into effect and a large portion of the public continued to oppose it. Another year later — and no one is talking about it.

Perhaps that is a good thing. After all, it would mean that there have been no overt instances of the law being applied to the detriment of press freedom — or at least no instances that we know of. But complicit silence is harder to quantify, and as Sarah Repucci, director of Freedom House's Freedom in the World project, points out, "Sometimes you don't ever need to implement a law, if by its existence you are able to encourage self-censorship."

The main impetus for the passage of the new law was a desire to share more information with the United States as the security situation facing Japan becomes more concerning. Japan has historically been known as a "spy heaven," and the need to change this stigma is what is driving recent developments.

Richard Samuels, director of the Center for International Studies at MIT, observes: "Because Washington's experience with intelligence-sharing with the Japanese government had been unsatisfactory due to leaks, it was widely rumored that the U.S. urged Japan to create a formal classification regime. The Abe administration cited the desire to enhance alliance confidence and intelligence-sharing by the U.S. as a central reason for the introduction of the legislation. But this also should be seen as a next step in the evolution of Japan's own intelligence community." How much the law was inspired by internal developments within Japan versus external developments in the relationship with the U.S. is a question worth untangling.

The U.S. has been long involved in Japan's state secrets protection regime. Shortly after Japan's defeat, the Supreme Commander Allied Powers abolished the existing system associated with the ultra-secretive wartime government. But, after that about-face, when the U.S. realized that Japan would be a key battlefield in the Cold War, they resurrected protection for state secrets by revising the National Public Service Act in 1948 and passing the Self-Defense Forces Law in 1954. Bilaterally, Japan and the U.S. signed the 1952 Special Criminal Act, which protects secrets held by U.S. forces stationed in Japan, and in addition, the 1954 United States Mutual Security Act Secrets Protection Law, which protects secrets related to U.S. military equipment supplied to Japan.

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party had been trying to revise the lax state secrecy protection regime since as early as 1957. In 1985, Yasuhiro Nakasone made a push to pass a new state secrets law, but the domestic opposition was too great and the issue was shelved for almost two decades.

The "war on terror," regional challenges such as China and North Korea, and the rising dominance of the conservative LDP brought the issue back to the forefront. In addition to these important factors, as Brad Williams writes in *Pacific Affairs*, "one cannot overlook the important role of the U.S., whose pressure, both subtle and overt, has not only encouraged Japan to assume greater military roles and missions but has also forced the Japanese to rethink the efficacy of existing secrecy provisions."

A series of leaks since the early 2000s had shaken U.S. confidence in Japan as a security partner. In September 2000, a Maritime Self-Defense Force officer was arrested for selling military secrets to a Russian defense attache. This led to a tightening of the law in 2001. In May 2005, classified intelligence about a possible accident on a Chinese submarine made it to the front page of the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, which

led to the investigation of an Air Self-Defense Force officer. In January 2007, it was found that an MSDF officer had unauthorized possession of sensitive data on the Aegis combat system. The investigation that followed revealed that the information was given to 38 people, and was also being used in a MSDF technical training program. To regain U.S. trust, in August 2007 Japan signed a General Security of Military Information Agreement with the U.S., though Tokyo had been hesitant to do so. It is this dynamic interplay between leaks in Japan and subsequent U.S. pressure that has driven developments in Japan's state secrets protection regime.

The state secrets law is not just an issue for the Japanese right, as is often portrayed. The imperative is to establish a stronger state secrets protection regime in order to maintain the health of the U.S. alliance is recognized across the political spectrum. Discussions to tighten punishments had already begun in late 2011, in response to leaked footage of the 2010 collision between a Japanese patrol boat and Chinese trawler, under the Democratic Party of Japan government. Due to domestic opposition, the DPJ chose not to submit the bill during the 2012 Diet session. That brings us to where we are today, with the law in its present form passed under the Abe government two years ago.

As noted above, under the previous law the length of imprisonment for most Japanese who leaked state secrets was limited to one year, though defense officials could be imprisoned for five to 10 years. Now, government officials and defense industry employees who leak state secrets face up to 10 years in prison and a fine of ¥10 million. Even journalists and activists who unwittingly solicit information deemed to be state secrets can be prosecuted under this new law, as those who conspire to leak state secrets face up to five years in prison and those who acquire state secrets through illicit means face 10 years.

Even more worryingly, the process of defining state secrets is entirely in the government's hands. A supervisory committee and panel have been set up to oversee the classification process, yet their independence is questionable as both bodies are composed of government officials. There is no third-party involvement to determine whether the classification is appropriate. Furthermore, there is no protection for whistle-blowers and no mechanism to punish officials who classify information as a "state secret" for frivolous or self-serving reasons. Plus, the designation for certain types of secrets can be extended from 30 to 60 years or even indefinitely based on an internal government decision.

As mentioned at the outset, there have been no known cases of the new state secrets law being applied to prosecute journalists or whistle-blowers. As of last January, the government had designated 382 cases as subject to the new law. Most are related to defense and international diplomacy. No doubt, most of these state secrets ought to be given the highest protection possible. However, there is lingering concern the law could be misapplied in the future. As The Japan Times reports, there's also the possibility of the law hampering state account audits.

Jeffrey Kingston, a professor at Temple University, is troubled by the lack of transparency this law will condone. **"There is no independent oversight body, meaning that officials have a carte blanche to cover their tracks,"** he comments. The bureaucrats "will designate too much information as 'special secrets' so that their decisions won't be scrutinized or second-guessed until they are dead. What we know from various scandals is that bureaucrats have often decided against the public interest and now have a way to hide their misdeeds."

Balancing the protection of information that ought to be kept secret for the public's sake with the protection of press freedom to report on information that ought to be publicized is always tricky. Toshi Minohara, a professor at Kobe University, feels that the law is important as secrets of a certain nature need to stay secret — but it should be tweaked somewhat. Proper measures need to be put in place for relevant government officials to be held accountable for their actions, so there has to be more stringent

regulations regarding the preservation and maintenance of classified records, along with a clear process by which this information can become available at a later date, he argues. Furthermore, legal protection for whistle-blowers is necessary, as, he concludes, “for the government, this can become a convenient tool to cover up what is inconvenient. And looking back on history, when there is any room for abuse (of power), there will be just that — abuses.”

In Japan, there is a tendency for the government to destroy evidence, or even more egregiously, not produce any evidence. There is no law in place to force institutions or officials to keep a record or require disclosure after a certain amount of time has lapsed. The most recent example of this would be the lack of records keeping by the Cabinet Legislation Bureau as they reinterpreted the Constitution to allow for the exercise of collective self-defense. Perhaps the single most consequential change in Japan’s postwar history — and not a word has been written about what the decision-makers were saying as they made that change!

Even aside from this particular law, Japan is often criticized for the quality and independence of its media. Benjamin Ismail, head of the Asia-Pacific desk at Reporters Without Borders, describes how Japanese respondents to their anonymous surveys report unusually severe self-censorship, corporate and peer pressure (to cover or not cover certain kinds of stories), and restricted access to information. They also reported incidents of being expelled from press conferences for asking tough questions, and only being able to publish controversial stories in tabloids instead of mainstream media outlets. Ismail describes the reporting following the Fukushima incident as a “catalyst” that has finally brought to light the many problems in Japanese media.

As Kingston puts it, “The (state secrets) law doesn’t have to be acted on to have a chilling effect on investigative journalism in a nation not known for much investigative zeal.”

“The law exists in an environment of, at best, repeated disregard for the type of press freedom expected in advanced democracies — and at worst, willful infringement,” Repucci says. She cites the recent delay of a visit to Japan by David Kaye, U.N. special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, as a “perfect example”:

Nothing overt was said and postponing the visit is not any form of violation in and of itself, but the fact that the government declined to provide a convincing explanation and appears to have indirectly requested that the visit take place nearly a year from now is behavior consistent with that of a government that wants to be free to control the media as it sees fit, without oversight. The government may never see a need to implement the state secrets law against the media, but it would not have passed such a law if it did not want to have the option of using it. And yet one year after the law was enacted, no one is talking about this law anymore.

From the government’s perspective, “Out of sight, out of mind,” is their best strategy to coopt the public. But it is precisely because of this complacency, which will allow such a law to become entrenched over the years, that it is important to continuously reinvigorate the debate over the appropriate balance between protecting state secrets and protecting the right to know in Japan.

Mina Pollmann is an editorial assistant at The Diplomat. © 2015, The Diplomat Distributed by Tribune Content Agency

India not a signatory of NPT



Activists of the Communist Party of India (CPI) and All India Students' Association (AISA) hold banners during a sit-in protest against the nuclear power talks between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart, Shinzo Abe, in New Delhi, India, on Dec. 12. (AP Photo)

December 13, 2015

Japan's nuclear power deal in principle with India a first with an NPT non-signer

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201512130019

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's agreement in principle to supply nuclear power technology to India may run counter to Japan's stated commitment against the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The deal was reached on Dec. 12 during a meeting between Abe, who is visiting New Delhi, and his Indian counterpart, Narendra Modi.

If an actual nuclear power agreement is signed, it would mark the first for Japan with a nation that has not signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

The latest move by Japan was met swiftly with criticism in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Hiroshima Mayor Kazumi Matsui issued a statement on Dec. 12 asking that no nuclear power agreement with India be signed until it joined the NPT. The agreement reached between Abe and Modi "cannot be said to be in line with the position of maintaining the NPT structure by preventing its hollowing out," Matsui said.

Japan and India began negotiating a nuclear power agreement in 2010 when the Democratic Party of Japan was still in power. Japan had wanted a provision in any such deal that would allow it to immediately stop any nuclear power cooperation should India resume testing of nuclear weapons, which has been on hold since 1998.

Japan insisted on that position because of its goal of abolishing nuclear weapons, being the only nation in the world to have been subjected to the destructive power of such devices.

Although a joint declaration and a memorandum regarding a nuclear power agreement were released on Dec. 12, no provisions were included regarding a suspension of cooperation should India resume nuclear testing.

In the joint declaration, the two leaders confirmed that a nuclear power agreement would be signed after completion of the technological details through further negotiations between the two nations.

According to Japanese officials who briefed reporters, in his meeting with Modi, Abe said Japan would suspend cooperation if India resumed nuclear testing. Those officials said that reference would serve as a brake against India if it considered resumption of nuclear testing.

The move toward providing nuclear power technology with a nation that has not signed the NPT would be a major shift for Japan, which had emphasized nuclear nonproliferation until now.

At the same time, the Abe administration has placed the export of major infrastructure projects as a key pillar of its economic growth strategy, so it is eager to export nuclear power plant technology.

Before Abe's meeting with Modi, a high-ranking Foreign Ministry official said, "With the experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan is the only nation that has been hit by nuclear bombs and that is why Japan has pushed a nuclear nonproliferation diplomacy. We will not enter into an agreement that is not in line with that stance."

India has long insisted that it has the right to develop nuclear weapons. While it has announced a moratorium on nuclear testing, it apparently did not want to commit in writing any suspension of nuclear power cooperation should it ever resume nuclear testing.

This would not be the first time India has pushed for an agreement on nuclear power technology cooperation that did not contain a provision against nuclear testing.

India reached a similar deal with the United States in 2008. The United States has a domestic law that includes a provision that allows for suspension of nuclear power cooperation should nuclear testing be conducted.

The news of the latest agreement on Dec. 12 was criticized by Miyako Jodai, 76, who survived the atomic bombing of Nagasaki on Aug. 9, 1945. She linked the latest agreement with the 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"The people of Fukushima are still suffering and spent nuclear fuel cannot be disposed of properly," Jodai said. **"It is wrong to sell nuclear plant technology overseas by emphasizing only its safety and convenience."**

(Kazuki Uechi and Yoshihiro Kando in New Delhi and Hajimu Takeda and Kaname Ohira in Tokyo contributed to this article.)

State secrets laws : Potential for govt. cover-ups

December 12, 2015

EDITORIAL: Anxiety still lingers over 1-year-old secrecy law

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201512120025>

A full year has passed since the state secrets protection law came into force.

"I believe the citizens are aware that nothing of the kind that they initially feared has taken place during this time," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said.

We, however, disagree.

That is because, by the very nature of the secrecy law that took effect on Dec. 10, 2014, it remains impossible to find out from the outside if any information that is inconvenient for the government has not been withheld or if the law has not been applied in an arbitrary manner.

"I think I should have taken more time to provide more detailed explanations," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said at a news conference two years ago when he had the state secrets protection law enacted. "From now on, I will explain carefully to erase people's concerns."

It remains to be seen if careful explanations have actually been provided or if people's concerns have really been erased.

It has been disclosed recently that in 2013, prior to the Cabinet approval of the state secrets protection bill, the Board of Audit of Japan pointed out to the Cabinet Secretariat that government ministries and agencies could refuse to submit documents that contain designated state secrets, a situation that was "constitutionally problematic."

In response, the Cabinet Secretariat said it would issue a notice to instruct government ministries and agencies to comply with auditing as before, but it has yet to make good on that word. Board of Audit officials said no ministry or agency has so far cited the secrecy law to withhold documents, but said the notice should be issued at any rate, because there is the undeniable possibility that auditing could be obstructed in the future.

Article 90 of the Constitution says that "final accounts of the expenditures and revenues of the state shall be audited annually by a board of audit."

That provision was included to reflect that, under the prewar Constitution of the Empire of Japan, the government's secret funds and military expenses were excluded from auditing, which resulted in a lack of auditing control over the ballooning expenses related to the armed forces.

The Cabinet Secretariat may be taking that historical context and the weight of the Constitution too lightly. It should promptly issue the notice as it said it would.

It has also been learned that a survey trip to Japan by a U.N. special rapporteur on freedom of expression, which had initially been scheduled for early December, was delayed at the last minute at the request of the Japanese government, which asked the rapporteur to postpone his visit to autumn 2016 at the earliest. The rapporteur had planned to gather information on the state secrets protection law and other matters. A Foreign Ministry official said the delay was not requested because Tokyo found anything inconvenient in the issues to be surveyed, but simply because it was difficult to schedule the availability of officials in charge of the matter. But suspicion against administrative organs will linger as long as the essential nature of the state secrets protection law, which allows them to conceal whatever they wish, remains the same. Now is the time for Abe to "explain carefully to erase people's concerns." Doing so amounts to a minimal duty for the person responsible for brushing aside deep-rooted criticism and concerns to have the secrecy law enacted.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Dec. 12

December 8, 2015

Secrecy legislation carries potential for serious government cover-ups

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20151208/p2a/00m/0na/023000c>

Under the Constitution of the Empire of Japan, which remained in force from 1890 until 1947, the Board of Audit of Japan faced limitations on checking military-related budgets. Since secret funds of the government and military were exempt from auditing in those days, the bulk of military-related budgets remained in a "black box."

The book "Kaikai Kenshin Hyakunenshi" (100-year history of the Board of Audit), published in 1980 by the Board of Audit of Japan, states that there were considerable constraints on auditing under the Military Secrets Protection Law (revised in 1937). The law was designed to punish those who leaked military secrets.

Based on lessons learned from this past, Article 90 of the current Constitution stipulates that "Final accounts of the expenditures and revenues of the State shall be audited annually by a Board of Audit ..." This means that the Board of Audit is independent of the Cabinet. There have been no provisions so far even in the Self-Defense Forces Act that limit the provision of defense secrets to the Board of Audit. Specially designated state secrets include documents on budgetary measures for defense and foreign policies.

Regarding Section 1 of Article 10 of the Act on Protection of Specially Designated Secrets, Hiroshi Arikawa, former commissioner of the Board of Audit and professor of public policy at Nihon University, said, "If those who are subject to auditing can select which documents to submit, I would have to say it infringes on Article 90 of the Constitution."

The special secrets act, which imposes heavy penalties on those who leak important state secrets and those who obtain such information through unauthorized means, carries the potential for serious cover-ups of information. The government should make efforts to allay such doubts.

"A slap in the face of NPT"

December 14, 2015

EDITORIAL: Japan-India nuclear cooperation a slap in the face of NPT

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201512140016>

The framework for preventing the spread of technology and materials for building nuclear weapons is becoming increasingly compromised.

Even Japan, which has suffered atomic bombings, has joined the ranks of the world's nations that are eager to pitch nuclear technology even to a country with nuclear weapons for the sake of commercial interests.

During a visit to India on Dec. 12, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe agreed with his Indian counterpart, Narendra Modi, that the two countries will sign a deal on civil nuclear cooperation. The agreement would bolster the export of nuclear technology by Japanese enterprises.

India became in possession of nuclear weapons without joining the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). Its relations with neighboring Pakistan, which also refused to join the NPT and armed itself with nuclear weapons, remain strained.

Providing nuclear technology to such a nation should be called an act of folly that makes light of the longstanding and persevering nuclear nonproliferation efforts of the global community and would further emasculate the nonproliferation regime.

Rising calls for the abolition of nuclear weapons in the years following World War II, when the world came under a threat of the potential use of nuclear weapons, were the driving force behind the NPT, which entered into force in 1970.

Nations of the world, including Japan, joined the treaty under its guiding principle, which obligates the United States, Britain, France, China and Russia to commit to nuclear disarmament in exchange for granting them the status of nuclear-weapon states. The NPT also allows the other countries to use nuclear power only for peaceful purposes.

Supplier nations made it a rule not to trade in nuclear technology with countries outside that framework. But the United States took the initiative in granting an exception to India in 2008. Since then, the United States, France, Russia, South Korea and other nations have all signed nuclear agreements with India.

Those countries are looking at India as a promising market for pitching nuclear power plant technology. That is because India already hosts about 20 nuclear reactors and plans to build 40 more at a time when it is becoming increasingly difficult to build reactors in advanced nations.

The United States and other countries should realize that compromising the nuclear nonproliferation principles for the benefit of business opportunities would engender serious problems for the future. Japan, among others, is a nation that should be taking the lead in creating a nuclear-free world. It not only knows about the tragic consequences of the use of nuclear weapons but also has experienced one of the world's largest nuclear plant disasters and continues to be plagued by the resulting radioactive contamination.

Japan is the country that should be applying the brakes on any moves toward nuclear proliferation. The previous administration led by the Democratic Party of Japan, however, opened negotiations on the nuclear deal with India five years ago. Both the DPJ government and Abe's current administration cannot escape the charge of having forgotten the duty and responsibility of a nation that has suffered atomic bombings.

Abe told a news conference Dec. 12 that he would go along with India in pursuing a world free of nuclear weapons. But he has yet to provide a specific action to achieve that goal.

We are only left to wonder how we could explain to North Korea and Iran, which are insisting on their own nuclear development programs, why we are dealing differently with India. We could lose our convincing power for dissuading other nations from following in their footsteps.

The threat of nuclear arms will only increase as long as Japan, the United States and other countries, which should be guardians of the nonproliferation regime, are using their own hands to undermine its foundation.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Dec. 13

Murphy's Law lives in Fukushima

December 14, 2015

Fukushima Amplifies Murphy's Law

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/12/14/fukushima-amplifies-murphys-law/>

by Robert Hunziker

Murphy's Law has found a permanent home in Fukushima: "Anything that can go wrong will go wrong."

For instance, only recently, radioactive cesium in tunnels at Fukushima suddenly spiked by more than 4,000 times similar measurements from one year ago. This spooky/huge spike in radiation levels hit 482,000 Becquerels per liter. TEPCO intends to investigate the reason behind the enormous anomalous increase, *Radiation Spikes in Fukushima Underground Ducts*, NHK World, Dec. 9, 2015. Over the course of a year, 4,000 times anything probably is not good.

Not only that but the barrier constructed at the Fukushima nuclear power plant to hopefully prevent contaminated water from leaking into the ocean is tilting and has developed a crack about 0.3 miles in length along its base. The wall is 0.5 miles long and 98 feet below ground.

An ocean barrier, indeed: "Higher levels of radiation from Japan's 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident are showing up in the ocean off the west coast of North America, scientists from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution reported," *Higher Levels of Fukushima Radiation Detected Off West Coast*, Statesman Journal, Dec. 3, 2015. Fortunately, so far, the detected levels still remain below U.S. government-established safety limits.

In the meantime, TEPCO battles one of the most perplexing disasters of all-time with an average number of daily workers more than 7,000. The difficulty of procuring workers at the site is beyond imagination. Homeless people are hired off the streets to do the dangerous decontamination work.

The Tokyo 2020 Olympics

The situation better get better really soon because the Olympics are scheduled for 2020, which brings to mind perilous lost corium, the sizzling hot melted core in Plant #2, that hopefully, keeping one's fingers crossed, has not burrowed into the ground, spreading deadly isotopes erratically, ubiquitously throughout. Still, nobody knows where this Missing Corium-Waldo of the Nuclear World is located. Meanwhile, Greenpeace/Japan accuses the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of downplaying the health risks of the 2011 Fukushima disaster and accuses the agency of acting in concert with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's attempts to "normalize" the disaster, *Greenpeace Japan: IAEA Downplays Dangers of Fukushima Disaster*, Sputnik News, Feb. 9, 2015. Hurry, hurry, the Olympics is coming! One clever approach to the problem of too much radiation is to increase the "allowable limits": "The permissible annual level of radiation exposure has been dangerously heightened in Japan after the March 11th accident. One (1) millisievert (mSv) has been elevated to 20 mSv for residents in affected areas. The government increased the annual limit for nuclear workers' radiation exposure from 100 mSv to 250 mSv in 'emergency situations,'" Mitsuhei Murata (Executive Director of Japan Society for Global System and Ethics and former Japanese ambassador to Switzerland) *Nuclear Disaster and Global Ethics*, UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, March 16, 2015.

When the "permissible level" of radiation was initially moved higher, the Japan Medical Association stated: "The scientific basis for choosing the maximum amount of 20 mSv in the band of 1 to 20 mSv is not clear." Furthermore, according to Physicians for Social Responsibility, there is no safe level of radiation. Apropos the Fukushima situation: "It is unconscionable to increase the allowable dose for children to 20 millisieverts (mSv). Twenty mSv exposes an adult to a 1 in 500 risk of getting cancer; this dose for children exposes them to a 1 in 200 risk of getting cancer. And if they are exposed to this dose for two years, the risk is 1 in 100. There is no way that this level of exposure can be considered 'safe' for children." Recent studies confirm "exposure to low levels of radiation can cause cancer," specifically, "No matter whether people are exposed to protracted low doses or to high and acute doses, the observed association between dose and solid cancer risk is similar per unit of radiation dose," (Source: British Medical Journal,

Press Release, *Low Doses of Ionizing Radiation Increase Risk of Death from Solid Cancers*, International Agency for Research on Cancer, WHO, Oct. 21, 2015).

In sharp contrast to Japan's position, Chernobyl's officialdom has a different take on "permissible annual radiation exposure," specifically: "The radiation limit that excluded people from living in the 30km zone around the Chernobyl nuclear plant exclusion zone was set at 5mSV/year, five years after the nuclear accident. Over 100,000 people were evacuated from within the zone and will never return," (Greenpeace Japan). Never ever return!

Nuclear disasters don't go away easily. For example, Chernobyl is already facing a brand new crisis. The durability of the original decaying blighted sarcophagus expires within the next 12 months. However, the new replacement sarcophagus, the world's biggest-ever metallic dome, will not be accomplished in time as they are short of funds (615million EUR).

In addition to Ukraine's internal strife with pro-Russian citizens, the country has serious financial difficulties. All of this amounts to one more "spoke in the wheel" against nuclear reactor proliferation (Incidentally, China has 400 reactors on the drawing board). Who knows if and when a crippled reactor ends up in the hands of a financially strapped country? Then what?

Already, Ukraine has 15 nuclear reactors standing tall, so far, amongst whizzing bullets and powerful rockets. Dismally, Ukraine has conceivably become a nuclear holocaust tinderbox in the midst of cannon fire, rumbling tanks, and surface-to-air missiles, for example, Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down by a missile, supposedly by accident, on July 17, 2014, all 298 on board died.

Meanwhile, back in Japan, raising the level of permissible annual radiation exposure does not escape international notice. According to Dr. Ian Fairlie, former head of the Secretariat of the UK Government's CERRIE Committee on Internal Radiation Risks: "The Japanese government goes so far as to increase the public limit for radiation in Japan from 1 mSv to 20 mSv per year, while its scientists are making efforts to convince the International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP) to accept this enormous increase."

But, wait a moment; the Olympic Committee has already designated Tokyo 2020. Is it possible the IOC has the cart ahead of the horse, maybe way ahead?

As for the newly established higher acceptable Japanese limit for radiation: "This is not only unscientific, it is also unconscionable," Dr. Fairlie, *Unspoken Death Toll of Fukushima: Nuclear Disaster Killing Japanese Slowly*, Sputnik International, Aug. 8, 2015. After all, on a factual basis, "unscientific and unconscionable" are strong indictments.

Yet, the Olympic committee has already approved Tokyo 2020, and people from around the world will be making plans to attend. Withal, if the Olympic Committee is okay with Japan's capricious radiation conditions, then shouldn't everybody else be okay with it too? Well....

All of which brings to mind: If Fukushima's a canary in the mineshaft that exposes nuclear power's hidden dirty underbelly, meaning, once things go wrong they really go wrong, adhering to Murphy's Law, then what of the potential consequences of big ole nuke plants in war zones? How would Murphy's Law apply in a war zone? The most comfortable answer is: Don't even think about it.

Still, the world's 430 nuclear reactors are "big fat sitting ducks." According to former ambassador Murata, nuclear reactors are "the world's most serious security problem."

Thus, Fukushima may be more than the poster child of nuclear power's fragility vis a vis extreme forces of nature; it's also a surrogate poster child for lurking dangers behind and within terrorism and within war zones when "anything that can go wrong will go wrong," for example, a downed airliner over Ukraine.

Nuclear Reactors are as Dangerous as Nuclear Weapons (Murata)

Rockets have been fired at nuclear facilities in Israel. " Hamas claimed responsibility for the rockets, stating that it had been attempting to hit the nuclear reactor. Militants from Hamas's Qassam Brigades said they had launched long-range M-75 rockets towards Dimona" (The Jerusalem Post, July 9, 2014). As mentioned earlier, Ukraine is home to 15 nuclear reactors in the midst of a war zone. What if a missile accidentally, or purposefully, hits a nuclear reactor? Does Fukushima provide any clues as to the consequences of such a disaster?

Assuming Fukushima is truly a harbinger of how remarkably well nuclear disasters harmonize with, in fact, cohere to Murphy's Law, it probably implies that "all bets are off."

Postscript: "The future of the Olympic Games is at stake. It is as a believer in the spirit of the Olympic Games and the Olympic Movement that I am pleading for an honorable retreat, and this, in order for Japan to devote maximum efforts to controlling the Fukushima crisis," Mitsuhei Murata, Former Japanese Ambassador to Switzerland and Executive Director, Japan Society for Global System and Ethics, Tokyo, October 28, 2015.

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Japan-India pact a risky deal

December 16, 2015

The risky nuclear deal with India

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2015/12/16/editorials/risky-nuclear-deal-india/#.VnKFPL8R-id>

During his visit to New Delhi last week, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi agreed in principle on a civil nuclear cooperation pact that would pave the way for export of Japan's nuclear power plant technology to India. It will be Japan's first such deal with a country that has not signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. In working out its further details, the government needs to ensure a clear mechanism to prevent India from using the technology provided by Japan to enhance its nuclear weapons capabilities. This is Japan's duty as the only country in history to suffer nuclear attacks.

Japan has so far refrained from signing a civil nuclear cooperation pact with countries that are outside the NPT regime. Such an agreement with India, a de facto nuclear weapons power, is tantamount to Tokyo accepting possession of nuclear weapons by a country that is not a party to the NPT, representing a major shift in Japan's nuclear policy. It may compromise Japan's position of calling on North Korea, which has withdrawn from the NPT regime, to end its nuclear weapons program. The pact would have the effect of further reduce India's incentive to join the NPT regime. One wonders whether the Abe administration has seriously considered these effects.

The root of Japan's talks with India for a civil nuclear pact goes back to a proposal made in the late 2000s by U.S. President George W. Bush to change the rules of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), a multinational body designed to control the export of nuclear apparatuses and technology to ensure nuclear nonproliferation. Behind the proposal was the Bush administration's desire to strengthen the United States' strategic ties with India. Although the NSG, whose members include the U.S., Russia, Germany, France, Britain, Canada and Japan, had prohibited civil nuclear cooperation with India because

of its nuclear explosion test in 1974, the group in 2008 granted a waiver to India from its rules. Japan was initially cautious about the change but eventually succumbed to pressure from the U.S.

The change prompted the U.S., France, Russia, South Korea and others to sign agreements with India on nuclear cooperation. Abe's move represents the desire of Japan's nuclear power industry, whose prospect in the domestic market is uncertain following the 2011 Fukushima crisis, to enter the growing market of nuclear power in India. Currently, 21 nuclear power plants are in operation in the country, and there are plans to build over 30 more to meet the demand of its expanding population.

Abe says his agreement with Modi ensures that Japan's nuclear technology provided to India would be used solely for peaceful purposes. A government official said Japan would halt the implementation of the pact if India tests a nuclear weapon, which it has not done since 1998. That would be a logical course of action for Japan.

A major problem with the planned pact is that Japan would allow India to reprocess nuclear fuel burned in a plant built with Japanese components and materials. Plutonium extracted through reprocessing of spent fuel can be converted into nuclear weapons. To prevent that, the pact needs to have a mechanism to verify the volume of such plutonium and its whereabouts. Still, **the more plutonium India can secure for commercial purposes, the more it can possibly concentrate on using uranium produced in the country for military purposes.** India and Pakistan, which also possesses nuclear weapons, are in confrontation for many years. **Utmost efforts must be made to stop India from reinforcing its nuclear arsenal by taking advantage of this pact.**

During the talks with Abe, Modi also agreed to introduce Japan's shinkansen technology to build a high-speed railway linking Mumbai and Ahmedabad in western India. India hopes the project worth ¥1.8 trillion — for which Tokyo has agreed to extend ¥1.46 trillion in loans — will begin in 2017 and be put to service in 2023. Although Japan succeeded in exporting its bullet-train technology to Taiwan in the late 1990s, it lost out to China in October in the competition to sell the technology to Indonesia. India appears to have put priority on the safety and technological advantage of the shinkansen system. Japan should support India in the training of personnel, including operation controllers, drivers and maintenance workers, in addition to the export of hardware.

Abe's latest visit to and deals with India are **part of his administration's efforts to check the rising influence of China by deepening Tokyo's ties with New Delhi.** The two leaders agreed that the Maritime Self-Defense Force will become a permanent participant in India and the U.S.' annual joint naval drill known as Exercise Malabar, which is carried out with China's rise as a regional maritime power in mind. Japan and India also signed deals paving the way for transfer of Japanese defense equipment and technology and exchanges of defense-related information.

While Japan and India are both wary of China's growing maritime presence in the region, New Delhi is more flexible in its approach toward Beijing. For example, India is a founding member of the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, from which Japan, along with the U.S., has opted out. **Abe should realize that building friendly ties with both China and India in a balanced manner will contribute to enhancing Japan's interests.**

Decontamination budget hits record

December 17, 2015

Japan's radiation decontamination budget to hit record ¥522.3 billion

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/12/17/national/japans-radiation-decontamination-budget-to-hit-record-%C2%A5522-3-billion/#.VnKD9r8R-ic>

JJI

The Environment Ministry has sought a **record ¥522.3 billion in its budget proposal for fiscal 2016**, with most of the spend related to decontamination work in areas affected by the March 2011 nuclear disaster.

The proposed figure for the year from April, presented at a meeting led by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's environment policy division on Wednesday, was up from some ¥450 billion in this summer's budget request.

The increase reflected higher-than-expected costs for decontamination work shouldered by the Fukushima Prefecture government, which hosts Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 power plant, the site of the nuclear accident.

Decontamination work is conducted by municipalities, backed by financial support from the central government.

The government also plans to book some ¥78.3 billion for decontamination costs in a fiscal 2015 supplementary budget proposal.

With municipalities aiming to finish decontamination work by the end of fiscal 2016, the central government will look to help accelerate the efforts by boosting the budget.

In the fiscal 2016 budget proposal, the ministry also included some ¥134.6 billion mainly for maintenance costs for interim facilities where contaminated soil is temporarily kept.

A further ¥214 billion is for costs related to the disposal of radioactive substances and other designated waste produced by the nuclear accident.

Japan-India pact: "A disaster in the making"?

December 17, 2015

Source : The Hindu

The strange love for nuclear energy

<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/on-the-indiajapan-civil-nuclear-deal/article7996972.ece>

- M.V. Ramana
- Suvrat Raju

Updated: December 17, 2015 10:52 IST

The prospect of a nuclear deal with Japan is worrying because it ignores voices on the ground and takes India a step closer to the construction of untested and expensive reactors

During Japanese Prime Minister Shinzô Abe's visit to India last week, Japan and India reportedly made progress on a nuclear deal that they have been discussing for more than seven years. The governments did not actually conclude the deal: the Joint Statement released by the Prime Ministers only includes a droll phrase welcoming the "agreement reached... on the Agreement... for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy" and expresses the hope that "this Agreement will be signed after the technical details are finalised".

These "details" include deep concerns about India's growing weapons arsenal within Japan's polity that even Mr. Abe's militaristic government has found difficult to ignore. Nevertheless, even the prospect of an India-Japan nuclear deal is worrying because it takes the country a step closer to the construction of untested and expensive reactors. Moreover, despite the Narendra Modi government's "Make in India" rhetoric, the agreement will primarily benefit multinational corporations based in Japan.

A silent nuclear player

Although the debate on reactor imports in the past few years has largely focussed on France, Russia and the United States, Japan is an important background player in this market. Except for the Russian VVER reactors at Kudankulam, in Tamil Nadu [which is the Vodo-Vodyanoi Energetichesky Reaktor or Water-Water Power Reactor and a pressurised water reactor], Japanese corporations have a key role in the three other reactor designs that the government is planning to import: the Westinghouse AP1000 reactors for Mithi Viridi (Gujarat), the General Electric (GE) Economic Simplified Boiling Water Reactors (ESBWR) for Kovvada (Andhra Pradesh), and Areva's European Pressurised Reactors (EPRs) for Jaitapur (Maharashtra). The Japanese company, Toshiba, holds a controlling stake in Westinghouse. The ESBWR was developed by GE in collaboration with Japan's Hitachi. Finally, the EPR is so large that Japan Steel Works is one of the few companies in the world that can forge some of its critical components. The India-Japan nuclear deal is meant to clear the way for these Japanese corporations to sell their wares in India. Nuclear suppliers have a clear interest in this deal. A global downturn in the nuclear industry after the Fukushima disaster in 2011 has left them with serious commercial difficulties. GE, which built the Fukushima reactors, was considered a "laggard" in the industry even before its reputation was damaged by the accident. It has since struggled to find buyers for its ESBWR design, which was certified by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission only last year. Last month, Toshiba announced that from the time it acquired the company in 2006, Westinghouse had accumulated a net operating loss of \$290 million. Areva is now virtually bankrupt — its rating downgraded to "junk" by Standard & Poor's — after billions of euros in recent losses. Its reactor division may be taken over by the French state-run Électricité de France, and possibly Mitsubishi.

Need for new markets

Nor is there any scope for reactor sales within Japan. The Fukushima disaster, which has not been contained even after four years, continues to remind many Japanese of the dangers of nuclear power. A commission established by the Japanese Parliament emphasised the role of poor safety practices in the Japanese nuclear industry and went so far as to state that "this was a disaster 'Made in Japan'". Despite a strong push by the Abe government, nuclear power finds little support in the country. A poll conducted by

a Japanese national newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* in 2014 found that 77 per cent of respondents supported a phase-out of nuclear power.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Japanese nuclear corporations have turned to India as a market for their technology. But there are good reasons for India to resist this sales pitch. Even with domestic Indian reactors, nuclear power has been an expensive source of electricity, but with imported reactors the costs become prohibitive. This is, in large part, due to the astronomical capital costs of reactors. Since none of the reactor designs being considered — the AP1000, the ESBWR, and the EPR — are operational anywhere in the world, cost figures must rely on projections, and these have been rising with each passing year. For example, just this month, it was reported that the total costs of the two AP1000s being built in the U.S. state of Georgia might rise to \$21 billion, significantly more than the initial projection of \$14 billion. Likewise, the latest estimate, from September 2015, of the cost of the EPR being built at Flamanville (France) is €10.5 billion (\$11.6 billion), up from €3.2 billion.

Costly proposition

It is straightforward to translate this into a final tariff, using techniques that we described in a paper for the *Economic and Political Weekly* in 2013. Even accounting for a reduction in construction costs in India, a reactor that costs \$11.6 billion in Europe is likely to lead to a first-year tariff of about Rs.19 per unit of electricity. For perspective, recent winning bids at auctions from coal and solar power have been in the range of Rs.4.50 to Rs.5.50 per unit of electricity.

The Indian government claims that it would reduce costs by manufacturing reactor components in India, and concomitantly promote India's domestic manufacturing industry. However, the deal with Japan shows that this is mostly empty rhetoric. In a press briefing last year, the Joint Secretary (East Asia) explained that India's motivation in pursuing a nuclear agreement with Japan had to do with its belief that "in the area of nuclear technology there are certain advantages which rest with Japanese industry, in large-scale forgings for example". Of course, if key reactor components are forged in Japan, they cannot simultaneously be "made in India".

Disaster in the making?

Another problem with the proposed reactors has to do with safety. The reactors under consideration are untested, and provide no empirical track record of safe operation. Although the industry produces some calculations, using a technique called probabilistic risk assessment to claim that these reactors are safe, these techniques are unreliable both on theoretical and empirical grounds. Indeed, given the complexity of the new designs, it is only natural to expect construction difficulties that will also impact safety. Just a few months ago, Areva announced that it had found serious flaws in the fabrication of the pressure vessel of the EPR under construction in Flamanville. The industry is itself well aware of the possibility of a devastating accident, as is clear from its constant efforts to alter India's liability law and pre-emptively insulate itself from the consequences of a disaster.

GE's CEO, Jeffrey Immelt, explicitly stated earlier this year that he would not invest in India without legal indemnity: "I am not going to put my company at risk... there is no project that is worth it." One lesson that India should definitely learn from Japan has to do with the danger of giving in to such threats. More than 50 years ago, Japan succumbed to pressure from nuclear suppliers and instituted a law to indemnify them. Consequently, when the GE reactors at Fukushima suffered an accident, in part due to a design defect that had been pointed out decades earlier, GE was protected from any claims by victims. The cost of the clean-up, estimated at about \$200 billion, has been borne almost entirely by Japanese taxpayers. Of course,

multinational suppliers would like to institute the same outrageous arrangement in India, but there is no reason that the government should oblige them.

Citizens in both India and Japan have expressed their serious concerns about this deal and India's nuclear imports. Recently, 13 villages near Jaitapur passed a joint resolution against that nuclear plant. Large protests have also taken place at Kovvada and Mithi Viridi. Before Mr. Abe's visit, the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki took the unusual step of jointly writing to their Prime Minister asking him to reconsider the deal with India. It is revealing that the leaders of "Asia's largest democracies" have entirely ignored these voices on the ground, and instead moved to bail out the multinational nuclear industry.

(M.V. Ramana and Suvrat Raju are physicists with the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace, and based in Princeton and Bengaluru, respectively. The views expressed are personal.)

On 3/11 emergency declaration reached only 16% of Fukushima residents

December 19, 2015

Only 16% of Fukushima residents knew of emergency declaration

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201512190021>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The government's declaration of a nuclear emergency on March 11, 2011, reached only 16.5 percent of residents in Fukushima Prefecture by the following day, according to a Cabinet Office survey.

A key reason for this seems to have been that the communication structure in coastal areas was wiped out by the towering tsunami generated by the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake that led to the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The government directive was issued about four hours after the earthquake struck.

The survey findings on 19,535 evacuees from 22 municipalities in Fukushima Prefecture underscore the difficulties in promptly notifying residents in such an emergency situation, which is essential for ensuring that all residents are evacuated smoothly.

The survey, the largest government-sponsored study on people evacuated in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster, was undertaken between February and May 2014.

The Cabinet Office said it was done in line with a law to use such data for mapping out extensive evacuation plans for nuclear accidents. It sent questionnaires to 59,378 people, and 19,535, or 32.9 percent of them, responded.

The central government issued the emergency declaration in Tokyo at 7:03 p.m. on March 11, 2011, approximately four hours after the earthquake hit. Only 16.5 percent of the respondents said they were informed of the declaration by the following day.

At 9:23 p.m. on March 11, the government also instructed all residents living within a 3-kilometer radius of the crippled plant to be evacuated and those living within 10 km of the facility to remain indoors.

But only 15.6 percent and 18.8 percent of the respondents, respectively, said they knew of the instructions by March 12.

Among residents of the town of Namie, located within a 10-km radius of the plant, only 9.7 percent were informed of the emergency declaration by March 12.

The communication infrastructure in the coastal town was knocked out by the earthquake and tsunami, which also caused power blackouts in the area.

The government sequentially extended evacuation areas, and residents in a 20- to 30-km radius of the plant were instructed to remain sheltered indoors on March 15.

In another startling finding, only 63.2 percent of the respondents said they were informed of the March 15 instruction by the end of April--a full six weeks later--and 59.9 percent said they complied with the guidance.

The triple meltdown at the Fukushima plant led to the release of vast amounts of radioactive materials into the environment. After the disaster, local governments in areas surrounding nuclear plants around the country mapped out evacuation plans that call for residents living within a 30-km radius of a plant to remain sheltered until radiation readings reach a certain level.

The survey results show that local governments need to devise better systems to ensure that residents are promptly informed in times of emergency.

(This article was written by Shinichi Sekine, a staff writer, and Hisashi Hattori, a senior staff writer.)

Tepco will post profit even if reactors do not restart

December 18, 2015

Tepco expects 2016 profit even if reactors are not restarted, plans to issue bonds

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/12/18/business/corporate-business/tepco-expects-2016-profit-even-reactors-not-restarted-plans-issue-bonds/#.VnUY6r8R-id>

Kyodo

Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the disaster-struck Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, expects to post a profit next year even if unable to restart any reactors, according to a plan given to its creditor banks.

Tepco will likely turn a profit for the fourth straight year due to cost-cutting efforts and reduced fuel costs, the result of plummeting crude oil prices, the plan shows. Tepco expects to post an unconsolidated pretax profit of ¥314 billion (\$2.56 billion) for the current business year to March 31.

The plan also stipulates that Tepco plans to issue ¥330 billion in corporate bonds in fiscal 2016, the first bonds the utility will have issued in six years.

Next year, Tepco's pretax profit is projected at ¥156.9 billion if nuclear reactors at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata Prefecture are reactivated next October, and ¥114 billion if restarted in January 2017, according to the plan.

The plan did not include a profit figure if the plant remains offline the entire year, saying only that it would still turn a profit.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority has indicated readiness to examine whether reactors. 6 and 7 units at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant meet new safety regulations adopted in the wake of the 2011 nuclear disaster at Fukushima No. 1.

But it is unclear whether Tepco could obtain local consent to reactivate them as Niigata Gov. Hirohiko Izumida maintains a cautious stance.

Takahama restart ignores safety concerns

December 25, 2015

EDITORIAL: Fukui court ignores all safety lessons from Fukushima disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201512250028>

A local court has handed down a ruling on a plan to restart offline nuclear reactors that harks back to the era before the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011.

The Fukui District Court on Dec. 24 nullified an injunction against restarting the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture. The injunction was issued by the same court in April.

In its April decision, the district court said the new safety standards of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) were "far too lenient, and meeting them does not guarantee the safety of nuclear power plants." This time around, however, the court said, "The framework of the new safety standards for safety examinations by the NRA, which has high levels of expertise and independence, is reasonable."

The court also endorsed the NRA's assessment that the two reactors had cleared the safety standards, saying there are no "unreasonable elements in the judgment."

The court also turned down local residents' request for an injunction against the restarts of the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at Kansai Electric's Oi plant, also in Fukui Prefecture, saying, "It cannot be said that the restarts are imminent."

In April, the court pointed out that as many as five earthquakes exceeding the design basis earthquake ground motion (DBEGM) levels had occurred at four nuclear plants since 2005. The DBEGM serves as a benchmark for quake-resistant design of a nuclear plant. It also referred to the fact that spent nuclear fuel stored in pools at the Takahama plant were not placed in sufficiently sturdy facilities.

The latest court decision dismissed all these safety concerns, saying, "The danger is controlled to an extent where it can be ignored in light of socially accepted standards."

In 1992, the Supreme Court handed down a ruling that set a precedent for cases involving technical issues related to nuclear power generation. In ruling over a lawsuit concerning Shikoku Electric Power Co.'s Ikata nuclear power plant, the top court said the judiciary should respect opinions of nuclear experts and refrain from making judgments about highly technical issues that require expert knowledge unless there are clearly errors in safety checks that are too serious to be overlooked.

The Dec. 24 court decision is in line with the Supreme Court ruling.

But the meltdowns at the Fukushima plant took place while the judiciary continued making decisions on related issues under this framework.

A severe accident at a nuclear power plant could cause immeasurable damage in wide areas for a very long time.

The latest court decision, which seems to leave the judgment to experts and be based on the assumption that serious accidents seldom occur, blatantly disregards the fact that unexpected accidents could happen.

This has been an important viewpoint in debate on the future of nuclear power generation in this nation since the March 11 disaster.

Kansai Electric Power has argued that **each day of delay in the restarts of the two reactors at its Takahama plant costs the company about 400 million yen (\$3.27 million) in losses.**

With the removal of the judicial block to the resumption of the two reactors, the process of bringing them back online will accelerate.

But the utility should not forget that many Japanese people cast critical eyes on nuclear power generation. **When electric utilities plan to restart idled reactors, they seek consent only from the prefecture and the municipalities that host their plants.**

But parts of Kyoto and Shiga prefectures are also located within 30 kilometers from the Takahama nuclear plant. Utilities should widen the scope of local communities from which they seek consent to restart reactors.

There has also been **insufficient debate on the risk posed by a concentration of nuclear power plants in Fukui Prefecture.**

Neither the government nor electric utilities must be allowed to forge ahead with any plan to restart reactors without addressing all these safety concerns.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Dec. 25

TEPCO refuses to pay for decontamination as agreed

December 28, 2015

TEPCO refusing to pay for decontamination work planned since end of FY '13

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20151228/p2a/00m/0na/010000c>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the tsunami-ravaged Fukushima nuclear plant, has refused to foot the costs of decontamination work that has been planned and conducted after a December 2013 Cabinet decision, it has been learned.

The Environment Ministry is poised to demand money it is expected to spend on decontamination of areas with high radiation levels -- where the government has deemed that it is difficult for residents to return in the foreseeable future -- from TEPCO. The ministry began this year to decontaminate such an area in the Fukushima Prefecture town of Okuma, but there is no prospect that TEPCO will foot some 20 billion yen in the costs of the work that the ministry will temporarily shoulder.

As the Environment Ministry is in conflict with the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry that supports TEPCO's position, a massive amount of taxpayers' money is being invested in such work without clarifying who should bear the expenses.

The Act on Special Measures concerning the Handling of Environment Pollution by Radioactive Materials, which was enacted in the wake of the March 2011 nuclear crisis, requires TEPCO to "try to swiftly pay for decontamination when and if demanded."

Moreover, the guidelines for Fukushima recovery, approved at a Cabinet meeting on Dec. 20, 2013, state that the government should demand that TEPCO foot the expenses of decontamination and the construction of temporary storage facilities for radioactively contaminated waste that were implemented or being planned. However, the guidelines do not mention whether TEPCO should be required to pay the costs of decontamination and relevant projects that were not being planned when the guidelines were approved.

According to the Environment Ministry, TEPCO has agreed to foot the costs of decontamination in "difficult-to-return" zones, which was performed on a trial basis before the Cabinet approved the guidelines. However, TEPCO has refused to pay for decontamination of main roads in such zones on the grounds that the utility is not obligated to pay for these projects, which were conducted after the Cabinet decision.

Hiroshi Ono, head of the Environment Ministry's decontamination and temporary storage planning coordination team, has raised questions about the utility's response.

"It's unreasonable to decide whether to pay for the costs depending on whether decontamination was planned before or after the Cabinet decision, although decontamination is based on the same special measures law," Ono said. "We understand that we can demand payments for decontamination of the difficult-to-return areas."

However, the economy ministry's Agency for Natural Resources and Energy takes a different position. "The Cabinet decision doesn't state that the government can demand the costs for decontamination that was not part of the original plan. We've instructed TEPCO to follow the Cabinet decision," said an agency official.

An official of TEPCO's public relations division said, "We'll respond to the matter in accordance with the special measures act, the nuclear power accident compensation system and the 2013 Cabinet decision, while listening to explanations from concerned ministries and agencies and consulting with them."

Since the government has decided that TEPCO must foot the costs of decontamination, the 32 trillion yen which will be set aside for disaster recovery projects over a 10-year period does not include decontamination costs. Therefore, if TEPCO refuses to pay for decontamination costs, the government will be forced to secure additional resources.

"The Environment Ministry and the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy should hold negotiations to draw a conclusion on the matter," said a senior Finance Ministry official.

The Environment Ministry has demanded TEPCO foot a total of 381 billion yen in decontamination costs on 12 occasions, and the power company has basically complied with the demands, paying 350.5 billion yen of the amount so far.

The decontamination work in Okuma is the first in the difficult-to-return zones. The work began in summer this year and is scheduled to be completed at the end of this fiscal year. The cost of decontaminating 95 hectares in the town is estimated at over 20 billion yen.

The town of Okuma is asking for decontamination of the remaining 305-hectare area while the towns of Futaba, Namie and Tomioka as well as other local bodies in the prefecture are requesting full-scale decontamination.

How much "aid" all in all for TEPCO?

December 28, 2015

Vague language left gov't on hook for nuke disaster cleanup costs, but for how much?

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20151228/p2a/00m/0na/011000c>

The total cost of dealing with the Fukushima nuclear crisis, including compensation payouts and building mid-term waste storage facilities, is set to clock in at a staggering **11 trillion yen**. How much of that will end up being paid by the Japanese government? How much "aid" is TEPCO going to get, all told? Different government ministries and agencies have different ideas about where to draw that line, as do various figures in the ruling parties, so **the upper limit remains fuzzy**. And this lack of certitude has produced its own, new problems.

In November 2013, the ruling parties put together recommendations for how much of the nuclear disaster cleanup bill should be left to TEPCO. There were some in the parties who called for a new special measures law to be passed that would provide state funds for decontamination and other work. With public opposition brewing, however, in the end the parties said only that "the handling of operations after the present decontamination plans have been implemented will be considered from a public works perspective."

More than two years later, however, we still do not know if that "handling of operations" means decontamination work itself, or some other variety of environmental improvement. In fact, interpretations differ even among the lawmakers who thought up the 2013 recommendations, with some saying that "decontamination should be a public works project," and others declaring that "cleanup work should, as a basic principle, be TEPCO's responsibility."

The government appeared to accept the recommendations, and incorporated them -- and the uncertain statement about who was going to pay for unplanned cleanup work -- into Fukushima Prefecture recovery guidelines passed by Cabinet decision in December 2013.

The core of the matter is the growing desire to clean up the towns of Okuma and Futaba, hosts to the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and whose central parts have been designated as "hard to return" zones. According to one senior government official involved, **"There was no debate about how to view decontaminating the difficult to return zones, and so the question of who would bear the cost was just left up in the air."** The 2013 Cabinet decision furthermore does not specify what counts as "planned decontamination work."

So, if the government isn't going to bill TEPCO for "unplanned" decontamination work, where is the money going to come from? The government bears a heavy responsibility for pushing debate on this question down the road.

Takahama restart based on "unmet conditions, weak promises"

December 28, 2015

EDITORIAL: Approval to restart Takahama reactors based on unmet conditions, weak promises

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201512280015>

The Fukui District Court recently nullified its earlier injunction against reactivating the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors of the Takahama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture.

Kansai Electric Power Co., operator of the nuclear plant in the town of Takahama, is expected to restart one of the two reactors as early as late January.

But the procedure for obtaining the approval of the hosting government of Fukui Prefecture, which was completed immediately before the court decision, was laden with problems. We oppose moves to press ahead with the planned restarts under the current circumstances.

Fifteen nuclear reactors are concentrated in Fukui Prefecture, including some for which decisions have been made for decommissioning.

Fukui Governor Issei Nishikawa set five conditions for his approval, calling on the central government and Kansai Electric to clearly pinpoint their responsibilities.

Public opinion has consistently been cautious about restarting nuclear reactors following the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. Nishikawa called strongly on the central government to “promote public understanding,” and he obtained Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s assurances that he will ensure that meetings with residents will be held across Japan for that purpose.

The governor called on Kansai Electric to precisely explain when it plans to build an interim storage facility outside Fukui Prefecture for spent nuclear fuel. The utility said in November that it will locate the site for the facility around 2020 and have it operational around 2030.

Nishikawa said he believes that all his conditions have been met. But the substantiality of those commitments remains questionable.

Kansai Electric has said it hopes to install an interim storage facility somewhere in the Kansai region, and it has long been canvassing local governments for their understanding. But resistance to hosting such a facility remains strong, and the building site is not likely to be selected any time soon. There is no denying suspicions that the plan could end up as an empty promise.

Questions also remain on the extent to which Nishikawa has fulfilled his own responsibilities.

He has never had the prefectural government organize meetings with local residents, saying it is up to the central government and the plant operators to explain the safety and necessity of nuclear plants.

An emergency evacuation plan for areas within a 30-kilometer radius of the Takahama nuclear plant was only worked out earlier this month. That zone contains parts of Kyoto and Shiga prefectures and has a total population of about 180,000.

But Nishikawa approved the planned restarts without waiting for a drill held across prefectural borders, arguing that working out an emergency evacuation plan is not a legal requisite for restarting a nuclear reactor.

Obtaining the host communities’ approval for a reactor restart should primarily be a process to enhance the safety and peace of mind of local residents.

It is all too regretful that another undesirable example has been set, following the earlier approvals to restart the Sendai nuclear power plant in Kagoshima Prefecture and the Ikata nuclear power plant in Ehime Prefecture.

The central government was also quite candid in postulating that restarting nuclear reactors is a foregone conclusion. Industry minister Motoo Hayashi visited Fukui, the capital of Fukui Prefecture, four days before the court decision to ask Nishikawa for his approval.

The local governments and residents of communities adjacent to nuclear plants are strongly dissatisfied that they have no say in decisions on reactor restarts. Kansai Electric has rejected the demands of the Kyoto and Shiga prefectural governments for inclusion on the list of “hosting communities,” whose approvals are required for restarting reactors of the Takahama nuclear plant. The central government has only been looking on, arguing that approvals of the hosting communities are not a legal requirement.

Abe has said he will provide explanations to gain the public’s understanding of the importance of nuclear power generation. That leads us to believe that he should also be presenting guidelines on the extent and coverage of the “hosting communities,” whose approvals are necessary for nuclear restarts.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Dec. 27

View from inside Fukushima Pref.

This article dates a bit (last July) but things haven't changed that much since at Fukushima.

View from Inside Fukushima Prefecture: Vastly Different from Govt. Pronouncements

<http://fukushimaupdate.com/view-from-inside-fukushima-prefecture-vastly-different-from-govt-pronouncements/>

July 9, 2015

translation services

by Robert Hunziker / ukprogressive.co.uk / July 8, 2015 /

Because of Japan’s unconscionable open-ended new secrecy law, it is very likely journalism in the nation has turned tail, scared of its own shadow. Nevertheless, glimmers of what has happened, of what is happening, do surface when brave people come forward.

On May 22nd 2015 Hiromichi Ugaya, a photojournalist who is well-informed, insightful, and engaging, was interviewed about what he witnessed in the aftermath of one of the world’s most horrendous disasters. Hiromichi Ugaya was born in Kyoto City, Japan in 1963. He is an accomplished photojournalist with experience in both Japan and the United States, receiving his bachelor’s degree at Kyoto National University and his master’s degree at Columbia University.

Naïveté of Public

Hiromichi first visited Fukushima within two weeks of the disaster, and he has returned nearly 50 times to photograph scenes. His is a personal mission because the tragedy does not receive adequate media coverage. According to him, very few journalists cover the aftermath; television in Japan has lost interest; the public is blasé and dangerously naïve; Japanese publishers do not entertain stories about Fukushima, and the mainstream media in Japan ignores the impact of the aftermath.

Curiously, it’s as if a news blackout has been covertly instituted, and maybe it has. What people do not see, do not hear becomes invisible, out of sight out of mind, similar to the after-effects of radiation exposure, which are not felt, not smelled, not tasted, not physically recognized by people, until it’s too late, until it’s too late, until it’s too late.

Then again, maybe The Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets, Act No. 108 promulgated on December 13, 2013 is quelling public opinion?

According to a leading Japanese newspaper, the law “almost limitlessly widens the range of what can be considered confidential,” and the new secrecy law allows bureaucrats and politicians to “designate state secrets to their liking,” Nobuyuki Sugiura, Managing Editor, Tokyo Head Office, *Asahi Shimbun will continue to respond to the public's right to know*, The Asahi Shimbun, December 7, 2013.

Those who leak state secrets face up to 10 years in prison.

And, repeating that standardized rule: Bureaucrats and politicians can “designate state secrets to their liking.” Is this a world's first? Does this mean that bureaucrats and politicians can determine the fate of anybody and/or everything?

In the face of cowardly authoritarianism, history teaches lessons of harsh reality, for example, Chernobyl is an example of the long-term tragedy associated with nuclear accidents, thirty years later, nearly one million dead (source: Alexey V. Yablokov, Center for Russian Environmental Policy, Moscow, *Chernobyl: Consequences of the Catastrophe for People and the Environment*, The New York Academy of Sciences, Vol. 1181, December 2009).

Chronicling the first four years of Fukushima, Hiromichi Ugaya composed a photo book about the tragedy as a personal countermeasure to widespread public apathy: *Portrait of Fukushima: 2011-2015: Life After Meltdown*, which is a treasure trove of over 200 unpublished photos, telling the story from the beginning to the present.

Regions of Fukushima persist ghostlike: “America Tonight journeyed to the affected areas, which are separated into zones of higher and lower radiation risk. In the hardest-hit area, known as the “exclusion zone,” the streets remain virtually empty, eerily silent and frozen in time at the moment residents fled the quaking earth and incoming sea. The garbage and debris that litter the area defy the kempt and pristine neighborhoods for which Japan is famous,” Michael Okwu, *Inside Fukushima's Ghost Towns*, Aljazeera America, Jan.6, 2014.

An Insider's Story- the interview

The government's initial reaction to the disaster is scandalous. According to Hiromichi, the authorities should have been “more open to the public.” Because of failure to communicate the danger, unnecessary radiation exposure was widespread. Minimal information was provided and evacuations were delayed much too long.

In essence, he believes the authorities were probably concerned about public panic. Regrettably, that concern may serve to haunt and endanger lives for many years. For example: “The most serious leakage of radiation took place March 15th, which was day-five of the nuclear accident, but still, within the radius of 10-20 kilometers, many citizens were still there... They were exposed to the radiation. The number of the people who got exposed to the radiation comes up to like 230,000, which is ten times bigger than Three Mile Island of 1979. So, it's huge and all the population on Fukushima, two million, have to go for medical checks every year.”

Hiromichi suspects an outbreak of thyroid cancer over the next few years. Already, according to local reports, 107 cases of thyroid cancer have been confirmed. Yet, the gestation period for radiation's effect is 5-40 years. And, this is only the fourth year.

He believes the Japanese people are not well informed. They only see the limited thyroid cancer cases so far even though those are merely an early harbinger, only foreshadowing the beginning of a long process of widespread complications for years to come. As well, it is doubtful people want to face the brutal truth; avoidance is an easy way out when fear reigns supreme.

Additionally, it is likely that widespread health problems will occur well beyond the limits of Fukushima Prefecture. The radioactive plume traveled notably beyond the immediate area. In March, in the immediate aftermath of the explosions, the plume traveled to Tokyo. "The area between Fukushima and Tokyo has some huge hotspots. In the northern Tokyo metropolitan area, also huge hotspots. Over the eastern region of Japan, the radioactive plume spread across a huge area."

Hiromichi met with families of Fukushima Prefecture. The accident triggered bizarre behavior amongst families and within communities. The first reaction of family members was to evacuate their children to the next prefectures. But, complications arose, for example, "The problem happened because... first fathers tried to evacuate with their families... in those places where the evacuees reached, the fathers could not find a job. So, the fathers went back to their hometowns to their former jobs although the hometown was contaminated."

The families of Fukushima squabbled and divided over issues of whether to leave their homes, sometimes leaving behind stubborn family members who refused to leave their lifetime residence. As well, entire communities divided into camps of pro-evacuation versus anti-evacuation, leading to conflict, arguments with old friends labeled as traitors.

Along the way, people experience horrible depression, drinking problems, headaches, vomiting, and loss of appetite, symptoms which are outside of physical normality.

Hiromichi's story leaves one dangling, wondering what's to become of the tens of thousands who are homeless to this day, what happens to those who live in fear, to the depressed who now view life as meaningless. And, to those who have already returned to fringe areas.

His is the inside story, the bitter truth behind the recklessness inherent within the complexity of nuclear power generation, toying with enormous untamed power, like wild horses on the plains, originated from $E=mc^2$.

Still, to this day, purportedly, "More people have died from stress-related causes than from the initial disasters in Fukushima," Alexis Dudden, professor of history, University of Connecticut, *The Fourth Winter of Fukushima*, Truthout, Jan. 4, 2015.

Beyond that, as time marches on, it is almost certain to bring on a perniciousness of cancer-related complications of unconscionable consequence, look at Chernobyl (1986) where to this day, in the still-contaminated villages and towns of Ukraine and Belarus children are horribly deformed without torsos and babies genetically mutated born without thighs or without fingers and where the "Chernobyl necklace" or thyroid cancer is universally widespread (Source: John Vidal, *Nuclear's Green Cheerleaders Forget Chernobyl at Our Peril*, The Guardian, April 1, 2011). It's 30 years later, and it continues!

The Health Impact

Green Cross International, which is committed to phasing out nuclear energy worldwide, issued a report d/d March 9, 2015: *Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant Disaster: How many people were affected? 2015 Report*. According to Adam Koniuszewski, Chief Operating Office of Green Cross International: "Our local presence and ongoing activities to help the communities... gives us a first-hand experience of the human and environmental consequences of nuclear disasters."

Mikhail Gorbachev, former Communist Party General Secretary, formed Green Cross International in 1993. According to the former Soviet Union President and Nobel Peace Prize laureate: "We are facing a global environmental crisis, a conflict between man and nature," Alexei Yablokov, *Heroes of the Environment*, Time Magazine, October 17, 2007. Chernobyl happened on his watch.

Estimates of radiation fallout, as obtained by Green Cross Int'l, show that 80% of the released radiation was deposited in the ocean and the other 20% dispersed within a 50 km radius. Over time, the overall risk of cancer will increase, especially for children at risk for entire lifetimes.

“Approximately 32 million people in Japan are affected by the radioactive fallout from the nuclear disaster in Fukushima.”

“The number of deaths from the nuclear disaster attributed to stress, fatigue and hardship of living as evacuees is estimated to be around 1,700 so far.”

So it goes, the long reach of radiation exposure is only starting as the gestation period runs 5-to-40 years. Not only that but the Fukushima Power Plant is still white hot, very hot. Despairingly, the melted core is somewhere inside of or outside of the nuclear containment vessels, nobody knows where, an enormous problem riddled with unforeseen danger for the environment, for humanity, maybe forever.

Why is Japan brazenly restarting nuclear power plants in the face of Fukushima’s continuing calamity, a tragedy that has only just started?

SOURCE: UK Progressive

Ugaya Hirochimi

<http://queenmobs.com/2015/06/an-interview-with-hiromichi-ugaya-a-photojournalist-documenting-fukushima/>

A 25-minute interview (in English) with Ugaya Hirochimi, a photojournalist who has visited Fukushima many times since the disaster. <https://youtu.be/EbUUhk4uoAc>

Ugaya has also published a book of photographs, to try and fight the growing oblivion surrounding the aftermath of 3/11:

***Portrait of Fukushima: 2011-2015: Life After Meltdown* can be purchased here.**

Underage workers to clean Fukushima?

January 5, 2015

Labor shortage sucks underage workers into Fukushima nuclear cleanup

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160105/p2a/00m/0na/016000c>

It was the spring of 2015, and a 37-year-old construction company owner in Fukushima Prefecture got a call on his phone from an unknown number.

"Can you use me again?" the person on the other end said, the voice tugging at the man's memory. Ah, that's right. It was a young man who'd worked for him about two years before, doing decontamination work near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. The problem was, the worker had only been 17 at the time. It was July 2013 when the man was arrested on suspicion of violating the Labor Standards Act, which states that it is illegal to assign dangerous work to anyone under the age of 18. Cleaning up a nuclear

disaster zone certainly qualified. The then 17-year-old was one of four underage workers -- all aged 16 or 17 -- in the man's cleanup team, eventually bringing the police to his door.

At the time, the man was working for a construction firm owned by his foster father, leading decontamination teams in the field. He looked at his roster of workers, but saw no problems with the ages that went along with the names. The birthdays listed put all the workers safely above 18; they'd been falsified on the orders of the man's foster father. The man himself did not know this, and so was not indicted. His foster father, however, was arrested and found guilty of labor standards violations.

The formerly under-age worker on the phone, now 20, showed no signs he was upset over the events of 2013. The man told the youth that, if he was willing to work hard, he'd give him a shot at the man's firm, founded after the arrests about two years before.

The cleanup effort began in earnest in summer 2012, a little more than a year after the March 2011 triple-meltdown at the nuclear plant. Virtually the entire construction sector in Fukushima Prefecture became involved in the work, starting with major construction firms who actually took the work orders and then fed them into a vast trickle-down pyramid of subcontractors. The man's foster father's firm was one such subcontractor, taking work that had already been subcontracted three or four times already -- a practice that does not officially exist. With these hand-me-down contracts in hand, the foster father's firm recruited workers.

The 37-year-old man planned out the jobs and also spent a lot of time on-site, even in high radiation areas. His dosimeter beeped so relentlessly that it became just another background noise, and he began to ignore it. He regularly took his mask off outside to drink, and walked into the vehicle serving as a break room -- an area that is supposed to be hermetically sealed from the outside air -- without changing out of his protective suit.

The man thought that some members of his team -- the four boys under 18 -- looked a little too young, and though he had doubts about the birthdays listed on the worker roster, he didn't investigate further. If the firm was found employing under-age workers, it would have to report the violation to the contractor above it, which could impact future orders. The man kept his suspicions to himself.

His July 2013 arrest apparently came after one of the boys submitted a complaint to authorities. At the time, the national government was offering regular nuclear cleanup workers per diem wages of between 21,700 yen and 25,000 yen. Once a work order had trickled down from the primary contractor through the layers of subcontractors, however, the workers actually on the ground never saw the full amount. The men in the 37-year-old's cleanup team were being paid less than a third the official wage. It seems the boy who reported the man had grown frustrated with his paycheck.

All the men on the team applied freely for the job. From his detention center cell, the man's foster father wrote him a letter saying, "We have to be very thorough when it comes to (worker) ages. I've learned a lot from this." The man also came to the realization that, as adults, they had to act responsibly.

Across Fukushima Prefecture, some 30,000 people go to work at decontamination sites every day. The companies, always short of workers, as well as the workers themselves have for the most part become numb to the dangers of radiation. Most of the underage workers at the man's foster father's firm said they wanted to stay on even after their employer's arrest. The Japanese Constitution urges caution on youth labor, but the reality on the ground is a far cry from the constitutional ideal.

Child and youth labor has a storied history in Japan. In the Meiji period, groups of child laborers in match and textile factories included kids under the age of 10. From 1911 on, the law was slowly updated to ban employment of children under 12, though loopholes for apprentice nursemaids and other jobs remained. The student mobilization of World War II saw children return to factories in large numbers, churning out weapons and ammunition for the war effort.

All this led to a ban on child exploitation being included in the postwar Constitution, while the minimum employment age was raised to 15 in the 1947 labor standards law, which also forbade dangerous work for anyone under 18.

The 37-year-old man himself joined the workforce as a teenager. His mother died when he was in the first grade, and he never knew his father. After his mother's death, his grandmother took him in and raised him, but she, too, passed away when he was 16. He dropped out of high school after just two months and became a construction worker. Looking around at other people his age spending their time enjoying themselves, he decided that the only way to win in life was with money and qualifications, and he threw himself into work.

In April last year, the man started his own company with seven employees. Among them was the young man who had called him. The 20-year-old, saying he wanted a high salary, went to work in the still evacuated town of Namie. The man told him the radiation was high in Namie, but his young employee said he didn't care. If the youngster was so keen, the man thought, he'd give him the work he wanted, as well as a monthly salary topping 300,000 yen. It was the most he could pay for a young worker.

The man's 17-year-old son quit a vocational school and also went into construction, working at a different firm than his father's. The boy isn't involved in the decontamination, but his company has been subcontracted to do many nuclear cleanup jobs, which worries his father. In the dying days of 2015, the man called up his son and told him he should become a painter. It didn't cost much to get into and he could start his own business relatively quickly. His son said he'd think about it.

Rokkasho: 2.94 trillion yen

January 5, 2015

Japan's ¥2.9 trillion nuclear recycling quest coming up on three decades

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/05/national/science-health/japans-%C2%A52-9-trillion-nuclear-recycling-quest-coming-three-decades/#.Vou8V1IR-ov>

by Emi Urabe and Stephen Stapczynski
Bloomberg

It's designed to recycle spent uranium from Japan's nuclear power plants, consists of more than three dozen buildings spread over 740 hectares, costs almost ¥3 trillion and has been under construction for nearly three decades. The amount of fuel successfully reprocessed for commercial use: zero.

Under construction since the late 1980s, the complex is designed to turn nuclear waste into fuel by separating out plutonium and usable uranium. The start date of the project has now been pushed back for the 23rd time, with operations set to commence in 2018.

The money continuing to pour into the Rokkasho reprocessing complex in Aomori Prefecture is raising speculation that attention is being diverted from more-promising avenues of energy development, including renewables.

“Reprocessing is an idea that seemed good to many in the nuclear industry when it was first proposed, but with time and experience has proven to be uneconomical,” M. V. Ramana, a professor at Princeton University’s Nuclear Futures Laboratory, said by email. “There is a lot of sense in the idea that Japan should just cut its losses and stop trying to get this plant to operate.”

The idea for Rokkasho can be traced to the 1960s when the government decided to pursue a “closed nuclear fuel cycle” — a system which would allow resource-poor Japan to recycle old fuel in order to reduce import dependence and insulate itself from fluctuating prices.

The insistence on developing a closed fuel cycle has diverted funds, as well as generations of scientists and engineers, from renewables and other alternatives, according to Ramana.

“From the point of view of a nation with few natural resources, completion and stable operation of the nuclear fuel cycle is extremely important,” said Makoto Yagi, chairman of Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd., which operates the facility.

Construction of the Rokkasho facility, the heart of the endeavor, was supposed to be completed by 1997. Delays due to technical and safety issues have kept it from operating commercially while costs ballooned to an estimated ¥2.94 trillion, according to Japan Nuclear Fuel.

The government and the country’s power industry view fuel reprocessing generally, and the project in Rokkasho specifically, as one of the only ways to lower import dependence and find a home for thousands of tons of highly radioactive spent fuel.

The facility was originally intended to separate plutonium from spent fuel for use in so-called fast-breeder reactors — plants that produce more fuel than they consume.

While Monju, the nation’s first prototype fast-breeder reactor, has remained closed due to its own technical issues, Rokkasho expanded construction to include a facility that processes plutonium-uranium mixed-oxide fuel, known as MOX, that can be used in some of Japan’s existing reactors.

In its most-recent delay, Japan Nuclear Fuel announced in November that commercial startup of its plutonium reprocessing facility would be delayed to 2018 due to post-Fukushima safety requirements.

Start of the MOX facility was delayed to 2019.

Even when reprocessing begins, the recycled fuel won’t be any cheaper than uranium, which has slumped about 49 percent on the spot market since the March 2011 Fukushima crisis.

“In the short term, recycling is not economically advantageous,” Dale Klein, former chief of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, said in an interview in Tokyo. “But it does things like reduce your volume” of spent fuel.

Restrictions on Fukushima food imports to EU to be eased

January 7, 2015

EU to ease rules on Japanese food imports

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Jan. 7, 2016 - Updated 10:23 UTC+1

The European Union this week will ease restrictions on food imports from Japan that were introduced in the aftermath of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident in 2011.

The restrictions require Japan to conduct radiation checks on food products from Fukushima Prefecture and neighboring areas before they can be shipped to EU countries.

The European Commission decided on Wednesday to lift those measures for certain products, if their radiation levels have stayed below safety limits long enough. The changes will take effect on Saturday.

Almost all of the agricultural goods from Fukushima will be exempted, such as vegetables, buckwheat, tea, beef and other meat products, and fruits other than persimmon.

In addition, all food products from Aomori and Saitama, as well as rice and soybeans from 6 other prefectures in northeastern Japan will be exempted.

Japanese government officials say they will work to have the remaining restrictions lifted as soon as possible.

Nuke taxes

January 7, 2015

Genkai mayor asks Kyushu Electric to pay tax on spent nuclear fuel

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201601070028>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

GENKAI, Saga Prefecture--Kyushu Electric Power Co. indicated it was willing to pay a new tax on spent nuclear fuel stored at its Genkai nuclear plant to help the town recover lost revenue from reactor shutdowns.

Genkai Mayor Hideo Kishimoto on Jan. 6 asked Kyushu Electric Power President Michiaki Uriu to accept the tax plan, which would provide Genkai with about 300 million yen (\$2.5 million) in new tax revenue annually.

Kyushu Electric Power is seeking to resume operations of the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at the Genkai plant, but it has also decommissioned the No. 1 reactor. Having that reactor offline has hurt Genkai's municipal treasury.

After the meeting at the town government hall, the mayor told reporters that Uriu appeared prepared for the new tax because a similar levy has been imposed by Satsuma-Sendai city in Kagoshima Prefecture.

Kyushu Electric Power operates the Sendai nuclear power plant there.

Kishimoto said he holds two views on when the new tax would be imposed: as soon as possible or after the Genkai reactors are restarted.

“Although Kyushu Electric Power has moved into the black with the Sendai plant back in operation, it is only a small amount,” Kishimoto said. “They are saying their profit margin will not recover unless the Genkai plant also resumes operations, so they may not have the leeway right now.”

For his part, Uriu told reporters: “While I understand the need from the standpoint of the fiscal condition of the town government, I also asked for the town government’s understanding about the extremely difficult nature of our own fiscal condition. We want to work out the details, including the actual tax rate.”

When the four reactors at the Genkai plant were running, the town government’s fiscal condition was so robust that from fiscal 1995, it did not need any handouts from the central government in the form of ordinary tax subsidies.

At that time, a major portion of the town’s revenues came in the form of taxes paid by Kyushu Electric Power for both operating the nuclear reactors and for property taxes on the land where the plant is located.

Some of those revenues are based on the amount of electricity generated, so the town’s tax revenues plunged after the Genkai reactors were taken offline for safety reasons following the 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The tax that Kyushu Electric Power pays Satsuma-Sendai city for spent nuclear fuel works out to about 390 million yen a year, based on a tax rate of 250,000 yen for each fuel assembly.

(This article was written by Ikko Ishida and Shuhei Shibata.)

Reprocessing: "There is no option to call it off"

January 7, 2016

Nuclear Watch: 'Nursing care plan' for nuclear plants (Pt. 60)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160107/p2a/00m/0na/005000c>



The Akatsuki Maru vessel that transported 1 metric ton of plutonium from France to Japan is pictured in this photo taken at a port in Tokai, Ibaraki Prefecture, on Jan. 5, 1993. (Mainichi)

Many of those involved in nuclear power say the electric power industry appears to have no intention to "die with the nuclear fuel cycle project."

The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) recommended on Nov. 13, 2015, that the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA) be replaced by another entity as the operator of the trouble-plagued prototype fast-breeder reactor Monju.

Three days later, Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd. (JNFL), which was founded on the initiative of the electric power industry, announced that the completion of its nuclear fuel reprocessing facility under construction in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, will be delayed by about two years to the first half of 2018.

These two core facilities in the nuclear fuel cycle project, in which nuclear fuel spent at atomic power stations is reprocessed and reused in nuclear reactors, are in difficult situations.

In spring this year, electric power retail will be fully liberalized. Since consumers will be allowed to freely select electric power suppliers, competition between utilities is expected to intensify, which could cause the profits of electric power companies to decline. As such, the nuclear fuel cycle project is becoming increasingly burdensome for power companies as there are no prospects that the project will be put into practical use in the foreseeable future.

Nevertheless, Toichi Sakata, former vice minister at the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry, has ruled out the possibility that the government will abandon the project.

"There is no option to call it off," says Sakata, 67, who was involved in the operation of the Akatsuki Maru vessel that transported plutonium from France to Japan.

This is not only because over 2 trillion yen has been spent on the project but also because the Aomori Prefectural Government would certainly demand that some 3,000 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel stored at the reprocessing facility be removed from the prefecture if the project were to be discontinued.

About 70 percent of pools for spent fuel at nuclear plants across the countries are filled, and they do not have enough capacity to store spent nuclear fuel if returned. The abandonment of the nuclear fuel cycle project could force electric power companies to suspend their nuclear power generation, which is a highly profitable business, causing great confusion.

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry took action in response to the situation. **At a meeting of experts on Nov. 30, the ministry decided to set up an entity to supervise JNFL. By establishing a system to force electric power companies to engage in processing spent nuclear fuel, the national government showed its determination to continue the nuclear fuel cycle project. This may be a sign that Japan's atomic energy policy, in which private companies operate nuclear plants under national policy, will shift into one in which the government supervises atomic power business based on its own policy.**

"It's so-to-speak a plan on 'nursing care' for atomic power stations," says Hitoshi Yoshioka, professor at Kyushu University.

Yoshioka points to the possibility that the accounting system and the system of paying compensation in case of a nuclear accident will be reformed and that a system similar to one under which utilities must buy electric power generated with renewable energy at fixed prices will apply to nuclear power.

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry has urged power companies to build more facilities to store spent nuclear fuel. In response, electric power companies announced on Nov. 20 last year that they will build such facilities with a total capacity of 6,000 tons, a 30 percent increase from the current capacity, by sometime around 2030. (By Haruyuki Aikawa, Senior Writer)

TEPCO makes plans to retain customers

January 7, 2015

Tepco unveils loyalty tie-ups in bid to retain household customers

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/07/business/corporate-business/tepcu-unveils-loyalty-tie-ups-bid-retain-household-customers/#.Vo-POVIR-ot>

by Kazuaki Nagata

Staff Writer

With the retail electricity market set to be deregulated in April, Tokyo Electric Power Co. on Thursday unveiled a range of new price plans that offer discounts to customers who sign up with specific partners. The revamp, which involves third-party suppliers from the gas, communication and entertainment sectors, is an attempt to retain customers. Tepco has tens of millions of them, but from April many may desert it for cheaper competitors.

Tepco's new offers are designed to appeal to a wide range of users. **Signing a package plan with both Tepco and Nippon Gas Co., a provider of household gas, will yield an annual discount of about ¥6,000. And SoftBank Corp. plans to grant discounts to its mobile phone subscribers if they choose Tepco for their power,** although details have yet to be announced.

Other partners include Internet access provider So-net Corp., cable music distributor Usen Corp. and consumer electronics retailer Bic Camera.

The utility said it will launch a **loyalty incentives program** under which users receive five points per ¥1,000 of utility charges. One point is worth ¥1.

The points can be moved to two other loyalty programs, T-point, operated by Culture Convenience Club Co., and Loyalty Marketing Inc.'s Ponta.

Tepco said users will be able to pay electricity bills with points from the spring of 2017.

Tepco said it will provide four basic plans, naming them standard, premium, smart life, and night.

It said the standard plan is similar to existing rates, but that users can benefit from the use of points.

The premium plan, which the firm recommends for people who use a lot of power, has a fixed monthly fee of ¥9,700, and if users exceed consumption of 400 kWh per month, an additional ¥29.04 per 1 kWh is charged.

Until now, Tepco has had a stranglehold on power supply in the Kanto area because Japan assigned specific regions to monopolies, citing the need to ensure a stable supply.

Competition from April is already apparent. Last month, new entrant Tokyo Gas announced the prices it will charge for households that switch over. It will be the company's first foray into household power supply.

Moreover, regional utilities will be able to sell electricity outside their traditional areas of operation.

Tepco plans to enter Kansai.

TEPCO's luring tactics

January 8, 2016

TEPCO to drop electricity rates to lure customers after deregulation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160108/p2g/00m/0bu/009000c>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Co. said Thursday that it will lower electricity rates by up to about 6 percent in April in a bid to attract customers as the deregulation of the retail electricity market in Japan is set to spark fierce price competition.

The power company will cut the monthly house-use electricity rate for a four-person household to 19,100 yen (\$162), for example, if a customer signs up for a two-year power service contract by the end of March. The new price will be lower than the current 20,300 yen and also 3 to 5 percent cheaper than rates offered by Chubu Electric Power Co. and Kansai Electric Power Co. TEPCO plans to sell electricity in central and western Japan -- the markets currently monopolized by the two rivals.

At present, Japan's regional power firms can sell electricity to retail customers only in their respectively designated areas.

But the market barriers will be lifted when the liberalization of the retail market starts in April, opening up opportunity to firms not traditionally in the power business.

The deregulation will spur tough price competition and put a major power firm like TEPCO at risk of losing customers to new rivals.

Fukushima foods: EU eases restrictions

January 9, 2016

EU due to start easing restrictions on food imports from Fukushima

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/09/national/eu-due-start-easing-restrictions-food-imports-fukushima/#.VpDoHFIR-ot>

Kyodo

The European Union will start easing restrictions Saturday imposed on Japanese food imports over the Fukushima nuclear disaster, including vegetables and beef produced in the prefecture, the farm ministry said.

Tsuyoshi Takagi, Cabinet minister in charge of rebuilding from the March 2011 quake, tsunami and nuclear crisis, on Friday welcomed the bloc's decision. At present, all food items from Fukushima except alcoholic beverages must be shipped with radiation inspection certificates.

That requirement will be removed for vegetables, fruit excluding persimmons, livestock products, tea and soba, because the radiation levels of these items never exceeded permissible levels in 2013 and 2014, according to the farm ministry.

Other food from the prefecture such as rice, mushrooms, soybeans and some fishery products — excluding scallops, seaweed and live fish — will remain subject to the requirement.

The allowable limits are set at 100 becquerels per kilogram for vegetables and fruit, 50 Bq/kg for milk beverages and infant food, and 10 Bq/kg for drinking water, in accordance to Japanese standards.

The EU move follows the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry's announcement in November that the bloc would ease the restrictions after gaining approval from the European Commission.

The decision also comes as the European Union and Japan are in the midst of negotiations for a free trade agreement. In the talks, Tokyo is seeking the elimination of duties on Japanese vehicles, while Brussels is looking to expand exports through the reduction of tariffs on pork, cheese, wine and other agricultural products.

"We will make persistent efforts so (restrictions) on all items (from Fukushima) will be eliminated," Takagi said at a press conference Friday.

The minister added that he will continue to work with other countries to lift similar restrictions imposed after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant raised concerns over the safety of food produced in Japan.

The European Union will also remove restrictions on all food imports from Aomori and Saitama prefectures.

Aside from Fukushima, restrictions will remain in place for some items produced in 12 prefectures in northeastern, eastern and central Japan.

At least 14 countries, including Australia and Thailand, have abolished restrictions on Japanese food imports, while dozens of countries like South Korea maintain special rules.

12-day IAEA mission to assess NRA

January 11, 2015

IAEA starts review of Japan's nuclear regulator

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Jan. 11, 2016 - Updated 04:59 UTC+1

Experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency have begun their first review of Japan's nuclear regulator since it was set up after the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011.

Team leader Philippe Jamet told officials with the Nuclear Regulation Authority on Monday that **they will evaluate how Japan has improved its nuclear regulatory framework since the accident.** He said team members will offer frank opinions so further improvements can be made.

During the 12-day mission, **the experts will interview NRA officials and visit nuclear power plants, including Fukushima Daiichi.**

The IAEA sends teams of experts to countries at their request to assess their regulators and nuclear

inspections.

In 2007, a team reviewed NRA's predecessor and recommended that its independence from government offices that promote the industry be legally clarified. It also called for reviews of nuclear inspections.

Fukushima governor to attend Davos Forum

January 12, 2016

Fukushima governor to attend Davos forum

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

10:01 UTC+1

Fukushima's governor will attend this year's World Economic Forum to discuss recovery efforts in the prefecture after the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster.

Masao Uchibori told reporters on Tuesday he was invited by organizers to join the annual global gathering of financial and political leaders in Davos, Switzerland. The event will take place from January 20th to 23rd.

Uchibori will attend a session on the 22nd themed on Fukushima's recovery and lessons to the world.

He plans to talk about the earthquake and tsunami, lessons from the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant, and the current status of recovery in the prefecture.

The governor is also expected to offer sake from local breweries at a Davos event.

Uchibori said he wants to express his gratitude to global leaders for their support, explain the status of reconstruction, and **promote Fukushima's food and tourist resources.**

Fukushima officials say it is rare for a prefectural governor to attend the Davos forum.

Former Tokyo governor Shintaro Ishihara and his deputy have attended the meeting before.

Japan's top government spokesman announced earlier that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will not attend the gathering, as he is placing priority on enacting a supplementary budget for the current fiscal year.

Fukushima governor to attend Davos forum next week

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/12/national/fukushima-governor-to-attend-davos-forum-next-week/#.VpSv-FIR-ot>

Kyodo

FUKUSHIMA – Fukushima Gov. Masao Uchibori said Tuesday he will attend this year’s World Economic Forum meeting to talk about recovery efforts in the prefecture.

The annual gathering of financiers and government officials will take place in Switzerland starting Jan. 20. Uchibori is scheduled to attend a meeting about the revitalization of Fukushima and explain what is going on. It is rare for a governor to attend the global gathering.

“It is a precious opportunity to be able to communicate directly with people from all over the world,” Uchibori told a news conference. “I want to report (on) the steady progress that is being made toward rebuilding Fukushima.”

It is expected that sake brewed in Fukushima will be served at an event during the gathering.

Uchibori was invited to the Davos forum after attending an event related to the World Economic Forum in Tokyo last June.

Govt to lift evacuation orders for 9 municipalities

January 12, 2016

Govt. to help Fukushima evacuees return home

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Jan. 11, 2016 - Updated 23:31 UTC+1

The Japanese government says it will **step up efforts to help evacuees return to communities** affected by the 2011 nuclear accident in Fukushima Prefecture.

The government plans to lift all evacuation orders for 9 municipalities near the damaged nuclear plant by the end of March next year.

The plan excludes some areas that have the highest levels of radioactive fallout from the nuclear disaster.

Of the 9 municipalities where evacuation orders are still in place, evacuees from the city of Minami-Soma, the town of Kawamata and the villages of Katsurao and Kawauchi are allowed to stay at their homes overnight as they prepare to return if the orders are lifted.

But there are persistent concerns among evacuees about radiation and the living environment if they return.

The government plans to speed up measures to help rebuild commercial areas, medical institutions and welfare facilities in those communities.

The government also plans to help businesses construct factories, stores and restaurants with subsidies earmarked in the draft budget for fiscal 2016 that starts in April.

Five years on: Time to reflect on recovery?

January 11, 2016

Editorial: 5th anniversary of 3.11 disasters moment to reflect on recovery, Japan's future

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160111/p2a/00m/0na/006000c>

One of the lesser known casualties of the destruction wrought by the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdowns could be linguistic. Dialects unique to some areas hit by the triple disaster are thought to be in danger of dying out, as the communities that speak them have collapsed.

Tohoku University professor Takashi Kobayashi and other researchers conducted a survey on dialects in the disaster areas. In his related book, Kobayashi points out that restoration of regional communities cannot be achieved without restoration of local culture. "This is because the people lived immersed in regional culture," he wrote.

March 2016 will mark the fifth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake. However, work to restore disaster-hit areas has not progressed smoothly. In many cases, regional communities partly defined by their local dialects have disintegrated, their residents losing the local web of mutual emotional support after being forced to evacuate to other areas. Currently, over 180,000 survivors are living away from their hometowns, about 100,000 of them from parts of Fukushima Prefecture affected by the nuclear crisis. Many have no prospect of returning home in the foreseeable future.

In a meeting of the government's Reconstruction Promotion Council in October, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said, "The government is determined to achieve psychological recovery from the disasters by supporting efforts to form regional communities and taking other measures," in addition to reconstruction of homes destroyed by the disasters. But what does "psychological recovery" mean?

In June 2011, the Reconstruction Design Council in Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake compiled a report calling for "creative" reconstruction of disaster-hit areas, and submitted it to then Prime Minister Naoto Kan. The recommendation was based on the idea that **people can endure hardships better if they have hope for the future.**

The report called for regional community-oriented reconstruction and stated that the national government should work out a basic reconstruction policy and specific systems to support such reconstruction work. Whether politicians can light the flame of hope in disaster areas is being tested. Looking at the reality, however, politicians have failed to achieve this. Reconstruction of disaster-hit areas is now closely linked to the Abe administration's key local economic revitalization policy. This is because the triple disasters sped up the local aging of society and depopulation in disaster-hit areas.

The government is designating a five-year period from spring 2016 for the reconstruction and vitalization of local economies. In other words, the government is looking to turn reconstruction of areas devastated by the disasters into a model of this policy. The government has worked out specific measures to put the brakes on the declining population as part of efforts to boost local economies, but has also failed to show a clear vision for residents' future livelihoods.

Areas of central Niigata Prefecture hit by the Chuetsu Earthquake in 2004 have given a clue to how to revitalize local economies. Most areas hit by the quake are in mountainous areas where the population is aging and decreasing. Based on a spirit of mutual help within their communities, these regions set goals of restoring sustainable livelihoods for mountain residents and trying to bring about a future suited to regional resources and characteristics. They also interacted with many supporters outside their regions and made the best of cooperative reconstruction efforts.

It is true that the Great East Japan Earthquake contributed to depopulation, but there are positive aspects of disaster areas.

A panel of experts to evaluate reconstruction following the Chuetsu quake pointed out in a report released in March last year that residents of affected areas were living positively. "We visited areas hit by the disaster on the occasion of the 10th anniversary. We have the impression that people are lively and active in their neighborhoods, interacting with each other and enjoying the richness of their lives in mountainous areas, instead of feeling that their communities are slumping because of depopulation," the report said.

The scale of the Chuetsu disaster and the environment of the affected areas are different from those of the Great East Japan Earthquake. Still, it is a common goal for all areas across the country to find ways to maintain and make effective use of mountain areas' abundance and unique characteristics despite depopulation.

Some regions devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake are taking advantage of their characteristics to steadily recover from the disaster.

The Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics will be held in 2020, when the period for reconstruction and vitalization of local economies nears an end, and human capital and funds will further concentrate in the capital. This tendency could widen a perception gap between Tokyo residents, who are excited at the Games, and those in other regions that have barely benefited from the event.

If this perception gap widens, it would damage national unity. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind the Reconstruction Design Council's recommendation that "all people should take on the massive disasters as their own problem, strengthen their solidarity and share the burden with each other in promoting reconstruction."

On March 11, 2016, the anniversary of the triple disasters, it is necessary to evaluate the reconstruction efforts that have been made so far. It is the role of not only politicians but also all members of the public to consider how to design the future of Japan, including disaster areas. We must together light a flame of hope in all regions of Japan, based on reflection on the past five years.

Japan needs to hold in-depth debate on nukes

January 12, 2016

Nuclear Watch: When will Japan awake from the 'dream' of nuclear energy? (Pt. 63)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160112/p2a/00m/0na/005000c>



People form human letters saying the equivalent of, "Congratulations, initial firing ceremony," on the premises of JRR-1, Japan's first nuclear reactor, on Sept. 18, 1957. (Mainichi)

"Japan still has a dream that the country had when it started using atomic energy," said Nobuyasu Abe, a member of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), when he talked in a recent interview about challenges that Japan's nuclear energy policy faces.

Abe, 70, has raised questions about Japan sticking to all nuclear-related projects, including fast-breeder reactors and nuclear fuel reprocessing facilities, based on the idea in the 1950s that uranium is an important resource and must be effectively utilized. **Abe calls it "a law of inertia," and dismisses it as Japan's bad habit. He points to the need to hold in-depth debate on the issue depending on changes of the times.**

Japan has repeated that it will never have surplus plutonium. Still, Japan has found no way to spend 47.8 tons of plutonium that the country has accumulated. With revisions to the Japan-U.S. nuclear energy agreement coming in three years, bilateral negotiations on the matter will face rough going unless Tokyo paves the way for solving this problem.

"Holding Japan-U.S. talks (on the issue) is equal to considering the future direction of Japan's atomic energy," says Toichi Sakata, 67, former vice minister of education, culture, sports, science and technology, who was involved in bilateral talks in the 1980s.

Sakata suggests that **unless all those involved in the use of nuclear energy begin discussions to work out long-term policy measures, Japan's utilization of atomic energy will come to a deadlock.**

There is a reference case in Britain, which has accumulated 114 tons of plutonium for civilian use, more than twice the amount Japan possesses. Britain held discussions for nearly two years from 2010 on whether plutonium is a resource or waste because the country needed to spend 2 billion pounds a year, or some 240 billion yen at the exchange rate at the time, on storing plutonium and had difficulties managing it. People from various circles participated in the discussions. The process of the discussions was fully

released to the public for national debate. They concluded that plutonium should be used to make mixed-oxide fuel and plutonium that could not be processed to produce such fuel should be dumped. Tatsujiro Suzuki, 64, professor at Nagasaki University who had served as acting chairman of the AEC, points out that Britain has expressed its readiness to take over plutonium Japan has accumulated if Tokyo pays a certain amount of money. Suzuki says this is an option. One cannot help but wonder when Japan will awake from its "dream." **Japan should hold in-depth debate from a long-term perspective instead of adopting an all-or-nothing approach of simply debating whether to promote or discontinue the use of atomic energy.** (By Haruyuki Aikawa, Senior Writer)

Fukushima Pref to seek compensation through mediator

The amount of compensation claimed (and paid) differs according to the article

January 14, 2016

Fukushima Pref. to seek nuclear accident compensation via alternative dispute resolution

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160114/p2a/00m/0na/020000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- The prefectural government here is planning for the first time to **seek compensation through the system of alternative dispute resolution (ADR)** for a portion of damages resulting from the nuclear disaster at the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)'s Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. The Fukushima Prefectural Government's claim is scheduled to be filed as early as April with a center for resolving disputes regarding nuclear damage compensation after gaining approval from the prefectural assembly.

The claim seeks about **1 billion yen in compensation for costs associated with the nuclear crisis that include the salaries of employees for a radiation contamination department that was newly created following the disaster, as well as expenditures associated with combatting harmful rumors.**

Compensation through the ADR system has already been sought by a total of seven prefectures in addition to Fukushima: five additional prefectures in the Tohoku region, along with Gunma and Chiba prefectures.

An ADR-related settlement has been reached by Iwate Prefecture.

Fukushima Prefecture has already sought a total of around 30.4 billion yen in damages from TEPCO, which provided compensation totaling some 14.1 billion yen for costs including treatment and management of waste products containing radioactive materials, as well as examinations for radioactive contamination of agricultural and livestock products.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government plans to initially seek a total of around 1 billion yen via ADR, and to subsequently decide based upon the response whether to ask for the rest of the funds.

A representative of TEPCO's Fukushima press bureau said in an interview, "We would like to respond in a sincere manner."

Fukushima to turn to third-party mediator to resolve claims dispute with TEPCO

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201601140031>

By NOBORU OKADA/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--The Fukushima prefectural government, exasperated by Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s foot-dragging, plans to turn to a third-party organ for the first time to resolve a dispute over damages arising from the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Prefectural authorities will be seeking an estimated 1 billion yen (\$9 million) in compensation for expenses resulting from the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

As the two sides remain far apart on key issues, prefectural officials decided to ask the central government's nuclear damage claim dispute resolution center to serve as mediator.

The prefectural government is hoping that this strategy will convince TEPCO to cover budgetary outlays for personnel expenses for the new departments and sections that had to be established to deal with the nuclear accident.

The submittal of the mediation request could be made in April once the Fukushima prefectural assembly gives its approval.

Compensation is also being sought for a public relations campaign that was implemented to lure tourists who stayed away from the prefecture in the aftermath of the nuclear accident.

Discussions with TEPCO on such expenditures proved fruitless.

"We would like to obtain the judgment of a third party for those parts that we are not convinced about," a prefectural official said.

Fukushima authorities will propose that the mediator be used in the prefectural assembly session to be convened in February.

Since July 2012, the Fukushima prefectural government has submitted three separate compensation requests to TEPCO totaling 11.01 billion yen. TEPCO has so far paid about 3.92 billion yen for projects to assist small businesses to resume operations as well as to relocate prefectural senior high schools.

Referring to the proposed mediation, a TEPCO official said, "We will respond in a sincere manner based on the established procedures."

Toshiba, nukes and fiscal woes

January 16, 2016

The elephant in the room for Toshiba is nuclear

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/16/national/media-national/elephant-room-toshiba-nuclear/#.VpqhjVKDmov>

by Philip Brasor

Special To The Japan Times

Japanese press outlets often cover scoops from competing outlets, but it's rare to build on a competitor's story with original reporting, especially when the scoop is a few years old. In December, the weekly magazine Aera, which is affiliated with the Asahi Shimbun, ran an article about a secret meeting that took place between representatives of Japan, Mongolia and the United States almost five years ago. This meeting was first reported by Haruyuki Aikawa in the May 9, 2011, issue of the Mainichi Shimbun. What interested Aera reporter Atsushi Yamada about the article was Aikawa's assertion that Toshiba Corp. was on hand for the negotiations. In 2006, Toshiba had bought a majority share in the American company Westinghouse, a manufacturer, like Toshiba, that started out in the home electronics field and eventually expanded into nuclear power plant construction. Japan said it would buy uranium mined in the central Asian country and in return Mongolia would tap Japan's nuclear energy expertise in building power plants and, more significantly, nuclear fuel reprocessing facilities that would incorporate the acceptance of high-level nuclear waste from Japan and other countries.

Though the Mainichi story received little attention in Japan or the U.S., it was translated and disseminated in Mongolia, thus leading, only three months after the 2011 nuclear meltdown in Fukushima, to citizen protests against the deal, which opponents said would turn their country into a "toilet" for the world's nuclear waste. Later, the Mongolian government said it might be difficult for it to accept this waste. Yamada read subsequent emails between Toshiba's president at the time, Norio Sasaki, and an official of the U.S. Dept. of Energy, which said that negotiations with Mongolia should continue and that any further arrangements be made in a confidential manner. Toshiba's public relations department confirmed the existence of the emails to Yamada but denied that Toshiba had asked the Mongolian government to receive outside nuclear waste. The negotiations, it said, had more to do with "building on the system of nuclear nonproliferation."

Aikawa told Yamada that while ostensibly the negotiations were between the three governments, the plans for the deal were drawn up by the U.S. and Toshiba with the aim of selling nuclear power plants to emerging economies under a scheme called Comprehensive Fuel Service. According to this scheme, vendors assure potential customers that they will handle any future nuclear waste produced by power plants the customers buy, which is why Mongolia's acceptance of such waste is so important. Due to local resistance, neither the U.S. nor Japan has anywhere to dump spent fuel, even their own.

The reason Yamada became so interested in this topic years after the fact is that in the meantime, Toshiba has been caught up in financial scandals that have brought the company to its knees, and he wanted to **explore the connection between Toshiba's nuclear energy business and its fiscal woes.**

The connection itself is not a secret. **Toshiba spent almost ¥600 billion to buy its share of Westinghouse, which at the time of the purchase was only worth about ¥250 billion.** The extra "goodwill" money (*norendai*) was in anticipation of future revenues that would accrue as Toshiba expanded its nuclear energy business both in Japan and throughout the world with Westinghouse as its "trump card." But then Fukushima happened, putting a serious damper on demand for plant construction.

The revenues Toshiba envisioned didn't materialize, and the norendai became a huge liability it tried to hide through bookkeeping. Sasaki, his predecessor and his successor are all now being sued by Toshiba's management for ordering improper accounting practices after Nikkei Business reported that Toshiba was violating Tokyo Stock Exchange regulations regarding the disclosure of a subsidiary's losses.

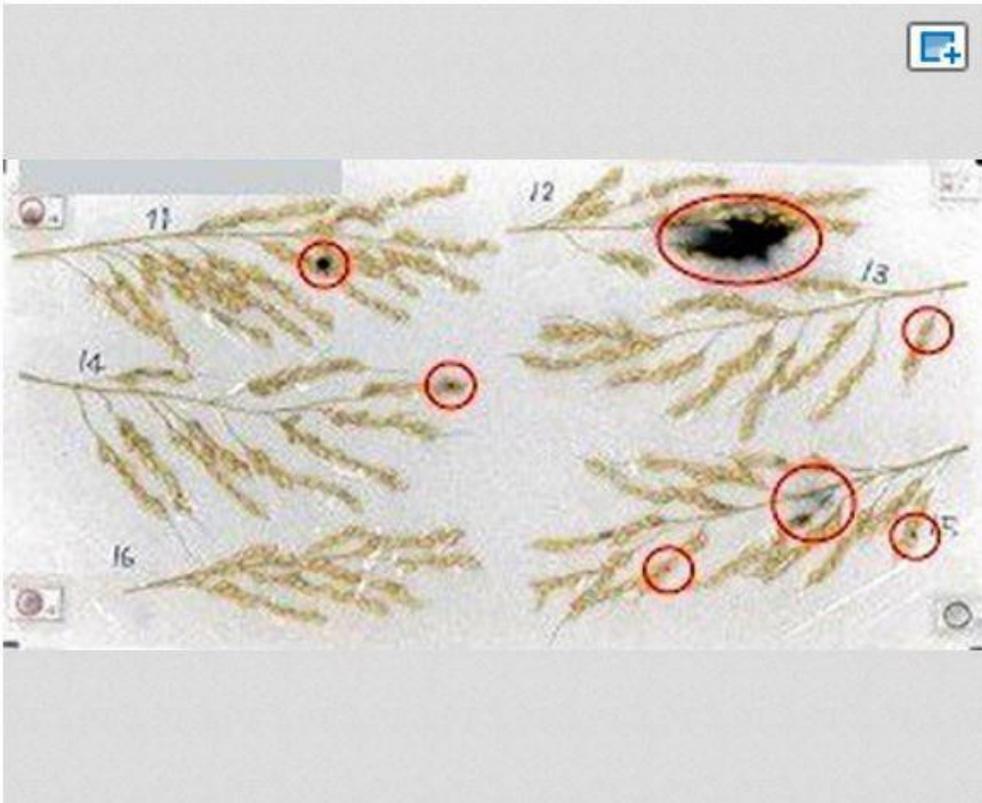
However, at the end of December, the Financial Services Agency, in its investigation of the accounting scandal, did not find Toshiba to be at fault, but rather punished the auditing firm of Ernst & Young ShinNihon for "failure to detect" Toshiba's improper accounting practices. In a follow-up article in the Jan. 11 issue of Aera, the reporter wondered if this arrangement didn't smack of "conspiracy," and an FSA representative told the magazine that the agency "suspected" as much but "could not find any evidence." For the next three months, ShinNihon is suspended from signing any new business contracts and must pay a "surcharge" of ¥2.1 billion. Though that may sound severe, industry people told Aera that usually in such cases penalized companies are suspended from conducting business altogether.

So why didn't the FSA accuse Toshiba of accounting fraud, especially given that it's not uncommon for auditors to revise their findings so as not to inconvenience powerful clients? As Yamada points out, the agency didn't even mention Westinghouse in its findings.

Perhaps the government still needs Toshiba, since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has pegged Japanese growth at least partly to the export of nuclear technology. In November, the Asahi Shimbun interviewed the CEO of Westinghouse, who said his company had plans to build dozens of new reactors all over the world, "including Japan." Abe is selling nuclear technology to Vietnam, Turkey and other countries, and in October he finalized a trade deal with Mongolia.

Ryoko Imaoka, an associate professor at Osaka University and longtime expert on Mongolia, has explained that **the U.S., desperate to find a friendly country to accept nuclear waste, was pushing Japan to make a deal with Mongolia. Japan publicly downplays the nuclear part of the trade agreement** and Japanese media have obliged, though Mitsubishi Corp. is already developing three new mines there. She says the country's currently dormant uranium pits remain extremely radioactive and it's not clear where any nuclear waste would be buried, but in any event there are Mongolians who are ready to sue to shut the whole thing down.

Rice contamination: Fukushima No.1 was the culprit



The black spots show radioactive particles found on the ears of rice harvested in autumn 2013 in Minami-Soma, Fukushima Prefecture. (Provided by Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries)

January 18, 2016

Researchers: No doubt cleanup at Fukushima nuclear plant contaminated rice crops in 2013

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201601180052>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

MINAMI-SOMA, Fukushima Prefecture--Radioactive substances that contaminated rice paddies here in 2013 came from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, an **international group of researchers** said, rejecting a denial issued by Japan's nuclear safety authority.

The researchers, led by Akio Koizumi, a professor at Kyoto University's Graduate School of Medicine, reached the conclusion after analyzing radioactive substances and taking spot readings of radioactivity levels around Minami-Soma.

Koizumi presented the final report of the group, consisting of 11 researchers from Japan, Europe and the United States, to local farmers and other parties at a community center in Minami-Soma on Jan. 17.

"The cause of further contamination was the radioactive particles dispersed from contaminated rubble during the cleanup effort at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant," Koizumi concluded in the report.

Earlier, the agriculture ministry and the Nuclear Regulatory Authority (NRA) gave different views on the source of the contaminated rice.

In 2013, rice crops from areas of Minami-Soma were found with unexpectedly high radioactivity levels more than two years after the triple meltdown at the nuclear plant located 20 kilometers south of the city. One theory was that highly radioactive substances were dispersed when workers were lifting and removing contaminated rubble at the Fukushima plant on Aug. 19 that year. Two workers at the plant were exposed to high doses of radiation during the cleanup process.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries said the cause of the contaminated rice was “unknown” although it acknowledged “the possibility of the dispersal of contaminated dust.” The farm ministry discontinued its investigation without specifying the source of the contamination.

The NRA, however, said the contaminated rice was not related to the cleanup work at the nuclear plant. The Minami-Soma city assembly expressed outrage over the NRA’s stance. Some in the city suspected the NRA of a cover-up.

Koizumi and the other researchers digitally recreated an accidental dispersal of contaminated dust from the plant in August 2013.

They used a new analysis system to estimate the amount of radioactive cesium that spread toward Minami-Soma based on radioactivity readings around the city and other factors.

The group’s cesium estimate was more than 3.6 times the amount initially estimated by the NRA.

The research group in September 2014 also collected soil samples from 10 locations around the contaminated rice paddies to determine the amount of strontium 90 in the area.

They confirmed that the ratio of strontium 90 to radioactive cesium in the soil samples was similar to the ratio that would be found near the Fukushima nuclear plant.

Beta-ray emitting strontium 90 is less airborne and tends to remain within close proximity of nuclear weapon testing sites or nuclear accidents. Radioactive cesium is more volatile and can easily adhere to fine dust spread by the wind.

In general, the amount of strontium 90 decreases the farther it gets from a nuclear plant, compared with radioactive cesium. In fact, hardly any strontium 90 has been detected far away from the Fukushima plant. Based on the amounts of radioactive particles recorded around Minami-Soma, the researchers concluded that a highly irregular plume of radioactive cesium reached Minami-Soma on the third week of August 2013.

“Every single piece of data in the paper supports the fact that contamination by radioactive dust came from the debris at the nuclear plant,” Koizumi said.

Asked about the NRA’s conclusion, Koizumi said: “It seems they were blinded by their estimated amount of dispersed particles, and their choice for the analysis system was misguided. This kind of attitude would only increase the anxiety of residents in the affected areas.”

The group’s findings were published in the international academic journal [Environmental Science & Technology](#) last month after a peer review.

(This article was written by Masakazu Honda and Miki Aoki.)

An old story with updates

What has happened to Japan's radioactive cars?

When the nuclear reactors in Fukushima exploded in 2011, approximately 8,000 square kilometers were heavily contaminated with fallout and residents were forced to evacuate, probably for the rest of their lives. This news has been widely reported, but another aspect of the contamination received almost no coverage. It took a while for authorities to lock down the evacuation zones, and in those first few weeks there appeared to be no awareness of the need to control the movement of contaminated property out of the zone. People's clothes and belongings, even their cash, were likely covered in radioactive dust, but the objects of most obvious concern should have been vehicles.

Because the government failed to quickly control the movement of vehicles and guarantee fair compensation to owners, people stuck with a "hot car" had to choose between taking a total loss on an expensive and essential personal asset, or selling it as soon as possible before the market woke up to the risk and valued these cars at zero. Within a few months there were reports of radioactive cars showing up in used car lots far from Fukushima. It seems to have not occurred to any journalists writing about this problem that TEPCO and the Japanese government had a moral obligation to compensate car owners whose vehicles were ruined by radiation. People wring their hands about what can be done to stop these sales, but they fail to see that the only question is whether the guilty parties, and/or insurance companies, are going to offer the fair value that these vehicles had on March 10, 2011.

Dealers recognized that there was going to be a lot of trouble from shifting radioactive cars around domestically, so they also turned to the export market. There were reports of hundreds of Japanese used cars being turned away at ports in Russia and Australia. Then the Japanese government cracked down, as much as they could (always reactive rather than proactive – a day late and a dollar short), so more radioactive cars started showing up at domestic dealers. But dealers and consumers got wise and bought dosimeters to make sure that they didn't get stuck with a worthless car. Still, unscrupulous exporters had enough control over some ports to get some cars out, and they turned to countries that were least likely to be checking. In the fall of 2012 reports came out of African nations telling of radioactive Japanese imports showing up there. Apparently, they are not all as easy to fool as the Japanese exporters believed. Some countries, lacking the instruments to check every used car imported from Japan, have entirely banned them. African policy specialist and journalist, Chika Ezeanya, reported from Nigeria:

"Cars having up to twenty times the permissible level of radiation have found their way to African countries where several governments are clueless or unconcerned about such health risks. Governments of Kenya and Tanzania however, are among the few African countries, who, unable to afford the high cost of testing all incoming vehicles, have expressly banned the importation of cars from Japan into their markets. The Kenyan government went as far as destroying some cars after it hired independent firms to test for radiation levels."

Sadly, this is just one more example of how Japan deliberately and/or neglectfully blunders through international soft diplomacy and tarnishes its own image. It is incredible that Toyota, Nissan, Mazda, Honda and Suzuki don't care more about what radioactive car exports could do to their brands. If they cared, they would pressure the government to assert control over used car exports. Whether it's a First World, valuable market or a Third World nation that buys mostly used cars, these struggling Japanese brands cannot afford to be complacent.

[...]

Updates:

July 2014:

Jay Ramey. "Radioactive cars from Japan keep turning up in Central Asia." *Autoweek*. July 11, 2014.

This report states that persistent exporters are finding ways to get through strict controls at major ports. Radioactive used cars are now coming to market in Central Asia through minor road border crossings. A director of the Disease Prevention Department in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan said the cars can't be sent back, so they might turn them into scrap. I'm not sure how they think that is a solution because scrapping means recycling the material into other consumer goods.

If the Japanese car industry were being managed intelligently, the major manufacturers would have long ago set up a buy-back program for radioactive cars, just as they can afford to do with recalls on other defective products. It would save their brand reputation overseas. It's shameful that they so badly disregarded the safety of consumers in the the developing world and underestimated their ability to detect radioactive cars.

Radioactive cars from Japan keep turning up in Central Asia
July 10, 2014

Read more: <http://autoweek.com/article/car-news/radioactive-cars-japan-keep-turning-central-asia#ixzz3xd3450j6>

<http://autoweek.com/article/car-news/radioactive-cars-japan-keep-turning-central-asia>

A total of 70 used cars imported from Japan and found to have increased levels of radiation are being stored in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and cannot be sent back, according to Silk Road Reporters citing local news outlets. Car retailers in Kyrgyzstan, who have been importing significant numbers of used cars from Japan for resale in the country, have been finding cars that exhibit levels of radiation above normal. Several batches of cars have been seized by the government during the last three years and have at times been sent back to Japan through an agreement with the Japanese government. However, irradiated cars keep turning up in Bishkek, the capital, and not all of them are being detected in a timely manner.

"These cars cannot be dispatched back. Neither China nor Japan will accept them. For this reason, we have to keep them here and deal with their further disposal," Tolo Isakov, director of the Disease Prevention Department in Bishkek, told the AKIpress news outlet, according to Silk Road Reporters.

Isakov told AKIpress and Novosti.kg, another Bishkek-based news outlet, that currently a decision is being made whether to scrap the cars. The cars have been quarantined in an impound lot, but the local authorities do not know what to do with them. The batch of (so far) 70 cars has been building up in the impound lot over time, with cars having come through several other countries. Isakov did not mention the levels of radioactivity that have been detected in these cars, though it is expected to vary from car to car. The import of used Japanese cars is big business in Central Asia, especially in Mongolia and the Russian far-east regions that are the largest consumers of used Japanese cars in the area. In cities like Vladivostok, Russia, RHD Japanese cars make up roughly 50 percent of all registered passenger cars.

A shipment of 132 irradiated cars was recently detected coming into the port of Vladivostok in January 2014, with the cars having been barred from entry in port, according to the Australian website CarsGuide. Russia has been more successful at detecting irradiated cars coming in from Japan due to stringent checks in the ports of Vladivostok and Khabarovsk. However, that is mainly due to the direct route that cargo ships with used cars normally take, in addition to systematic screenings by customs officials. The routes

that used Japanese cars usually take to small Central Asian countries like Kyrgyzstan are more circuitous, and cars with radiation levels above normal frequently escape detection as they are driven across the border on license plates from neighboring countries.

January 2014:

Livern Barrett. "Radiation Alert - Harmful Elements Detected At Ports In Shipments From Japan." *The Gleaner*, Jamaica, January 10, 2014.

"It could be that there is a weakness in the inspection process..."

More than 130 radioactive cars from Japan seized by Russia in 2013.

September 2013:

Russia's Far East Beset with Toxic Japanese Cars

Chinese Customs Seize Radioactive Scrap Metal from Japan

AIEA on NRA: Improved on transparency but can do better on screening and expertise

January 22, 2016

IAEA: Japan nuclear regulation should improve skills, law

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160122/p2g/00m/0dm/062000c>

TOKYO (AP) -- A team of experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency says Japan's nuclear safety regulation has improved since the 2011 Fukushima disaster, but it still needs to strengthen inspections and staff competency.

It's the first IAEA review for the authority since it was established in 2012. Japan adopted stricter safety requirement for plant operators, but the law stipulating on-site inspections has remained unchanged. The 17-member team, which concluded a 12-day inspection that included the wrecked Fukushima plant, said Friday that Japan's regulatory body demonstrated independence and transparency -- crucial elements lacking before the disaster, when a separate agency was in charge.

The team urged the Nuclear Regulation Authority to enhance inspection competence and Japan's government to amend its nuclear safety law to make on-site safety checks more effective and flexible.

IAEA assesses Japan's nuclear regulator

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Jan. 22, 2016 - Updated 08:22 UTC+1

The International Atomic Energy Agency says Japan's nuclear regulator has been independent and transparent since its launch, but needs better screening and expertise.

The IAEA held hearings on Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority since January 11th for its first assessment of the regulator.

The authority was established one year after the 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant. The UN watchdog conducts such assessments of regulatory frameworks for nuclear and radiation safety at the request of member countries.

The agency provided an outline of its assessment on Friday, the last day of the procedure.

It said the authority is transparent and independent of nuclear plant promoters, and has tightened its safety measures. But it called on the regulator to **work to attract competent and experienced staff and enhance its skills regarding nuclear and radiation safety.**

The agency also advised that the regulator's inspection procedures be made more flexible to allow for focusing inspections on key facilities.

Assessment team leader Philippe Jamet said his team recommended that Japan adopt more top experts, as many of the country's nuclear power stations are to resume operation. Jamet is the commissioner of the French Nuclear Safety Authority.

The team plans to compile an official report in April.

Faulty control at the Nuclear Material Control Center

January 22, 2016

Data leaked from Japan nuclear inspection body via Chinese software

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160122/p2a/00m/0na/023000c>

Unspecified data leaked from the nonprofit Nuclear Material Control Center in Tokyo last year **after an employee installed Chinese-made file sharing software without permission**, inviting unauthorized access from a Chinese server, according to people close to the case.

Although the chances of classified information having been leaked are low, the center's lax information control is likely to come under scrutiny.

Under the center's in-house regulations, it was obliged to report the case to the secretariat of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA), but failed to do so, judging the leak did not constitute a threat to nuclear security. The NRA, which oversees the center, is questioning the public interest incorporated foundation about the episode.

According to the NRA secretariat and other sources, the employee belongs to the inspection section of the center's Rokkasho Safeguards Center in Aomori Prefecture. The regional center oversees Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd.'s spent fuel reprocessing and uranium enrichment plants, Tohoku Electric Power Co.'s Higashidori Nuclear Power Station, and other facilities in Aomori Prefecture. **Staffers at the Rokkasho center are in charge of maintaining and managing surveillance cameras and measurement equipment necessary for inspections.**

The Rokkasho center's internal documents say the employee in question installed the Chinese-made file sharing software called Xunlei. The Chinese software is used to view video content but presents a high risk of information leaks.

In-house rules ban the use of file sharing software, but the employee installed the Chinese program along with other free software in April last year.

The Nuclear Material Control Center logged 12 cases of unauthorized access alone last September, and found records of data transmissions to a Chinese server. The center has been unable to find out what kind of data was leaked, but suggests that the employee's PC did not contain classified information such as on nuclear materials.

The center has worked with a private company since late August last year to keep constant tabs on communications with the outside as part of measures to fight data leaks. This outsourcing company found out about the unauthorized access, and **it is possible the illicit access had been going on since before the beefed-up security policy.**

The NRA secretariat employee in charge of safeguards says that the center's failure to notify the agency of the security breach is considered inappropriate, and that the agency plans to have the center tighten information controls. **Kenji Murakami, president of the Nuclear Material Control Center, declined to be interviewed, saying he had no time.**

Suspected data leak at nuclear inspection body

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Jan. 22, 2016 - Updated 12:31 UTC+1

A Japanese agency in charge of inspecting, analyzing, and processing information about nuclear material management says data may have leaked from one of its computers through file-sharing software.

The Tokyo-based Nuclear Material Control Center said on Friday that the suspected leak of data on inspection equipment occurred last September at **Rokkasho Safeguards Center**, in Aomori Prefecture, northern Japan.

Officials of the center said **a monitoring system detected that unspecified data was being sent to outside computers.**

They said an employee at Rokkasho apparently installed the software without knowing it. File-sharing software is prohibited by in-house rules.

The center did not report the case to the government's Nuclear Regulation Authority.

The center is commissioned by the authority to check whether nuclear facilities handle radioactive material properly.

Another computer at Rokkasho Safeguards Center contains important data about where plutonium is stored and when the material has been transported.

The officials said an investigation will look into whether the file-sharing software in question has been installed on other computers, and whether critical data has leaked.

IAEA mission makes recommendations

<https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/iaea-mission-says-japan%E2%80%99s-regulatory-body-made-fast-progress-sees-challenges-ahead>

January 22, 2016

IAEA Mission Says Japan's Regulatory Body Made Fast Progress, Sees Challenges Ahead

Tokyo, Japan

2016/3

An International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) team of experts said Japan's regulatory body for nuclear and radiation safety has demonstrated independence and transparency since it was set up in 2012. The team also noted that it needs to further strengthen its technical competence in light of upcoming restarts of nuclear facilities.

The Integrated Regulatory Review Service (IRRS) team today concluded a 12-day mission to assess the regulatory framework for nuclear and radiation safety in Japan which was modified following the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. The modification included the establishment of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) in September 2012.

"In the few years since its establishment, the NRA has demonstrated its independence and transparency. It has established new regulatory requirements for nuclear installations and reviewed the first restart applications by utilities," said team leader Philippe Jamet, Commissioner of the French Nuclear Safety Authority. "This intensive and impressive work must continue with equal commitment, as there are still significant challenges in the years to come."

IRRS missions are designed to strengthen the effectiveness of the national nuclear regulatory infrastructure, while recognizing the responsibility of each State to ensure nuclear safety.

Before being halted following the Fukushima Daiichi accident, Japan's nuclear power reactors produced about 30 per cent of the country's electricity generation. Two reactors were restarted in 2015 with NRA authorization, and the regulatory body is reviewing other restart applications using the new

requirements. The country also has fuel cycle facilities, research reactors and widely uses nuclear applications in other fields.

The team of experts made recommendations and suggestions to the NRA and the Government to help them enhance the implementation of Japan's regulatory framework to strengthen nuclear and radiation safety.

They reviewed the responsibilities and functions of the Government and the regulatory body for safety, the authorization of nuclear and radiation facilities and activities, safety assessments, inspections of nuclear facilities, emergency preparedness and response, and several other areas in the field of nuclear and radiation safety.

The experts met with staff of the NRA, observed regulatory activities including inspections, and visited nuclear-related sites. They also met with other Japanese officials.

The IRRS team comprised 19 experts from 17 countries - Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Ireland, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America - and five IAEA staff.

"The IRRS team members made great efforts to thoroughly review the activities of the NRA," said NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka. "NRA will seriously consider the findings in striving to further enhance nuclear safety and security in Japan."

"Japan has reformed its regulatory system with impressive speed and effectiveness following the Fukushima Daiichi accident. Today, the system provides for clearer responsibilities and greater authority to the regulatory body," said Juan Carlos Lentijo, IAEA Deputy Director General and Head of the Department for Safety and Security. "The NRA is on a good path to continue this crucial progress in the future. Its work must continue to ensure that the new regulatory system is applied fully to all facilities and activities."

The IRRS team identified good practices:

- The swift establishment of a legal and governmental framework that supports a new independent and transparent regulatory body with increased powers.
- NRA's prompt and effective incorporation of lessons learnt from the Fukushima Daiichi accident in the areas of natural hazards, severe accident management, emergency preparedness and safety upgrades of existing facilities, into Japan's new regulatory framework.

The mission provided recommendations and suggestions for improvements in most of the areas covered by the review. Examples include:

- **The NRA should work to attract competent and experienced staff, and enhance staff skills relevant to nuclear and radiation safety through education, training, research and enhanced international cooperation.**
- **Japanese authorities should amend relevant legislation to allow NRA to perform more effective inspections of nuclear and radiation facilities.**
- **The NRA and all entities it regulates should continue to strengthen the promotion of safety culture, including by fostering a questioning attitude.**

The final mission report will be provided to the Japanese Government in about three months. The Japanese Government has announced that it plans to make the report public.

Compensation after nuclear accidents: Where should the limit be?

January 24, 2016

Panel begins debate on limit of compensation in event of nuclear accident

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/24/national/panel-begins-debate-limit-compensation-event-nuclear-accident/>

JJI

The Japan Atomic Energy Commission has started full discussions by experts on whether to limit the power plant operator's liability to pay damage compensation in the event of a nuclear accident. Currently, nuclear plant operators in Japan bear unlimited liability for compensation, but some experts demand that a ceiling be set for their responsibility.

The discussions are expected to be difficult, as limiting the liability would raise the problem of how to compensate affected people and businesses for the damage in excess of the limit.

For the March 2011 triple meltdown accident at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 plant, Tepco shoulders full liability for compensation under the nuclear compensation law.

But as Tepco alone cannot finance all the costs for compensation payments and decontamination work, the government set aside ¥9 trillion in assistance, which has been provided to the company through Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp., a public-private organization. Tepco repays the aid little by little.

Electric power industry people have been pushing for a cap on nuclear plant operators' liability for compensation. "If the sky's the limit for compensation, we cannot project an outlook for our nuclear energy business," a senior official of a major power utility said.

In line with the government's policy of continuing to use nuclear energy, an expert panel of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission started debate last year on any problems with the current compensation regime.

Some panel members argued for a limited liability system. "Shouldering risks that go beyond the limit of the private sector will impede fund procurement by electric power companies," one member said.

On the other hand, a separate member said, "Limited liability is not an option, considering the current situation of Fukushima."

There are also concerns that a narrower scope of responsibility for power companies could be detrimental to their commitment to safety.

With the panel divided sharply, a government official said no conclusion is expected at an early date.

The expert panel plans to produce a report on their discussions next year, and the government will subsequently start working on any necessary amendments to the nuclear compensation law.

Even if the nuclear compensation system is revised, past nuclear accidents will not be covered by a limited liability system.

Among countries that impose limits on an electric power company's liability of compensation for a nuclear accident, the United States sets the maximum liability at \$12.6 billion and Britain has a ceiling of £140 million (\$199.7 million), according to the Japan Atomic Energy Commission. Under the U.S. system, if the scale of nuclear damage exceeds the limit, the president proposes a supplementary compensation program to the Congress.

Has Kyushu Electric been cheating?

January 24, 2016

Kyushu Electric accused of 'cheap trick' in forgoing quake-proof center at Sendai plant

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201601240026

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Kyushu Electric Power Co. is being lambasted by the public and scholars after backtracking on plans for a quake-proof building at its Sendai nuclear plant after two reactors were restarted.

The utility will forgo the project since an alternative building at the plant in Kagoshima Prefecture has passed inspection by the Nuclear Regulation Authority.

The decision was made after two reactors at the Sendai plant resumed operations last year.

Kyushu Electric's change of heart has infuriated citizens' groups opposed to nuclear energy, with some calling it a "cheap trick."

Tadahiro Katsuta, associate professor of nuclear energy policy at Meiji University, who was involved in drawing up new safety standards that called for facilities from where nuclear reactors could be safely operated even in emergencies, criticized the utility.

"It seems that Kyushu Electric, which had been concerned about the NRA response, has gone on the counter-offensive now that the safety screening results are in," Katsuta said. "Unless this trend is stopped, it could continue on to affect other issues beyond the quake-proof building and return to the days before the Fukushima nuclear disaster when regulatory agencies were not in an advantageous position (vis-a-vis the utilities)."

Before the Sendai reactors resumed operations in August and October 2015, Kyushu Electric had announced plans to build the quake-proof building by the end of fiscal 2015. However, in December 2015, the utility turned around and said it would cancel the building plan and use a much smaller building to handle major emergencies at the Sendai plant.

Even Shunichi Tanaka, NRA chairman, appeared taken aback by the shift in position by Kyushu Electric.

"The company obtained approval with the quake-proof building as a precondition so it should fundamentally abide by that stance," Tanaka said. "While we would welcome any change that moves in a safer direction, if it is only being done to save money then we will have to significantly intensify the screening process."

The NRA is expected to hear an explanation from Kyushu Electric on Jan. 26.

The need for quake-proof buildings arose from the lessons learned after the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture, operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co., was damaged in the 2007 Niigata Chuetsu-oki Earthquake.

Such buildings played an important role in bringing the nuclear accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant under control after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Kyushu Electric applied for a safety screening with the NRA in July 2013 after it said it would construct a three-story quake-proof building and include in it an emergency response center with a planned floor space of about 620 square meters.

Such centers have become mandatory under new safety standards for nuclear plants. While those rooms have to be able to function even after being hit by earthquakes and other natural disasters, the structure does not have to be quake-proof.

Because Kyushu Electric was hurrying to restart the Sendai reactors, it completed an alternative emergency response center in September 2013 that has about 170 square meters of floor space. The one-story structure is quake-resistant, but not quake-proof.

Kyushu Electric said that center would only be used until the quake-proof building was completed.

That alternative center allowed Kyushu Electric to become the first utility to pass the NRA safety screening under the stricter safety standards.

Kyushu Electric also said it was upgrading the alternative center into its permanent emergency response center because it had been found acceptable and there was no longer a need to build the quake-proof structure.

In addition, Kyushu Electric will construct a quake-resistant two-story building with two basement floors next to the emergency response center that will have lodging space for workers who will be on call to provide support in an emergency.

(This article was written by Junichiro Nagasaki, Maiko Kobayashi and Hiromi Kumai.)

16 billion yen of taxpayer money to promote MOX projects

January 24, 2016

Japan doles out over ¥16 billion in subsidies for slow-moving MOX projects

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/24/national/science-health/japan-doles-%C2%A516-billion-subsidies-slow-moving-mox-projects/#.VqUByFKDmov>

JJI

The government has used taxpayer money to provide over ¥16.2 billion in subsidies to local governments for promoting so-called pluthermal power generation using mixed oxide fuel (MOX), a survey has shown. The subsidies, financed with revenue from a tax for power-resources development imposed on electricity users, have been distributed to local governments that accepted pluthermal power generation at facilities in their regions.

The Jiji Press survey released Saturday illustrates that a large amount of taxpayers' money has been spent on the pluthermal project in order to win support from local governments.

The project, a key part of the country's nuclear fuel cycle policy, uses MOX fuel, a mixture of uranium and plutonium extracted from spent nuclear fuel.

So far, just four reactors in Japan have used MOX fuel, including reactor 2 at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. The reactor, set to be decommissioned, experienced a core meltdown after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

The Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan hopes to eventually raise the nation's total number of reactors carrying out pluthermal generation to somewhere between 16 and 18.

However, pluthermal projects have failed to progress as expected, prompting critics to urge the central government to conduct an immediate review of its policy.

The other three reactors that have run on MOX fuel are the No. 3 reactor at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Genkai plant in Saga Prefecture, the No. 3 reactor at Shikoku Electric Power Co.'s Ikata plant in Ehime Prefecture and the No. 3 reactor at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama plant in Fukui Prefecture. The Takahama plant reactor is set to be rebooted later this month using MOX fuel.

The survey found that seven of the nine prefectural governments and all of the 10 other municipalities entitled to the subsidies — one to promote the fuel-cycle policy and the other to support host municipalities — have actually received the payments.

The exceptions, Hokkaido and Shizuoka prefecture, have refrained from applying for the subsidies. While the Fukushima disaster has spurred safety concerns among citizens, a series of scandals — including attempts to influence public opinion — in favor of pluthermal projects — have eroded trust in the plan, sources said.

In Hokkaido, the No. 3 reactor at Hokkaido Electric Co.'s Tomari plant has been designated for pluthermal power generation. In Shizuoka Prefecture, the No. 4 reactor at Chubu Electric Power Co.'s Hamaoka plant has also been tapped for the pluthermal project.

Of the four prefectures where pluthermal generation has been carried out, Saga received ¥6.097 billion in state subsidies and Ehime was given a total of ¥6.059 billion by the end of fiscal 2014.

Fukui, meanwhile, has received ¥2.486 billion as of the end of 2013 and is expected to get more subsidies through fiscal 2015.

Group forms to keep an eye on TEPCO's criminal trial

January 27, 2016

Group to monitor trial of former TEPCO executives to clarify truth about Fukushima disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201601270055>

By MASAKAZU HONDA/ Staff Writer

Lawyers, journalists and scientists will form a group to help expose the truth and spread details about the Fukushima nuclear disaster during the criminal trial of three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co.

“We will encourage the court to hold a fair trial while transmitting information regarding the trial across the nation,” said an official of the planned organization, whose name is translated as “support group for the criminal procedure on the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.”

Tsunehisa Katsumata, former chairman of TEPCO, the operator of the crippled plant, and two former vice presidents, Sakae Muto and Ichiro Takekuro, face mandatory charges of professional negligence resulting in death and injury.

Although the trial is still months away, 33 people are now setting up the group, including **Ruiko Muto**, who heads an organization pursuing the criminal responsibility of TEPCO and government officials for the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Tetsuji Imanaka, an assistant professor of nuclear engineering at the Kyoto University Research Reactor Institute, and Norma Field, a professor emeritus of East Asian Studies at the University of Chicago, have also joined.

Three reactors melted down at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck on March 11, 2011. A number of hospital patients died in the chaotic evacuation. About 14,000 residents of Fukushima Prefecture filed a criminal complaint against TEPCO executives, government officials and scientists in 2012, saying they were aware of the dangers to the Fukushima nuclear plant from a tsunami, but they failed in their responsibility to take proper countermeasures. Tokyo prosecutors twice decided not to indict the three former TEPCO executives. However, the Tokyo No. 5 Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution, a panel of citizens, decided to forcibly indict the three in July last year.

“It has been almost five years since the disaster, but many details, including their foreseeability of the tsunami, remain unclear,” said science writer **Takashi Soeda**, one of the group’s co-founders. “As TEPCO has not unveiled a sufficient amount of information even in inquiries conducted by the Diet and the government or in civil lawsuits, the truth must be uncovered through the legal force of a criminal trial.” Five lawyers appointed by the Tokyo District Court will act as prosecutors in the trial.

Legal experts expect the lawyers will indict the former TEPCO executives and release a statement naming the victims around March 11, the fifth anniversary of the triple disaster that still haunts the Tohoku region.

Grant of over 13 billion yen given to TEPCO

Press Releases 2016

http://www.tepco.co.jp/en/press/corp-com/release/2016/1266357_7763.html

Press Release (Jan 22, 2016) Financial Assistance from the Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corporation

On January 22, we received a funding grant of 13.4 billion yen from the Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corporation (hereinafter referred to as NDF) based on the revision of the Special Business Plan which was approved on July 28, 2015.

This financial assistance was given in response to the 48th request we made in order to cover the compensation payouts due by the end of February 2016. **The amount of the payouts to be paid by that time had been estimated to exceed the sum of the compensation we had received in accordance with the "Act on Contract for Indemnification of Nuclear Damage Compensation" (188.9 billion yen) and the financial assistance that the NDF has provided (5.7475 trillion yen).**

With financial assistance from the NDF, we are determined **to continue to pay the compensation with courtesy and compassion** to all of those who have been afflicted by the nuclear damage.

Sendai emergency building: Safety claim groundless, says NRA

January 26, 2016

Regulator rejects plant's emergency office plan

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20160126_35.html

Jan. 26, 2016 - Updated 12:16 UTC+1

Japan's nuclear regulator has rejected an application by the operator of the Sendai plant to continue using an existing building as an emergency office.

It says **the operator's revised plan to keep using the building as an emergency office will not ensure improved safety.**

The No.1 and No.2 reactors at the Sendai plant in southwestern Japan were put back online last year.

During the reactors' screening process, Kyushu Electric Power Company submitted a plan to build a structure with the latest quake-absorbing technology, including the emergency office, by the end of March this year.

The utility cleared the screening by constructing a temporary building for use until the quake-absorbing one is completed.

But last month, the utility submitted a revised plan to the Nuclear Regulation Authority, saying the existing building is fully capable of serving as an emergency office.

Under the revised plan, the utility will not construct a quake-absorbent structure and will only build a quake-resistant support facility with break rooms and a doctor's office.

Utility officials explained at Tuesday's meeting of the regulator that the quake-resistant technology has already passed the screening process, and so the new building **could be opened earlier.** They say this would ensure greater safety at the plant.

Authority member Toyoshi Fuketa said the application does not explain when the facility could be put into service, and so **the claim of improved safety is groundless.** He asked Kyushu Electric Power to submit a new application.

The utility says it will consider what to do, with an eye to reapplication.

The issue of the emergency office does not affect the regular operations of the plant.

Needed: Faster communication for nuclear accidents

January 26, 2016

Faster communication sought for nuclear accidents

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/20160127_05.html

Jan. 26, 2016 - Updated 23:32 UTC+1

The Japanese government is to consider introducing a dedicated communication system between central and local officials to ensure they can share crucial information in the event of a nuclear accident.

Officials at the Cabinet Office and the Nuclear Regulation Authority will study connecting local governments to the computer system from fiscal 2017.

The officials say this system displays the development of an accident and the responses to it in chronological order and stores evacuation instructions and other documents.

They say the system is used for communications between a government task force and the offsite emergency response center of a nuclear power plant.

Such information is mainly sent to local governments by fax.

Central and local officials who took part in a disaster drill at the Ikata plant in Ehime Prefecture last November complained that faxing was too slow and they could not be sure if the other party had received the information.

Immediately after the 2011 Fukushima accident, some of the evacuation information sent from the central government did not reach local authorities.

A fax about iodine tablets was not noticed for some time at the offsite center of the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

The Cabinet Office says it wants to connect local authorities to the system to secure multiple communication routes and to make sure that information will be delivered quickly and accurately.

Takahama restart ignores safety concerns

January 28, 2016

EDITORIAL: Takahama reactor restart raises fresh nuclear safety concerns

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201601280025>

The No. 3 reactor at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama nuclear power plant in Takahama, Fukui Prefecture, is set to restart on Jan. 29.

It will be the third nuclear reactor to be brought back online under stricter safety regulations drawn up by the Nuclear Regulation Authority after the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011.

The No. 1 and No. 2 reactors of Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai nuclear plant in Kagoshima Prefecture were brought back online in August and October, respectively.

This March will mark the fifth anniversary of the catastrophic accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Electric utilities have formally requested that the NRA inspect 25 of the 43 reactors across the nation, plus one under construction, to determine whether they meet the new safety standards.

The No. 3 unit at Shikoku Electric Power Co.'s Ikata nuclear power plant in Ehime Prefecture is expected to be the next reactor to go online following the ones at the Sendai and Takahama plants.

We are deeply concerned about offline reactors starting up again one after another, especially as there are troubling signs that the bitter lessons from Fukushima are being lost.

Once again we express our opposition to the plan to restart the Takahama plant reactor.

SAFETY CONCERNS BEING IGNORED

In a July 2011 editorial, we called for a major shift in the government's energy policy to build a society without nuclear power generation.

Before the 2011 calamity, nuclear energy accounted for nearly 30 percent of power supply in Japan.

There was concern that terminating nuclear power generation immediately would trigger a massive power crunch and soaring electricity bills, seriously impacting people's livelihoods.

We argued that Japan should sharply reduce its dependence on atomic power and strive to build a society powered mainly by renewable energy sources.

We also maintained that offline nuclear reactors should be allowed to resume operations only after their safety has been ascertained and they were clearly necessary for meeting demand for electricity.

The first thing to point out about the plan to bring the reactor at the Takahama plant back on stream is that the "safety first" principle has been ignored.

The grim lesson we learned from Fukushima is that nuclear accidents far above anyone's expectations can actually happen.

Fifteen nuclear reactors are located around Wakasa Bay in Fukui Prefecture, including some that are being decommissioned. This area has one of the highest concentrations of nuclear power facilities in the world. What would happen if a natural disaster, for instance, triggers severe accidents at more than one nuclear power plant in a particular area?

No clear answer has been given to this question, which was raised by the Fukushima triple meltdown.

The NRA paid scant attention to this risk in its safety inspection of the reactor at the Takahama plant.

Last year, Kansai Electric Power decided to scrap two small and aged reactors in Fukui Prefecture, where it has 11 reactors in total. But the utility also decided to continue operating three reactors beyond their 40th year of service.

There is no denying that efforts to minimize the safety risks involved in the reactors in the prefecture have been grossly insufficient.

The No. 3 unit at the Takahama plant is a so-called plutonium-thermal reactor which burns mixed oxide (MOX) fuel consisting of plutonium blended with uranium. It should not be forgotten that this fact further increases safety concerns among local residents.

POOR SAFETY PROTECTION FOR RESIDENTS

The emergency evacuation plan, which should serve as the last protective shield for local residents during nuclear emergencies, is far from reliable.

Local governments of areas within 30 kilometers of a nuclear power plant are required to develop plans for emergency evacuations of local residents.

A total of 12 municipalities in the three prefectures of Fukui, Kyoto and Shiga are located within that distance of the Takahama plant. They have a combined population of 179,000.

Late last year, the government's Nuclear Emergency Preparedness Commission approved the wide-area evacuation plans that have been worked out by the three prefectures.

In the worst case scenario, local residents living within a 30-km radius would be evacuated to 56 cities and towns in the four prefectures of Fukui, Hyogo, Kyoto and Tokushima, according to these plans.

But only seven cities of the 56 municipalities have devised plans to accept evacuees in such a situation, according to a survey by The Asahi Shimbun.

Most of the municipal governments surveyed said they had concerns about factors such as their ability to secure necessary facilities, manpower and materials to accept evacuees and the possibility of vehicles contaminated with radiation entering their areas.

Their anxiety is by no means surprising given that before the Fukushima accident it was not assumed that residents living outside a 10-km radius of a nuclear power plant might have to be evacuated in a nuclear emergency.

Ensuring the effectiveness of evacuation plans requires repeated drills and reviews to evaluate the blueprints.

But no evacuation drill has been conducted under an evacuation plan for an area around the Takahama plant. It is deeply worrisome to see the reactor being restarted without confirmation of the feasibility and effectiveness of the evacuation plans.

In response to anxiety among local residents, many of the local governments of areas within 30 km of the plant asked Kansai Electric Power to give them the right to consent to a plan to restart a reactor.

But the utility rejected their requests, while the central government has stuck to the position that all that is required for a reactor restart is consent from the local governments of the area where it is located.

Restarting a reactor without solving these safety issues can only be described as a premature move.

ROAD MAP NEEDED FOR NUCLEAR-FREE FUTURE

Electric power companies have stressed concerns about stable power supply and rises in electricity charges due to increasing fuel costs as main reasons for their efforts to resume operations of idle reactors. But the situations related to these problems have been clearly changing prior to the fifth anniversary of the Fukushima disaster.

All nuclear reactors remained out of operation for nearly two years until last summer. But no serious power shortage occurred during the period.

In addition to various maneuverings by utilities to meet demand, such as delaying regular safety checks of their thermal power plants, spreading power-saving efforts among the public also contributed significantly to preventing a power crunch.

Kansai Electric Power's sales of electricity, for instance, have fallen by about 10 percent from before the Fukushima accident.

Deregulation of the power retail market will allow households to choose their suppliers, starting in April. This will make consumers even more conscious of the efficiency of their use of electricity.

After growing for a while because of factors blamed on the economic effects of shutting down reactors, Japan's trade deficit has started shrinking thanks to falls in fuel costs due to lower crude prices.

Kansai Electric Power says it can lower its electricity charges if the reactor at the Takahama plant starts running again. But amid serious safety concerns, this offers no convincing rationale for restarting the reactor.

Another big question related to reactor restarts is how to find a location for interim storage of spent nuclear fuel that is piling up in pools within nuclear power complexes.

The dispute over the plan to restart the reactor in Fukui Prefecture has underscored differences in the stance of the local communities calling for the implementation of the plan, and that of the Kansai region, which has generally been cautious about supporting the plan despite the fact that it consumes the electricity generated at the nuclear plant.

There can be no realistic vision for a future without nuclear power generation without support from the local communities that have been hosting nuclear plants for many years.

All the parties involved, including not only the central government but also areas that consume electricity generated at nuclear power plants, should work together to lay out such a future vision.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Jan. 28

Nuke restart strengthens utility's profits

January 30, 2016

Kyushu Electric expects financial windfall thanks to nuclear reactor restarts

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201601300040

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUKUOKA--Kyushu Electric Power Co. is expecting a **65 billion yen (\$536.8 million) net profit in fiscal 2015, in part due to the restart of two reactors** at its nuclear power plant in Kagoshima Prefecture.

This will be the first time the regional utility has posted a net profit in five years. The company reported a 114.6 billion yen net loss in fiscal 2014.

Its president, Michiaki Uriu, said the utility will now push for the early restarts of two reactors at its Genkai nuclear plant in Saga Prefecture.

"We have made all-out effort as a company to avoid losses for this fiscal year, and such efforts have borne fruit so far," Uriu said at the news conference announcing the profit forecast at the company's headquarters in Fukuoka on Jan. 29.

The utility said the resumption of the operation of the reactors at the Sendai nuclear power plant in Satsuma-Sendai had **reduced the company's fuel costs**.

Kyushu Electric also announced its forecast of posting 1.845 trillion yen in sales for fiscal 2015, which ends in March. This is down 1.5 percent from the previous year. It will also post 80 billion yen in ordinary profit, compared with a 73.6 billion yen loss in fiscal 2014.

The utility said the resumption of the No. 1 reactor at the Sendai plant in August 2015 and the No. 2 reactor in October helped the company reduce its reliance on thermal power plants, for which fuel is more expensive.

The company estimates that the reactor restarts would push up the company's total earnings by 78 billion yen for fiscal 2015.

The decline in oil prices has also helped the company to reduce fuel costs for thermal plants, which helped push up the company's net profit by about 30 billion yen.

Uriu said **the company will push for the early restart of No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at the Genkai plant to strengthen the utility's financial standing.**

"The impact of reactor restarts at the Sendai plant has been certainly large, but we are making profits thanks to such fluctuating factors as the declining fuel price," Uriu said. "We believe that we have not achieved a positive turnaround for our earnings structure yet."

The two reactors at the Sendai plant that were brought back online last year will be shut down for two to three months for a periodical inspection after fall 2016.

The company also hopes to improve its earnings structure to counter the liberalization of retail electricity sales starting April.

(This article was written by Shuhei Shibata and Junichiro Nagasaki.)

What nuclear "renaissance"?

Nuclear renaissance? Failing industry is running flat out to stand still

http://www.theecologist.org/News/news_analysis/2987010/nuclear_renaissance_failing_industry_is_running_flat_out_to_stand_still.html

Dr Jim Green

30th January 2016

Despite the endless rhetoric about a 'nuclear renaissance', there are fewer power reactors today than there were a decade ago, writes Jim Green. The one country with a really big nuclear build program is China, but no one expects it to meet its targets. And with over 200 reactor shut-downs due by 2040, the industry will have to run very hard indeed just to stay put.

Over the next 10-20 years, global nuclear capacity may increase marginally, with strong growth in China more than masking patterns of stagnation and decline elsewhere. Beyond that, the aging of the global fleet of power reactors will be sharply felt.

Ten new power reactors began supplying electricity last year (eight of them in China), and eight reactors were permanently shut down.

Nuclear power's 20-year pattern of stagnation continues. In 1995 there were 434 'operable' reactors - operating plus temporarily shut down reactors. In 2005 there were 441, and now there are 439.

Thus there are fewer reactors today than there were a decade ago. Moreover the 439 figure includes 41 reactors in Japan that have been shut down for several years, and not all of them will be restarted.

The nuclear power industry's malaise was all too evident at the COP21 UN climate change conference in Paris in December. Former World Nuclear Association executive Steve Kidd noted:

"It was entirely predictable that the nuclear industry achieved precisely nothing at the recent Paris COP21 talks and in the subsequent international agreement. ...

"Analysis of the submissions of the 196 governments that signed up to the Paris agreement, demonstrating their own individual schemes on how to reduce national carbon emissions, show that nearly all of them exclude nuclear power.

"The future is likely to repeat the experience of 2015 when 10 new reactors came into operation worldwide but 8 shut down. So as things stand, the industry is essentially running to stand still."

According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, only seven out of 196 countries mentioned nuclear power in their climate change mitigation plans prepared for the COP21 conference: China, India, Japan, Argentina, Turkey, Jordan and Niger.

Now it's getting nasty

A striking feature of the debates around the COP21 conference was the vitriol directed at the anti-nuclear and environmental movements. Tim Judson from the Nuclear Information and Resource Service noted:

"The industry's rhetoric is getting increasingly desperate and personal. The industry rolled out a new front group called 'Nuclear for Climate', which handed out thousands of copies of a book attacking anti-nuclear activists and blaming us for the climate crisis.

"Needless to say, their efforts to intimidate activists are backfiring. In fact, they have given us a clear sign of how close we are to winning.

"Greenpeace International's Kumi Naidoo reminded activists in a speech in December - in which he broadened the call for divestment to include nuclear, as well as fossil fuels - of the famous adage attributed to Gandhi about the path to victory: 'First they ignore you. Then they laugh at you. Then they fight you. And then you win.'"

Perhaps the five stages of grief are relevant as nuclear lobbyists confront the reality that the nuclear renaissance didn't eventuate and isn't likely to. Denial and anger are very much in evidence, along with some bargaining ('we need all low carbon power sources'), depression and, in time, acceptance.

China's great leap forward

With 30 operable reactors, 24 under construction, and many more in the pipeline, China remains the only country with significant nuclear expansion plans. China is unlikely to meet any of its targets - 58 GW by 2020, 110 GW by 2030 and up to 250 GW by 2050 - but growth will be significant nonetheless.

Growth could however be derailed by a serious accident, which is all the more likely because of China's inadequate nuclear safety standards, inadequate regulation, lack of transparency, repression of whistleblowers, world's worst insurance and liability arrangements, security risks, and widespread corruption.

There are fears, for example, that China may press ahead with its twin-EPR project at Taishan despite fears over the metallurgy of its reactor vessels and heads. Similar components supplied to the EPR at Flamanville in France have been found to have areas of excessive carbon leading to brittleness and possible failure in use. The French project is now on hold and may never be completed.

Over the next 10-20 years, global nuclear capacity may increase marginally, with strong growth in China more than masking patterns of stagnation and decline elsewhere. Beyond that, the aging of the global fleet of power reactors will be sharply felt: the International Energy Agency anticipates almost 200 permanent shut-downs by 2040.

Steve Kidd notes that the industry is running to stand still, and it will have to run faster to stand still as the annual number of shut-downs increases.

Growth elsewhere?

India is the only other country where there is a possibility of significant nuclear growth in the nearish-future. But nuclear growth in India has been modest - six reactor start-ups over the past decade - and may remain so.

In early 2015, India claimed to have resolved one of the major obstacles to foreign investment by announcing measures to circumvent a liability law which does not completely absolve suppliers of responsibility for accidents.

But those claims were met with scepticism and a capital strike by most foreign suppliers is still in effect. Strong public opposition - and the Indian state's brutal response to that opposition - will also continue to slow nuclear expansion.

India has just signed an 'preliminary agreement' with EDF to build a massive six-reactor EPR project at Jaitapur, 360km south of Mumbai. But given the still-unresolved liability issues and the EPR's disastrous construction record to date, it's hard imagine any but the most cautious of progress taking place.

Meanwhile renewables are surging ahead. One part of the Jaitapur deal that is likely to move ahead fast is 142MW of wind power in Gujarat that EDF is to develop with its Indian partner, SITAC.

And in mid-January 2016, the latest auction of solar energy capacity in India achieved a new record low price of 4.34 rupees / kWh (US\$0.064; €0.059). Energy minister Piyush Goyal said: *"Through transparent auctions with a ready provision of land, transmission and the like, solar tariffs have come down below thermal power cost."*

Russia has 35 operating reactors and eight under construction (including two very low power floating reactors). Only six reactors have started up over the past 20 years, and only four over the past decade. The pattern of slow growth will continue.

As for Russia's ambitious nuclear export program, Steve Kidd noted in October 2014 that it *"is reasonable to suggest that it is highly unlikely that Russia will succeed in carrying out even half of the projects in which it claims to be closely involved"*.

South Korea has 25 operable reactors and three under construction. Six reactors have started up over the past decade. Along with China, India and Russia, South Korea is supposedly one of the four countries driving the 'nuclear renaissance'. But the best the industry can hope for in South Korea is slow growth.

South Africa plans 9.6 GW of new nuclear capacity to add to the two Koeberg reactors. But the nuclear program is more theatre than reality. Pro-nuclear commentator Dan Yurman states:

"South Africa's plans to build 9.6 GW of nuclear power will continue to be embroiled in political controversy and be hobbled by a lack of realistic financial plans to pay for the reactors."

"Claims by both Rosatom and Chinese state nuclear firms that they have won the business are not credible. Even if written down on paper, these claims of contracts cannot be guaranteed in the long term due to the political twists and turns by South African President Jacob Zuma."

"Most recently, he burned through three finance ministers over differences about whether the country could afford the cost of the reactors said to be at as much as US\$100 billion including upgrades to the electrical grid. Additionally, Zuma is distracted by political and personal scandals."

Brazil's nuclear industry provided some theatre in 2015 with the arrest of Othon Luiz Pinheiro da Silva, the former CEO of Brazil's nuclear power utility Eletronuclear, for allegedly accepting bribes to fix the bidding process for the Angra 3 reactor under construction 100 km from Rio de Janeiro. Fourteen other people were also charged as a result of the federal police's 'Operation Radioactivity'.

"The arrest is a tragedy for the industry," said former Eletrobras' chief executive Luiz Pinguelli Rosa. *"The industry was already in crisis, but now the corruption concerns are bound to delay Angra 3 further and cause costs to rise even more."*

Newcomer countries: The World Nuclear Association claims that *"over 45 countries are actively considering embarking upon nuclear power programmes."* Balderdash. Only two 'newcomer' countries are actually building reactors - Belarus and the United Arab Emirates. Other countries might join the nuclear club but newcomers will be few and far between.

Moreover, some countries are phasing out nuclear power. Countries with nuclear phase-out policies include Germany, Belgium, Taiwan, and Switzerland. Other countries - e.g. Sweden - may phase out nuclear power partly as a result of deliberate government policy and partly because of natural attrition: aging reactors are being shut down without replacement.

Stagnation and decline

Patterns of stagnation or slow decline in North America and western Europe can safely be predicted. In 2014, the European Commission forecast that EU nuclear generating capacity of 131 GW in 2010 will decline to 97 GW in 2025.

The European Commission forecasts that nuclear's share of EU electricity generation will decline from 27% in 2010 to 21% in 2050, while the share from renewables will increase from 21% to 51.6%, and fossil fuels' share will decline from 52% to 27%.

The most important nuclear power story of 2015 was legislation enacted in the French Parliament in July that will reduce nuclear's share of electricity generation from 75% to 50% by 'around' 2025, and caps nuclear capacity at the current level of 63.2 GW.

The legislation also establishes a target of 32% of electricity generation from renewables by 2030, a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and a 20% reduction in overall energy consumption by 2030.

In April 2015, a report by ADEME, a French government agency under the Ministries of Ecology and Research, shows that 100% renewable electricity supply by 2050 in France is feasible and affordable. French EPR reactor projects in **France and Finland** are three times over budget and many years behind schedule. As already noted, in April 2015 it was revealed that EDF's Flamanville EPR under construction in France has a weak pressure vessel and head, and that the same problem may afflict China's twin-EPR project with EDF at Taishan.

A January 2016 update to the World Nuclear Industry Status Report discusses the miserable state of the French nuclear industry:

"The French state-controlled AREVA, having announced an outlook of a further 'heavy loss' in 2015, was downgraded by credit-rating agency Standard & Poor's to B+ ("highly speculative"). On 29 December 2015, the company plunged to a new historic low on the stock market (€5.30 compared to €72.50 eight years ago). On 7 December 2015, Euronext ejected the French heavy weight Électricité de France (EDF), largest nuclear utility in the world and "pillar of the Paris Stock Exchange", from France's key stock market index, known as CAC40. One day later, EDF shares lost another four percent of their value, which led to a new low, a drop of over 85 percent from its 2007 level. ...

"The French nuclear industry's international competitors are not doing much better. AREVA's Russian counterpart Atomenergoprom as well as the Japanese controlled Toshiba-Westinghouse were both downgraded to 'junk' ('speculative') by credit-rating agencies during the year."

Next door in **Belgium**, ageing reactors at Doel and Tihange - shut down a year ago because of serious safety concerns over numerous leaks and, at Tihange, 16,000 reactor vessel cracks - are scheduled to start up shortly, triggering serious concern across Europe. An Avaaz petition to be delivered to Belgium by German Environment Minister Barbara Hendricks on Monday has already attracted almost 500,000 signatures.

In the **United States**, utilities announced two more reactor shut-downs in 2015: the FitzPatrick reactor in New York will be shut down in 2016, and the Pilgrim reactor in Massachusetts will be closed between 2017 and 2019.

Five reactors are under construction but a greater number have been shut down recently or will be shut down in the next few years. The last reactor start-up was in 1996. In August 2015 the Environmental Protection Agency released its final Clean Power Plan, which failed to give the nuclear industry the subsidies and handouts it was seeking.

A decade ago, the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission was flooded with applications for US\$127 billion (€117b) worth of reactor projects. Now, obituaries for the US nuclear power renaissance are increasingly common.

The situation is broadly similar in the **United Kingdom** - the nuclear power industry there is scrambling just to stand still. It should be clear by the end of this year whether the extraordinarily expensive Hinkley C EPR project will go ahead. But the signs are not good for the project's backers: EDF was due to make its 'final investment decision' this week, but flunked out owing to its inability to raise the necessary £18 billion.

According to the World Nuclear Association, most of the UK's reactors are to be retired by 2023. If other projects prove to be as expensive and difficult as Hinkley C, it's unlikely that new nuclear capacity will match retirements.

In **Japan**, only two of the country's 43 operable reactors are actually operating. Perhaps half to two-thirds of the reactors will eventually restart. Five reactors were permanently shut down in 2015, and the six reactors at Fukushima Daiichi have been written off.

Before the Fukushima disaster, Tokyo planned to add another 15-20 reactors to the fleet of 55, giving a total of 70-75 reactors. Thus, Japan's nuclear power industry will be at most half the size it might have been if not for the Fukushima disaster.

Generation IV reactors to the rescue?

Rhetoric about 'super safe', 'best thing since sliced bread' Generation IV reactors will likely continue unabated. That said, critical reports released by the US and French governments last year may signal a slow shift away from Generation IV reactor rhetoric.

The report by the French Institute for Radiological Protection and Nuclear Safety (IRSN) - a government authority under the Ministries of Defense, the Environment, Industry, Research, and Health - states:

"There is still much R&D to be done to develop the Generation IV nuclear reactors, as well as for the fuel cycle and the associated waste management which depends on the system chosen."

IRSN is also sceptical about safety claims: *"At the present stage of development, IRSN does not notice evidence that leads to conclude that the systems under review are likely to offer a significantly improved level of safety compared with Generation III reactors ... "*

The US Government Accountability Office released a report in July 2015 on the status of small modular reactors (SMRs) and other 'advanced' reactor concepts in the US. The report concluded:

"While light water SMRs and advanced reactors may provide some benefits, their development and deployment face a number of challenges ... Depending on how they are resolved, these technical challenges may result in higher-cost reactors than anticipated, making them less competitive with large LWRs [light water reactors] or power plants using other fuels ..."

"Both light water SMRs and advanced reactors face additional challenges related to the time, cost, and uncertainty associated with developing, certifying or licensing, and deploying new reactor technology, with advanced reactor designs generally facing greater challenges than light water SMR designs."

"It is a multi-decade process, with costs up to \$1 billion to \$2 billion, to design and certify or license the reactor design, and there is an additional construction cost of several billion dollars more per power plant." Even SMR boosters are struggling to put a positive spin on the situation. Launching a Nuclear Energy Insider report on SMRs, lead author Kerr Jefferies said: *"From the outside it will seem that SMR development has hit a brick wall, but to lump the sector's difficulties together with the death of the so-called nuclear renaissance would be missing the point."*

According to a US think tank, 48 companies in north America, backed by more than US\$1.6 billion (€1.5b) in private capital, are developing plans for advanced nuclear reactors. But even if all that capital was invested in a single R&D project, it would not suffice to commercialise a new reactor type.

The UK government also sees a big future for SMRs and has even promised to spend £250 million on *"nuclear innovation and Small Modular Reactors"*. But it will face two big problems. First, the money won't go far. And second, nuclear power is already being outcompeted by wind and solar, which are getting cheaper all the time.

Dan Yurman notes in his review of nuclear developments in 2015: *"Efforts by start-up type firms to build advanced reactors will continue to generate a lot of media hype, but questions are abundant as to whether this activity will result in prototypes."*

"For venture capital firms that have invested in advanced designs, cashing out may mean licensing a design to an established reactor vendor rather than building a first-of-a-kind unit."

Dr Jim Green is the national nuclear campaigner with Friends of the Earth Australia and editor of the Nuclear Monitor newsletter, where this article was originally published. Nuclear Monitor is published 20 times a year. It has been publishing deeply researched, often strongly critical articles on all aspects of the nuclear cycle since 1978. A must-read for all those who work on this issue!

Kansai business leaders happy with restarts (and TPP)

February 4, 2016

Kansai business leaders hail nuclear power plant restarts, urge TPP ratification

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/02/04/business/kansai-business-leaders-hail-nuclear-power-plant-restarts-urge-tpp-ratification/#.VrOEe1KDmos>

by Eric Johnston

Staff Writer

KYOTO – The annual meeting of Kansai area corporate leaders opened Thursday in Kyoto with declarations of support for a recently restarted nuclear power plant and calls for the swift ratification of the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

The two-day Kansai Economic Seminar brought together over 500 participants including heads of companies. Tabled for discussion were local and national economic, social, and political issues ranging

from developing a more diverse and skilled young workforce in the face of a rapidly aging society to tourism promotion.

Kansai Economic Federation chairman Shosuke Mori, who also serves as chairman and director of Kansai Electric Power Co., opened the meeting by touching on local and national energy issues. He said Japan's energy policy has taken a new turn with the restart of Kepco's Takahama No. 3 reactor last week and the restart of two reactors at Kyushu Electric's Sendai plant last August.

"The restart of these reactors means the situation since September 2013, where Japan had no nuclear plants operating, has been eliminated," Mori said. "This is a very significant development. Kepco will also restart the Takahama No. 4 reactor in about a month, and we're talking about reducing electricity rates after April 1."

Mori did not address the deregulation of the electricity market in April to allow for competition in the household market and how it might impact the Kansai economy.

This move opens up Kepco to a range of competitors, many of which hope to sell electricity derived from renewable energy or natural gas. As Japan's regional utilities have a monopoly and control access to their transmission lines, it remains unclear what the impact on Kepco will be.

The seminar took place on the day that 12 nations, including Japan, signed the TPP agreement in New Zealand. Mori said the TPP nations account for nearly 40 percent of the world's GDP and called for early ratification of the treaty by members' legislatures.

However, some participants noted factors which could delay implementation of the TPP, including the facts that leading figures in the U.S. race oppose the deal and U.S. Congress remains skeptical. Another factor, they said, is the resignation last week of economy minister Akira Amari, who negotiated the TPP for Japan.

KEPCO's change of plans: Sacrificing to costs

February 5, 2016

Editorial: KEPCO's altered stance on nuclear plant emergency building breaches trust

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160205/p2a/00m/0na/019000c>

Is Kyushu Electric Power Co. (KEPCO) really taking nuclear safety seriously? Such misgivings arise when we consider the utility's decision to scrap plans to build a seismically isolated facility at its Sendai Nuclear Power Plant in Kagoshima Prefecture.

When it applied for safety screening for the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at the plant, KEPCO promised to build a seismically isolated emergency response center that was to serve as a frontline base in the event of a nuclear accident. Later, however, the company decided it would make do with an existing quake-resistant facility, and it applied to the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) at the end of last year to alter its plans. KEPCO has no experience obtaining government permission and building a seismically isolated nuclear power facility, and told the NRA that if it were to instead use a quake-resistant facility with which it has

plenty of experience, it would be possible to begin operations at an early date, thereby enhancing safety. Yet it has not actually stated when it would be able to begin operating the quake-resistant facility.

The NRA views the power company's turnabout negatively, and has asked KEPCO to resubmit its application, on the basis that it lacks grounds for its claim.

In August last year, the No. 1 reactor at the Sendai Nuclear Power plant was reactivated, becoming the first to be restarted after passing new safety standards implemented in the wake of the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster. The plant's No. 2 reactor was similarly reactivated in October. When KEPCO applied to the NRA for safety screening, the utility had promised that it would build an important base-isolated structure, aiming to complete it sometime around this fiscal year. Inside the structure, it was to establish an emergency response center with a floor space of about 620 square meters. It said it would temporarily use a substitute quake-resistant facility with a floor space of about 170 square meters while the base-isolated structure was being built.

Quake-resistant structures are built to withstand the shaking of temblors. Seismically isolated buildings, on the other hand, use buffers to absorb the shaking. This system makes it harder for equipment inside to be damaged and has the advantage of allowing workers to move smoothly even if aftershocks occur. When the Fukushima nuclear disaster occurred, a seismically isolated structure became a base for handling the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, and its importance became widely recognized.

Under KEPCO's new plan, the substitute response center would be upgraded to a regular response center, and a quake-resistant facility that could provide support with a rest facility and medical office would be set up alongside it.

KEPCO stresses that it would be able to secure a level of safety at least on par with a seismically isolated building. But **changing its plans after restarting the reactors represents a breach of faith toward the NRA.** It's like putting one's hand out in a game of rock, paper, scissors after the other player has already revealed their move. KEPCO has similarly declared that it will take its plan to build a seismically isolated structure at its Genkai Nuclear Power Plant back to the drawing board, sparking a backlash from a local municipality.

Under new standards, there is admittedly no regulation requiring emergency response centers to be seismically isolated -- as long as the functions of a quake-resistant structure can be maintained in an earthquake.

However, **utilities have a responsibility to constantly work at improving safety -- not being satisfied with merely passing the standard.** Saying, "We have no experience so we can't do it" is no excuse.

It would appear in this case, that safety is taking a back seat to costs and ease of construction.

KEPCO needs to carefully respond to these kinds of misgivings and state in concrete terms why safety would improve under the changed plans. If it can't do that, then it should give up on changing the original plans.

TEPCO: "We must expand the overseas business"

February 8, 2016

Tepco looks overseas as shake-up, competition loom at home

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/02/08/business/corporate-business/tepco-looks-overseas-as-shake-up-competition-loom-at-home/#.VrhqtlKDmos>

Bloomberg

Tokyo Electric Power Co. is seeking to expand operations abroad to diversify amid a power market shake-up at home.

Japan's biggest utility faces a fully liberalized power market from April and the prospect of new entrants encroaching on its base of about 29 million customers. Tepco expects to make up for lost customers by expanding into Japan's other regions and considering opportunities abroad, according to President Naomi Hirose.

"We have 100 percent of the market share in our area, so when it liberalizes, we can't go to 101 percent," Hirose said at a press briefing in Tokyo on Friday. "We must expand the overseas business."

Tepco has another reason for looking overseas. Japan's electricity use is falling as the population declines and customers cut usage. The nation consumed about 806 terawatt-hours of electricity from its 10 regional power utilities in 2015, the lowest since 1998, according to data from the Federation of Electricity Power Companies of Japan.

Tepco's sales will probably fall 18 percent between the fiscal years ending March 31, 2015, and 2017, according to the average estimate of five analysts compiled by Bloomberg. The company also hopes to boost revenue by entering the gas-retail market when it liberalizes in April, 2017.

Tepco has investments in power projects in countries including Taiwan, Thailand and Indonesia. Revenue from Tepco's overseas power-producing business increased to about ¥100 billion in the last fiscal year ended March 31, a threefold expansion from a decade earlier, according to a company presentation dated April 28.

The company also consults on overseas projects, ranging from technical support to assisting with electricity savings, according to its website. Revenue from its overseas consulting services was ¥1.11 billion last fiscal year.

Minister apologises but what did she really say?

February 10, 2016

Environment minister apologizes for comments on Fukushima radiation limits

Japanese version

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160210/p2a/00m/0na/013000c>

Environment Minister Tamayo Marukawa apologized during a post-Cabinet meeting press conference on Feb. 9 over a report in the Shinano Mainichi Shimbun that quoted her criticism of the former government of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ)'s policy to lower the annual additional radiation exposure dose to 1 millisievert after the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

According to the newspaper report, Marukawa had criticized Goshi Hosono, former environment minister and chair of the now opposition DPJ's Policy Research Committee, when she spoke during a meeting of the

House of Councillors members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the city of Matsumoto, Nagano Prefecture, on Feb. 7.

"It might sound strange to talk about an 'anti-radiation faction,' but there are some people who will say they are worried no matter how far you lower (the radiation level)," Marukawa was quoted as saying.

"The former environment minister made the decision (to lower the radiation level) amidst the hype from these kinds of people, without any sort of scientific basis whatsoever."

Marukawa offered an apology for the remarks during the Feb. 9 press conference, saying, "I do not recall using such wording. The general meaning of what I had been trying to say was not properly conveyed, and I am extremely sorry for the lack of clarity in my words."

"Our long-term (radiation level) objective will continue to be 1 millisievert," Marukawa added.

The DPJ, which was in power at the time of the nuclear disaster, had set the level of long-term radiation exposure (excluding natural radiation) for members of the general public at 1 millisievert, in accordance with recommendations issued by the International Commission on Radiological Protection.

Some governmental and ruling party figures see that this 1 millisievert level has become regarded as a "safety standard" and the figure is serving to prevent residents from being able to return home.

Marukawa was also quoted as saying during the Feb. 7 meeting, "There are people who remain unable to return home when they should be able to do so (because decontamination has not brought the radiation levels down to the specified level)."

Takahama: A "problematic" restart

February 10, 2016

Takahama's problematic restart

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/02/10/editorials/takahamas-problematic-restart/#.VrtmGKDMot>

The No. 3 reactor of Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture, which was restarted in late January, is expected to start commercial operations in late February. Its No. 4 reactor is also set to be restarted around the same time. Although the Takahama Municipal Government and Fukui Prefecture gave their consent to the restart, there are serious concerns, including those expressed by nearby municipalities and their residents.

Following the restart of the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai nuclear power plant in Kagoshima Prefecture, Takahama unit 3 is the third reactor to come back online under the safety regulations introduced by the Nuclear Regulation Authority following the shutdown of the nation's nuclear plants in the wake of the March 2011 disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 plant. But it is the first to run on mixed oxide (MOX) fuel, which contains not only uranium but also plutonium extracted from spent nuclear fuel. The No. 4 reactor at Takahama will also use MOX fuel. Japan has accumulated 48 tons of plutonium — enough to make an estimated 6,000 nuclear bombs — as a result of the government's nuclear fuel cycle policy, which aims to reprocess spent fuel to extract uranium and plutonium to be used again as fuel. The Takahama restart may help the government show its resolve

to cut its plutonium stockpile to address U.S. concerns over nuclear proliferation. But the restart will pose a problem in the not-too-distant future. The spent fuel storage facilities for reactors 3 and 4 are expected to become filled in seven or eight years after they are reactivated. Spent uranium fuel from nuclear power plants is to be sent to a fuel reprocessing facility in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, still on a trial run, but the plant cannot reprocess used MOX fuel — meaning that there will be no place to store overflowing spent fuel from the Takahama reactors. Although Kansai Electric aims to choose a site for a medium-term storage facility outside Fukui by around 2020, no prefectures seem willing to host it.

In the wake of the 2011 Fukushima disaster, local governments within 30 km of a nuclear power plant are now required to devise plans to evacuate their residents in the event of a major accident. In the case of Takahama, nearly 180,000 residents in 12 municipalities in Fukui, Kyoto and Shiga prefectures live in the 30-km zone. Part of the city of Maizuru, Kyoto Prefecture, is within 5 km of the Takahama plant. Despite this, Kansai Electric stuck to the position that to restart the reactors it only needs consent from the host town of Takahama and Fukui Prefecture, and it ignored calls from Kyoto and Shiga prefectures and many other municipalities within the 30-km zone that it should also gain their consent. The same situation happened when Kyushu Electric Power Co. pushed to restart the Sendai reactors. The power companies should address the concerns harbored by municipalities and residents that do not host plants but lie close enough to be affected by a nuclear disaster.

Despite the requirement for compiling evacuation plans, no evacuation drills with local residents have been carried out in the municipalities around Takahama and many residents have received no instructions on where they should evacuate to in the event of a severe accident. Maizuru, for example, won't release a new evacuation plan for its residents until March. While there are plans to evacuate some Fukui residents to Hyogo, Kyoto and Tokushima prefectures, many municipalities are not ready to receive them. In addition, evacuations may not proceed as planned in extreme weather conditions such as heavy snow or when roads are congested. The Fukushima disaster also exposed the evacuation difficulties faced by inpatients at hospitals and elderly people in nursing care facilities. And as there are few access roads to the Takahama facility, the evacuation of plant workers and dispatch of emergency teams may be hindered. The Takahama facility is among 14 nuclear power plants concentrated by Wakasa Bay in Fukui Prefecture. If a major disaster hits the plants simultaneously, the area will be highly vulnerable.

In December, the Fukui District Court quashed an injunction issued by the same court in April against restarting the Takahama reactors, paving the way for Kansai Electric to put them back online. Although the ruling upheld the NRA's new safety standards for restarting reactors as rational and endorsed the authority's decision that the Takahama reactors met the standards, both Kansai Electric and the NRA should not forget that the ruling also stated that the NRA's decision does not rule out the possibility of a severe accident and that high-level efforts for safety must be constantly maintained because there is no such thing as absolute safety. Since it is believed that controlling a reactor that burns MOX fuel is more difficult than one that uses uranium, Kansai Electric cannot be too cautious in operating the Takahama plant.

Environment minister finally does about-face

February 13, 2016

Environment minister retracts radiation remarks, refuses to resign

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160213/p2a/00m/0na/008000c>

Environment Minister Tamayo Marukawa has retracted her controversial remarks that denied the scientific grounds for the radiation criteria set after the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster, while ruling out the possibility of stepping down.

At a press conference on Feb. 12, Marukawa announced the withdrawal of her earlier comments in which she said "there is no scientific evidence" for the government's long-term goal of lowering the annual additional radiation exposure dose to 1 millisievert or less through decontamination and other efforts. Her retraction, which came five days after she made the remarks during a speech in Matsumoto, Nagano Prefecture, marks **a major about-face** as she had earlier practically denied making such comments, on the grounds that she had no recollection of them.

"I would like to extend my sincere apologies once again to disaster victims, including those in Fukushima," Marukawa said on Feb. 12. However, she stopped short of offering her resignation as a Cabinet minister. "I've concluded that I should retract my remarks in order to maintain my relationship of trust with people in Fukushima. It is my responsibility to work to live up to the wishes of Fukushima," the environment minister said.

Marukawa apparently surmised any further denial of her own remarks would aggravate her relations with the Fukushima Prefectural Government and other disaster-hit local governments, while opposition parties were eager to grill her further in the Diet. By retracting her statements the minister aimed to defuse the situation.

According to reports by the Shinano Mainichi Shimbun, Marukawa made the remarks during a meeting of House of Councillors members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party on Feb. 7, where she said the government's long-term radiation goal was "decided by the then environment minister without any scientific grounds" -- accusing then Environment Minister Goshi Hosono of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). In response, the DPJ demanded Marukawa step down from her post.

Later at a Diet session and on other occasions, Marukawa effectively denied making such remarks, saying, "I don't remember using such phrases. I'm sorry my point didn't get across due to insufficient explanation."

On Feb. 12, however, Marukawa said she came to believe she made those remarks after examining a note recording her remarks and a testimony by an attendee of the Feb. 7 meeting. She then telephoned Fukushima Gov. Masao Uchibori to offer an apology.

The long-term radiation goal, which was introduced during the reign of the DPJ government, provides that decontamination work and other efforts should be carried out to lower the annual radiation exposure dose for the general public at normal times to 1 millisievert or less after deducting exposure to natural radiation.

Marukawa said on Feb. 12, "The government will work together to achieve that goal," emphasizing that the current administration will uphold the long-range goal.

Environment minister withdraws radiation remark, apologizes to Fukushima residents

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201602130023

By YU KOTSUBO/ Staff Writer

Environment Minister Tamayo Marukawa retracted her remark about the government having “no scientific grounds” for its radiation decontamination target in the Fukushima nuclear disaster, saying she wanted to rebuild trust with local residents.

As the minister in charge of overseeing the decontamination efforts in Fukushima Prefecture, Marukawa, 45, said Feb. 12 she wants to “sincerely apologize to residents in Fukushima.”

During a speech in Matsumoto, Nagano Prefecture, on Feb. 7, she labeled the government’s long-term goal of reducing radiation levels near the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant to an annual dose of 1 millisievert or less as having “absolutely no scientific grounds.”

A local newspaper, The Shinano Mainichi Shimbun, picked up the story and reported her comments on Feb. 8, which she promptly denied having made.

At Diet sessions on Feb. 9 and 10, Marukawa stated that she had “no recollection of using such wording” in the speech.

Nevertheless, she told the news conference on the evening of Feb. 12 that she had decided of her own volition to “retract the remark in order to maintain a relationship of trust with residents in Fukushima.”

Marukawa went on to say that the government's decontamination target is “indeed scientific in the sense that it was set as a result of thorough discussions by scientists.”

Her acknowledgment of making the faux pas will likely prompt the opposition camp to go on the offensive during Diet sessions in the coming week. For the time being, at least, Marukawa is standing firm. She said she has no intention of stepping down and wants to continue fulfilling her duties.

The decontamination goal was set by the Democratic Party of Japan-led government of the time on the basis of recommendations by the International Commission on Radiological Protection in the aftermath of the triple meltdown at the Fukushima plant triggered by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster.

After the newspaper covered her remarks, Marukawa told reporters on Feb. 8 that she did not remember using such wording as “scientifically ungrounded.” She repeated the plea at Lower House Budget Committee sessions on Feb. 9 and 10.

During a regular news conference after the Feb. 12 morning Cabinet meeting, the minister finally acknowledged the possibility of making the remark.

She eventually retracted the comment later the day after obtaining a memorandum of her speech and confirming the content with attendants.

February 12, 2016

Environment minister withdraws radiation remarks

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/02/12/national/japans-environment-minister-withdraws-radiation-remarks/#.Vr7vG-aDmos>

JJI

Environment Minister Tamayo Marukawa on Friday withdrew remarks she reportedly made about the government’s radiation decontamination target following the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Speaking at a news conference, Marukawa said she apologizes from the bottom of her heart to those suffering from the nuclear accident, including people in Fukushima Prefecture.

She denied that she might step down over the remarks, saying she will continue to fulfill her duties.

Marukawa has been under fire since a newspaper reported remarks she made in a speech in the city of Matsumoto in Nagano Prefecture on Sunday.

She was quoted as saying the government's long-term goal of reducing radiation levels near Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant to an annual dose of 1 millisievert or less has no scientific grounds.

The goal was set by the government led by the now-opposition Democratic Party of Japan, based on recommendations from the International Commission on Radiation Protection and requests from the Fukushima Prefectural Government.

At Friday's news conference, Marukawa said that the central government will not drop the decontamination goal.

February 12, 2016

Environment minister apologizes to Fukushima governor over radiation comments

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160212/p2a/00m/0na/014000c>

Environment Minister Tamayo Marukawa said on Feb. 12 that she telephoned Fukushima Gov. Masao Uchibori to apologize over a report on her remarks allegedly denying scientific evidence for the government's long-term goal of lowering the annual additional radiation exposure dose to 1 millisievert after the 2011 meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

She also said at a post-Cabinet meeting news conference that she offered a similar apology to a local government leader in Fukushima Prefecture, saying she did not explain herself fully during a Feb. 7 meeting of House of Councillors members from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in Nagano Prefecture. Marukawa emphasized, though, that she has no plan to retract her comment, saying there was no record of her remarks and she cannot independently confirm them. She added that the current government will continue to maintain its long-term radiation level objective, work hard to achieve this goal, and also restore the areas hard hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and Fukushima nuclear disaster.

2.6 billion dollars to decommission Monju

February 16, 2016

Scrapping prototype reactor could cost \$2.6 bil.

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Feb. 16, 2016 - Updated 11:50 UTC+1

Japan's science ministry has revealed that it could cost an estimated 2.6 billion dollars to decommission the troubled Monju fast-breeder nuclear reactor.

The Japan Atomic Energy Agency made the estimates for the prototype reactor in 2012, one year after the Fukushima nuclear accident. The reactor is located at a plant in Fukui Prefecture, central Japan.

This is the first time the decommissioning costs have emerged.

Dismantling the reactor was estimated to take about 1.1 billion dollars. That's double to triple the cost of dismantling a regular reactor.

Maintenance and management was set at 1.3 billion dollars, while removing spent nuclear fuel was projected to cost about 200 million dollars.

The estimates did not include costs of transporting nuclear fuel and removing sodium used to cool the reactor.

The agency officials say they made the estimates due to debate at the time on whether to continue Monju's development. They say **Monju is larger than conventional reactors, so the decommissioning cost is greater.**

A panel of Japan's science ministry is in discussions to find a new operator for Monju after a series of safety problems were found at the plant.

Decommissioning of troubled fast-breeder reactor Monju would cost 300 billion yen

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160216/p2a/00m/0na/005000c>

The operator of Monju, a trouble-prone prototype fast-breeder nuclear reactor in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, estimates that it would take at least 300 billion yen to decommission the reactor, the Mainichi Shimbun learned Feb. 15.

This is the first time that Monju's decommissioning cost -- which is several times the cost of decommissioning regular nuclear reactors -- has come to light.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) has sought replacement of the reactor's operating body, the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA).

Over 1 trillion yen has been pumped into the Monju reactor thus far, and even if it were reactivated, repairs and other maintenance costs would surpass another 100 billion yen. As such, massive costs would be required to either decommission or reactivate the reactor.

The estimate was made in 2012. If decommissioning of Monju were to undergo the same procedures as the prototype nuclear test reactor Fugen, also in Tsuruga, it would take approximately 30 years and cost some 130 billion yen to dismantle the facility. It would cost an additional 20 billion yen to remove spent nuclear fuel, and some 150 billion yen for maintenance and management costs, such as electricity and labor. **Estimated costs for the removal of spent nuclear fuel include temporary storage, but because no storage site has been decided, the cost of transporting spent fuel to such a site has not been included.**

In the case of ordinary nuclear reactors, such as the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at Chubu Electric Power Co.'s Hamaoka nuclear plant in Shizuoka Prefecture, the cost of decommissioning both is expected to cost around 84 billion yen, while decommissioning both the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Mihama nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture is estimated to cost around 68 billion yen.

Because Monju is sodium-cooled, decommissioning costs are relatively higher than regular, water-cooled nuclear reactors. Furthermore, because the decommissioning technology for sodium-cooled reactors has yet to be established, funds for further research and development will also be needed. In response to numerous maintenance errors pointed out with the Monju reactor, the NRA advised the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology last November to propose an alternative operator to the JAEA. The NRA also demanded that if the ministry is unable to do so by around this coming summer, a fundamental review of Monju be conducted. The ministry set up a panel of experts late last year to consider a new operator for the troubled reactor.

TEPCO ordered to compensate voluntary evacuees

February 19, 2016

TEPCO ordered to pay damages for voluntary evacuation from Fukushima

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160219/p2g/00m/0dm/021000c>

KYOTO (Kyodo) -- A Japanese court on Thursday ruled that the operator of the disaster-struck Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex is liable for damages stemming from voluntary evacuation by residents in Fukushima Prefecture, believed to be the first ruling of its kind.

The Kyoto District Court ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. to pay about 30 million yen (\$264,000) in damages to a couple in which the husband lost his job and developed mental illness after the family

voluntarily fled in the wake of nuclear disaster triggered by a huge earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

The sum the court awarded to the couple in their 40s is also much bigger than the 11 million yen proposed by a government-established center to mediate out-of-court settlements for nuclear accident compensation.

The plaintiffs said the ruling "set an example that there is no need to give up when evacuees do not feel satisfied with the sum" presented by the dispute resolution center. The couple, who have evacuated to the city of Kyoto, sought about 180 million yen from TEPCO in the lawsuit filed in 2013.

According to the ruling, the husband was managing a company before he and his family fled Fukushima in the wake of the nuclear disaster. The husband then developed sleeping problems and suffered from depression before becoming unable to work around May 2011.

Presiding Judge Masayuki Miki determined that the nuclear accident "was one of the main reasons" that the husband suffered mental and other problems. He also found that the financial loss the couple faced was the consequence of the accident.

Of the amount TEPCO was ordered to pay, about 21 million yen in damages is associated with lost employment income and expenses due to evacuation, the ruling said.

Another 1.7 million yen is compensation for being "forced to move to a land with no ties with Fukushima Prefecture which they were familiar with," the court said, adding that they "lost a stable life."

During the triple reactor core meltdown disaster, residents living within 20 kilometers of the TEPCO nuclear plant and some areas beyond were ordered to evacuate. Many others also fled from their homes at their own discretion.

February 18, 2016

Court orders TEPCO to compensate evacuees

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/news/nuclear.html>

Feb. 18, 2016 - Updated 12:30 UTC+1

A court has ordered Tokyo Electric Power Company to compensate 5 people who evacuated after the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The Kyoto District Court issued the ruling on Thursday and told the utility to pay about 30 million yen, or over 260 thousand dollars.

The plaintiffs evacuated from Fukushima to Kyoto Prefecture and elsewhere on a voluntary basis.

They're seeking compensation of nearly 1.6 million dollars. They say they could not work since the accident due to insomnia, depression and other stress-related health problems.

The court said it's reasonable that the plaintiffs voluntarily evacuated, as information on the danger of the unprecedented disaster had not been revealed.

The court also said the plaintiffs had to evacuate from familiar surroundings and that this caused considerable stress and illnesses.

The firm says it will study the ruling in detail and deal with it sincerely.

In a first Tepco told to compensate couple for damage stemming from voluntary Fukushima evacuation

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/02/18/national/crime-legal/first-tepco-told-compensate-couple-damage-stemming-voluntary-fukushima-evacuation/#.VsX2bOaDmot>

Kyodo

The Kyoto District Court has ordered the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant to pay about ¥30 million to a couple for economic and health damage caused by the family's decision to voluntarily flee the radiation in Fukushima Prefecture.

The husband lost his job and developed a mental illness during the ordeal.

This is believed to be the first time that a court has found Tokyo Electric Power Co. liable for damages stemming from a voluntary evacuation after the plant's triple core meltdown, which was triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011.

The sum awarded is also far more than the ¥11 million proposed by a government-established center that mediates out-of-court settlements for nuclear accident compensation cases.

A lawyer for the plaintiffs, who are in their 40s, said the ruling "set an example that there is no need to give up when evacuees do not feel satisfied with the sum" presented by the dispute resolution center.

The couple — who had moved twice before settling down in the city of Kyoto in May 2011 — had sought ¥180 million in damages.

According to the written complaint, the husband became unable to work because he developed pleurisy (a respiratory disease) and depression after the evacuation. Their children also experienced emotional distress from being harshly treated by classmates because they came from Fukushima Prefecture.

After three reactors experienced meltdowns during the disaster, residents within 20 km of the nuclear plant and some areas beyond were ordered to evacuate. Many others also fled at their own discretion and remain in temporary housing.

Taking individual circumstances of voluntary evacuees into account

February 19, 2016

Lawyer urges Fukushima evacuees to individually file suits against TEPCO

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160219/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

A Kyoto District Court ruling on Feb. 18 that ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) to pay a man in his 40s and his family redress for damages due to voluntary evacuation has drawn mixed reactions from voluntary evacuees and other parties. The ruling marked the first time that TEPCO, the operator of the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, was deemed responsible for damages stemming from voluntary evacuation by local residents.

The court ordered the utility to pay about 30 million yen in damages to the family from Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture, because the man -- the owner of multiple restaurants -- lost his job and developed mental illness after voluntarily evacuating to Kyoto with his family in the wake of the nuclear disaster triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011. The compensation is much higher than about 11 million yen proposed by the government-backed alternative dispute resolution (ADR) procedures.

"We are relieved as (the compensation) will allow us to make a living for the time being, but with only such a limited amount we can't forecast our future prospects because my husband can't work (because of mental illness)," lawyer Kenichi Ido quoted the man's wife as commenting at a news conference after the ruling.

Ido is a former judge who, as the then presiding judge at the Kanazawa District Court, ordered a halt to the operation of the No. 2 reactor of the Shika Nuclear Power Plant in Ishikawa Prefecture in 2006. Ido said at his news conference, "It's a commendable ruling in that it accepted our key arguments. There are many voluntary evacuees who have been compelled to settle for small amounts of compensation by TEPCO. They should file suit individually."

According to people with knowledge of ADR-brokered compromise settlements involving voluntary evacuees, compensation standards set by TEPCO and the governmental Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation have been very strict, limiting redress to only 80,000 yen per adult and a labor incapacity period to six months. The Kyoto District Court's ruling raised redress to the man to 1 million yen.

Lawyer Naoto Akiyama, a member of the Daini Tokyo Bar Association who handles many ADR cases, praised the decision as "a ruling which offers hope to evacuees who moved voluntarily, reflecting individual circumstances without being bound to the standards." Masafumi Yokemoto, a professor of environmental policy at Osaka City University's Graduate School of Business who is familiar with the ADR issue, says, "It's unlikely for the central government and TEPCO to change the standards, but an accumulation of judgments in individual suits will be the key to substantially change the standards."

Evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster have filed class action lawsuits across the country. Akiko Morimatsu, 42, co-leader of a national coalition of groups of plaintiffs in Fukushima nuclear disaster lawsuits, fled from Koriyama to Osaka with her two children. She says, "**The ruling is epoch-making for ordering a far bigger amount of compensation than the ADR norms by taking individual circumstances of voluntary evacuees into consideration. If many people raise their voices in the future, the reality of damages will come to light more clearly.**"

But she expressed her displeasure with the ruling in that it limited the reasonable period of voluntary evacuation to the end of August in 2012, saying, "**It's wrong because it's based on government propaganda.**" The ruling reflects a decision by the governmental Dispute Reconciliation Committee for Nuclear Damage Compensation to set the deadline for local residents to continuously evacuate rationally, arguing there was not enough information about dangers from the nuclear disaster up until that deadline.

Official: Nukes stored on Okinawa during Cold War



Technicians work on a Mace B cruise missile on Okinawa in April 1962. Carrying a 1-megaton W28 nuclear warhead, the rocket-boosted, jet-propelled Mace missile could be fired at six minutes' notice. | NARA, STILL PICTURES UNIT, RECORD GROUP 342B, BOX 1470

February 20, 2016

In a first US admits nuclear weapons were stored in Okinawa during Cold War

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/02/20/national/history/first-u-s-admits-nuclear-weapons-stored-okinawa-cold-war/#.VsgrAuaDmot>

by Jesse Johnson
Staff Writer

Long an open secret, the U.S. government has for the first time officially acknowledged that nuclear weapons were stored on Okinawa during the Cold War.

In a statement on the Department of Defense's Open Government website, the Pentagon revealed Friday "that U.S. nuclear weapons were deployed on Okinawa prior to Okinawa's reversion to Japan on May 15, 1972."

The Defense Department statement also acknowledged "that the U.S. government conducted internal discussion and discussions with Japanese government officials regarding the possible re-introduction of nuclear weapons onto Okinawa in the event of an emergency or crisis situation."

Although widely known — various accounts and documents of a secret deal had previously shed light on the storage of atomic weapons on the islands both before and after Okinawa's reversion — the issue had been controversial because **Japanese leaders and U.S. officials had consistently denied the presence of such weapons within Japanese territory.**

In a 1967 address to the Diet, Prime Minister Eisuke Sato introduced the nation's **Three Non-Nuclear Principles**, which, reflecting public sentiment, have guided the country's nuclear policy since.

The three principles, which helped Sato win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1974, stated that Japan shall neither possess nor manufacture nuclear weapons, nor shall it permit their introduction into Japanese territory.

The National Security Archive at George Washington University said in a posting Friday that "however welcome the release may be, its significance is somewhat tempered by the astonishing fact that U.S. Air Force photographs of nuclear weapons on the island have been publicly available for over 25 years."

The nongovernmental group posted several photos, which were originally released in 1990 from U.S. Air Force collections at the National Archives and Records Administration. The photos had apparently gone unnoticed until now.

Okinawa remains home to a large number of U.S. military bases, and has been the site of recent protests over the transfer of U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, which has dominated headlines over the past year.

Japan is the only nation to have been attacked with nuclear weapons. The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 killed an estimated 200,000 people and, ultimately, led to the Japan's surrender in World War II.

Wasteful reconstruction schemes



February 22, 2016

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/02/22/commentary/japan-commentary/wasteful-spending-tohoku/#.VssbluaDmot>

Wasteful spending in Tohoku

Along the beaches of Kesenuma, Miyagi Prefecture, which used to boast popular resorts, a colossal seawall is nearing completion, measuring 14.7 meters high, 9 meters thick at the base and 5 km long. This is but one of many wasteful construction projects being carried out under the pretext of rebuilding the areas in northern Japan devastated by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Almost five years after the disasters, there are many projects under way that waste huge sums of taxpayer money and benefit only a handful of construction firms and individuals who have sold their land to make way for such ventures. As if by coincidence, law enforcement authorities have taken action over bid rigging among paving companies involved in expressway construction.

Why is such a huge seawall being built in an area of Kesenuma that is mostly rice paddies? A local source confides it is because municipal assembly members, local powerful figures and those close to them sold the land to the central government at a high price. An estimated ¥2.5 billion is said to have been paid by the government to the property owners for the otherwise worthless land on which the seawall is being built.

The total cost for building the 5-km seawall was initially set at ¥23 billion but has now ballooned to ¥36 billion. This is but a small portion of an overall coastal seawall construction project stretching over 400 km in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, the total cost of which is budgeted at ¥1 trillion.

As of last fall, only 17 percent of the project had been completed. Even though more than 80 percent of it can still be canceled, neither the central government nor the prefectural and municipal governments have any intention of suspending the project.

Another wasteful reconstruction scheme relates to relocating tsunami victims to higher ground. One such project being pushed by the city of Higashi-Matsushima, Miyagi Prefecture, envisages developing a hillside area to accommodate 450 houses. But the cost for the land redevelopment alone is ¥40 billion, or some ¥100 million per house — a figure that befits only the most luxurious residential area.

Even if this project is completed, there are many people who initially welcomed the plan but have found it impossible to build their own house in the area. This is because, according to a member of an association of tsunami victims, the cost to build a house has gone up 50 percent from the initial estimate of ¥15 million.

The Miyagi Prefectural Government, meanwhile, is building 15,000 houses under a seven-year, ¥180 billion plan. As of the end of last year, about half had been completed. But 16 of the 21 municipalities where those houses were built are plagued with vacancies since many of the more than 20,000 quake victims currently living in rent-free temporary housing facilities are refusing to move into these permanent houses. As construction work continues on the remaining 7,000-plus houses, the vacancy rate is bound to increase, rendering it foolish to put any more money into the project.

A total of ¥3.5 trillion in public money is to be poured into areas devastated by the quake and tsunami to build housing facilities or to move people to higher ground. But the results of this spending spree are characterized by huge seawalls resembling prison walls, redeveloped highland areas where only a small number of houses have been built and housing with high vacancy rates.

Another sector in which public money is being wasted is road construction. Many plans for new roads, which had been submitted before the 2011 disasters, are now resurfacing as if to ride on the coattails of the massive reconstruction projects.

One example is a 100-km road to connect the inland city of Morioka and the coastal city of Miyako, both in Iwate Prefecture. Local residents had clamored in vain for the new road for more than two decades. After the disasters, however, money was suddenly allocated for the road, ostensibly for the purpose of securing emergency transport.

Similarly, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism is pushing a new coastal “reconstruction highway” linking Miyagi and Aomori prefectures.

Such reconstruction projects have brought big benefits to many players in the construction industry — and not just major general contractors but also smaller regional firms. Hashimototen Co., for one, has grown rapidly in the post-earthquake years to become the second-largest contractor in Miyagi Prefecture in terms of completed construction projects, thanks to its close connection with a powerful Liberal Democratic Party Lower House member — Akihiro Nishumura, a former vice minister of reconstruction — and other LDP lawmakers.

A suspicion has reportedly arisen that Hashimototen conspired with third-ranking Maruhon Gumi Corp. to split a pair of tunnel contracts so that each could build one for about ¥1 billion.

Major general contractors are also suspected of collusion. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, Hazama Corp. and Maeda Corp., both of which have footholds in the Tohoku region, won many contracts for debris removal. According to a local construction industry insider, this prompted leading general contractors to ask LDP lawmakers to coordinate construction orders for reconstruction projects.

As if to prove that notion, contracts for huge reconstruction projects have all been won by majors like Kajima Corp., Shimizu Corp. and Taisei Corp. Local firms that have been chosen as subcontractors by the majors have prospered so much that their executives are buying expensive cars like Mercedes to reduce their tax payments, says an insider close to a major general contractor.

The very root of this and other unethical conduct in the tsunami-hit areas appears to lie in the staggering ¥26 trillion to be spent by the central government in the first five years following the disasters. If the local

governments are not required to bear any cost, it is logical that they won't worry if the money is going to waste.

Last year, the Reconstruction Agency sought to oblige the prefectures and municipalities to bear part of the cost but faced bitter opposition and was criticized for “bullying the disaster victims.” In the end, it was decided that they will shoulder no more than 3 percent of the total spending. For example, the construction cost of the Sanriku Expressway linking Sendai with Miyako will be wholly shouldered by the central government. A member of the Miyagi Prefectural Assembly, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that the ¥26 trillion has “spoiled” the three prefectures hit hardest by the disasters — Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate.

The situation in Fukushima Prefecture is complicated by the nuclear crisis, which forced residents near the affected power plant to flee. Even though the evacuation order was lifted last September for the town of Naraha, more than 2,000 former residents had not returned as of Jan. 14, choosing instead to remain in the city of Iwaki.

Currently they are receiving monthly compensation of ¥100,000. A local newspaper reporter said that many of those continuing to remain in temporary housing units are likely to become public welfare recipients after they have used up the compensation money.

It is true that there are local residents who are still suffering from the effects of the March 2011 disasters. But now that five years will soon have passed, attention should not be turned away from the reality of the devastated areas. Continuing to lavish funds on the victimized areas will only result in money collected from taxpayers from all over the country disappearing into the dark — a world that has nothing to do with reconstruction in the true sense of the word.

This is an abridged translation of an article from the February issue of Sentaku, a monthly magazine covering political, social and economic scenes.

News from the nuclear village

‘Nuclear for Climate’ Wins 2016 Pime Award For Communication Excellence

<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2016/02/23/nuclear-for-climate-wins-2016-pime-award-for-communication-excellence>

23 Feb (NucNet): The European Nuclear Society's (ENS) Pime 2016 award for communication excellence in the nuclear sector was won by the 'Nuclear For Climate' campaign, an initiative created jointly by the French Nuclear Energy Society (SFEN), the American Nuclear Society (ANS) and ENS, and supported by more than 140 members. The campaign aimed to promote the role nuclear power plays in the fight against climate change. The award was announced on 16 February, the final day of the Pime (Public Materials Information Exchange) conference in the Romanian capital Bucharest. The conference included plenary sessions and workshops on social media, lobbying, communications strategies, and engaging with stakeholders and environmentalists. **In a keynote speech, ENS secretary-general Jean-Pol Poncelet told the conference that “anti-nuclear challenges” during the forthcoming Chernobyl and Fukushima anniversaries must be tackled by communicators “transparently and with full honesty”.** The next Pime conference will take place on 20-22 March 2017 in the Netherlands, hosted by the Dutch Central Organisation for Radioactive Waste (Covra).

PIME Award for Communications Excellence
Winner of the Pime 2016 Award:
Initiative Nuclear for Climate

PIME 2016
<http://www.euronuclear.org/events/pime/pime2016/award.htm>

14 - 17 February 2016 in Bucharest, Romania

Initiated by the French Nuclear Energy Society (SFEN) Nuclear for Climate (N4C) is a global grassroots initiative involving nuclear associations, scientific societies and industry forums, nearly 150 organizations worldwide gathering more than 100 000 scientists, technicians, engineers, professional of nuclear energy. In the perspective of the Paris climate summit in December 2015, the COP21, the initiative has helped to coordinate national and international actions of the various associations. The initiative ederated around a common message:

"Nuclear energy is part of the solution for fighting climate change".

Nuclear for Climate's partners

Through its members, Nuclear for Climate stands as spokesperson of the scientists and employees of the nuclear sector. Thanks to scientific associations, N4C brings a credible contribution to the climate change fight. With, in particular its young professionals, the nuclear sector has a human face, friendly, future-oriented, which contrasts with the traditional image of "nuclear lobby".

The initiative was officially launched September 16, 2014 on the sidelines of the IAEA General Conference in Vienna (Austria), with 12 partners: SFEN (France), FORATOM & ENS, Belgian Nuclear Forum (Belgium), WNA, NEI & ANS (US), JAIF (Japan), KNS (Korea), AERB (Brazil), CNS (China), NIA (UK), CNA (Canada) and IYNC, the global network of young generations of nuclear power, with more than 40 local networks. Today Nuclear for Climate brings together 147 organizations from 57 countries, including 9 international associations (ENS, FORATOM, LAS-ANS (Latin America), WiN Europe, WFEO, WNA, INSC, IYNC, WiN Global).

Presentations from the short-listed candidates for the 2016 PIME Award for Communications Excellence:

International Nuclear Services in cooperation with AREVA
Nuclear for Climate
NUGENIA
TEPCO

And now a bit from the TEPCO document :



<http://www.euronuclear.org/events/pime/pime2016/pdf/Tepco.pdf>

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Safety, Transparency, Pride
and
Supporters is essential

Series of gaffes raises doubts about Cabinet's qualifications and convictions

February 16, 2016

EDITORIAL: Marukawa's gaffe about Fukushima heightens doubts about Cabinet's aptitude

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201602160048>

Environment Minister Tamayo Marukawa caused a stir by claiming the government had no scientific grounds for its radiation decontamination target around the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant. Her comment came in a Feb. 7 speech on the government's long-term goal of reducing radiation levels near the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant to an annual dose of 1 millisievert or less.

"There are people who worry about radiation no matter how much the levels have been lowered, people who might well be described, appropriately or not, as an 'anti-radiation camp,'" Marukawa said. "While such people were making noise, the environment minister at that time decided (on the target) without any scientific grounds."

Her remarks were reported the following day by The Shinano Mainichi Shimbun, a local newspaper. Decontaminating areas polluted with radioactive materials and curbing additional exposure to radiation is one of the top policy priorities for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Cabinet.

Nearly five years since the nuclear disaster unfolded, decontamination efforts alone appear unlikely to achieve the long-term target in some areas. Residents from these areas have no hope of returning to home soon.

The Democratic Party of Japan-led government set the long-term decontamination goal based on recommendations of the International Commission on Radiological Protection. The panel recommended annual doses in the range of “1 to 20 millisievert” as a yardstick for recovery from the accident.

The government’s decision to adopt the stricter end of the recommended range for the decontamination target reflected strong demand for absolute safety and security among communities in the affected areas. Responding to residents’ desire to return home as soon as possible while pursuing the tough long-term goal has proved a formidable challenge.

The goal, determined after considering a complicated mix of factors, has forced the government to continue making strenuous efforts while learning from mistakes.

If Marukawa didn’t know this background, she should be accused of failing to do her homework. Or **did she know all these facts and was simply trying to demean the previous DPJ-led government?**

Even more troubling is how she flip-flopped in replying to questions about her remark.

The environment minister initially responded to questions posed at the Diet and from reporters by repeatedly saying she had “no recollection of using such wording” in the speech.

On the morning of Feb. 12, however, she changed her account and admitted having made the comments. She retracted the remarks in the evening that day.

Did she really forget making the remarks? Or did she bet that people would eventually forget the matter if she kept saying she had no memory of saying such things?

In any case, Marukawa’s remarks raise serious questions about her aptitude for her job.

However, Marukawa is not the only Cabinet member who has made a verbal blunder indicating a disturbing carelessness in speech.

In a Feb. 9 news conference, Aiko Shimajiri, the state minister for Okinawa and Northern Territories affairs, could not read the kanji characters for the Habomai group of islets, and asked her secretary how the characters should be read. The Habomai islets are part of the Northern Territories, a chain of islands claimed by Japan but occupied by Russia.

Abe himself recently made an embarrassing verbal error.

In an Internet program of his Liberal Democratic Party, Abe misnamed the 2014 Stockholm agreement in which North Korea promised a fresh investigation into the fates of Japanese citizens it had abducted decades earlier. Abe mistakenly called it the Oslo Agreement, a 1993 peace accord between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Nobody is free from slips of the tongue or misunderstandings.

But the above-mentioned errors are serious because dealing with the nuclear disaster, tackling the territorial dispute with Russia and resolving the North Korea abduction issue are important challenges placed high on the Abe Cabinet’s policy agenda.

These gaffes could call into question not only the ministers’ qualifications for their jobs but also the Cabinet’s stances toward the issues.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Feb. 16

TEPCO admits failing to used guidelines on meltdowns

February 24, 2016

TEPCO admits initial assessments of Fukushima meltdowns were wrong

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/02/24/national/tepcos-admits-initial-assessments-fukushima-meltdowns-wrong/#.Vs1dpuaDmot>

Staff Report

Tokyo Electric Power Co. admitted Wednesday its staff at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant had guidelines on how to determine that a nuclear reactor is melting down, but that operators failed to use them as the disaster unfolded in March 2011.

The implication is that if operators knew this checklist existed they could have triggered a response more appropriate to what turned out to be one of the world's worst disasters in the history of nuclear power. The company's admission is an acknowledgment that its initial assessments at the site were wrong. The disaster began on March 11, 2011, but continues today in the shape of vast quantities of radioactive water building up at the site. Moreover, three reactor cores are filled with hot, melted fuel and may be untouchable for years.

TEPCO's refused to admit "meltdown" for 2 months

February 24, 2016

Tepco admits it should have declared meltdowns at Fukushima plant much earlier

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/02/24/national/tepcos-admits-initial-assessments-fukushima-meltdowns-wrong/#.Vs26LuaDmot>

by Reiji Yoshida

Staff Writer

Nearly five years after the nation's worst nuclear accident, Tokyo Electric Power Co. has admitted that its staff failed to follow damage assessment guidelines, according to which they should have reported the meltdowns almost immediately.

A Tepco spokesman on Wednesday said the company's Disaster Management Manual requires a reactor to be declared "in meltdown" if 5 percent or more of its fuel rods are determined to be "damaged."

Tepco knew the extent of the damage early on. As of March 14, 2011, it estimated that 55 percent of the fuel rod assemblies of the reactor No. 1 and 25 percent of those at reactor No. 3 were "damaged," based on the levels of radiation detected, Tepco spokesperson Yukako Handa told The Japan Times by phone.

Yet, despite widespread public skepticism at that time, the company refused to use the word "meltdown" for a period of about two months.

This led to widespread public speculation about a cover-up and failure to admit the extent of the damage. The sudden removal of a nuclear regulator spokesman fueled this.

Handa said a meltdown would have been declared if the guidelines had been followed correctly. But she said Tepco reported its estimates of damage to the government immediately — as required by law — and its failure to describe the situation as one of meltdown did not break regulations.

“Executives in charge of public relations at the time of the accident were not aware of the assessment criteria written in the Disaster Management Manual,” Handa said.

“They believed there was no clear definition of a ‘meltdown,’ so they didn’t make any clear remarks about one,” she said.

Handa said Tepco will investigate why it failed to follow the assessment manual.

Wednesday’s announcement by Tepco was the first confirmation that such a manual even exists. NHK broke the news earlier in the day.

Whether to admit a “meltdown” was taking place at the plant was a sensitive topic for both the central government and Tepco from the start.

On March 12, one day after the tsunami knocked out power and cooling facilities, Koichiro Nakamura, a senior official at the now-defunct Nuclear and Industry Safety Agency, told a news conference that a “meltdown of a reactor’s core” may be taking place at the Fukushima plant, given the radiation levels detected.

Nakamura was promptly removed from a PR position at the agency, sparking speculation of a government cover-up of something critical underway at the site.

TEPCO did not follow own manual

February 24, 2016

TEPCO failed to follow manual on meltdown

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160224_33/

A new finding on the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident has raised questions about the way the plant’s operator initially explained the catastrophe taking place in the reactors.

Nuclear fuel in 3 of the plant's reactors melted down following the earthquake and tsunami on March 11th of that year.

Tokyo Electric Power Company did not admit there had been meltdowns for 2 more months.

The utility previously said it could find no grounds to conclude the reactors had melted down.

But it has been revealed that the firm's in-house manual noted that damage of more than 5 percent to a reactor core should be called a meltdown. A core houses nuclear fuel.

TEPCO found the description in the manual in a probe following a request from an investigative panel of the Niigata prefectural government.

If the utility had followed the manual, it should have assessed the damage was a meltdown 3 days after the accident, when the reactors' sensors were restored.

Engineers learned at that time that fuel in the No.1 reactor was 55 percent damaged, and 30 percent in the No.3 reactor. Both clearly meet the criteria of a meltdown.

TEPCO revised its manual after the accident. It now says it will assess and disclose when a meltdown has occurred before nuclear fuel is damaged 5 percent.

TEPCO's understanding of 'meltdown' questioned

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160224_27/

A new finding is raising questions about the explanation first offered for what was happening inside damaged reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in 2011.

Nuclear fuel in 3 reactor cores melted following the earthquake and tsunami that March.

But Tokyo Electric Power Company officials failed to describe these as meltdowns.

They said there were no grounds for reaching that conclusion.

But 2 months later the utility formally admitted all 3 had melted down.

NHK has learned that the firm's own manual says a meltdown has occurred if at least 5 percent of a core has melted. Nuclear fuel is housed in the core.

The operator told NHK it discovered this definition in the course of responding to a request from a Niigata Prefectural Government panel investigating the accident.

An NHK reporter says this would suggest TEPCO did not understand the precise definition of a meltdown until nearly 5 years after the accident.

The utility says it will continue to investigate why it didn't use the word meltdown soon after the crisis began.

Tepco Admits Fukushima Operators Did Not Check Guidelines

<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2016/02/24/tepcos-admits-fukushima-operators-did-not-check-guidelines>

Unplanned Events & Incidents

24 Feb (NucNet): Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco) said today its staff at the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear station had guidelines on how to determine that a nuclear reactor is melting down, but that operators failed to use them properly as the accident unfolded in March 2011. Tepco said in a statement in Japanese on its website that operators did not thoroughly check the guidelines and failed to determine that core melt was a possibility. Tepco said laws, regulations and internal rules have been amended and retraining has been carried out, but admitted it needs to further improve its efforts to disseminate information about failures at the time of the accident.

Only took TEPCO five years

February 25, 2016

TEPCO discovers after 5 years that it could have quickly declared Fukushima plant meltdown

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201602250043>

By JIN NISHIKAWA/ Staff Writer

Nearly five years later, Tokyo Electric Power Co. said Feb. 24 that it has discovered a guideline in its operational manual that would have allowed it to announce meltdowns in the nuclear disaster in only days instead of the two months it actually took.

TEPCO apologized for failing to be aware for such a long time of the guideline on how to declare meltdowns at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

While the utility announced that reactor cores had been damaged at the No. 1 and No. 3 reactors by March 14 and at the No. 2 reactor by March 15, it did not admit that meltdowns had occurred in the three reactors until May 2011.

Based on its "nuclear disaster countermeasures manual," which was revised 11 months before the disaster, the utility could have instead declared meltdowns at the three reactors by those dates, it said.

"We sincerely apologize for failing to confirm the presence of the guideline in the manual for five years," a TEPCO spokesperson said Feb. 24.

The company will conduct an internal investigation to determine why it failed to promptly determine and announce meltdowns based on the manual.

In the few days after the Fukushima crisis unfurled, core meltdowns at the No. 1 to No. 3 reactors dispersed a large amount of radioactive materials into the environment.

Video footage of TEPCO's in-house teleconferences around the time show that company executives recognized the possibility of meltdowns at the reactors from the early stages of the crisis.

But the company maintained that the reactors suffered "core damage," a condition in which nuclear fuel inside a reactor core is damaged, rather than a "meltdown" at news conferences and in its announcements. In May it officially acknowledged that meltdowns had occurred.

The utility has explained that the delay was caused by the lack of a basis to assess meltdowns in the wake of an accident.

Early on May 14, 2011, TEPCO confirmed that the No. 3 unit had suffered damage to 30 percent of its reactor core and 55 percent of the No. 1 reactor's core was damaged, based on rising radiation levels inside reactor containment vessels. It also determined that 35 percent of the No. 2 reactor's core was damaged on the evening of May 15.

The newly discovered guideline in the disaster countermeasures manual, which was revised in April 2010, stipulates that the company should declare a meltdown when damage to a reactor core exceeds 5 percent, TEPCO officials said.

Company officials failed to announce the meltdowns because they were unaware of the guideline in the manual, according to TEPCO.

The existence of such a standard was confirmed earlier this month during an in-house investigation into how the utility responded to the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The investigation is being conducted at the request of Niigata Prefecture where TEPCO's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant, which the company aims to restart, is located.

In a statement on Feb. 24, Niigata Governor Hirohiko Izumida called on TEPCO to conduct a thorough internal investigation to uncover the "truth behind its concealment of meltdowns," including determining who gave instructions.

Greenpeace: 5 years and far from over

Source : Greenpeace

<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/news/Blogs/nuclear-reaction/fukushima-nuclear-crisis-japan-radiation-research/blog/55623/>

Five years on and the Fukushima crisis is far from over

Blogpost by **Shaun Burnie** - 24 February, 2016 at 20:00 1 comment

Five years ago the Rainbow Warrior sailed along the Fukushima coast conducting radiation sampling. Now it's back, and has Japan's ex-Prime Minister on board.

Scotland is over 9,000 km from Japan, but there's something the two countries have in common. Along the Scottish coastline, buried in riverbeds, and mixed into the Irish Sea, you can find significant radioactive contamination coming from the other side of the world. Yes, radioactive contamination. All the way from Japan.

Since the 1970s, Sellafield, a nuclear-reprocessing plant in northwest England has been contracted to process high level nuclear waste spent fuel from Japanese reactors. More than 4000 tonnes of spent nuclear fuel was shipped from Japan to Sellafield, including waste from Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), the owner of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. As result of reprocessing at Sellafield, more than 8 million litres of low level nuclear waste is discharged into the ocean every day. It's been labelled the "most hazardous place in Europe" - with levels of contamination in the fields, soils and estuaries at a

level that can only be described as a nuclear disaster zone. In fact, the Irish Sea is arguably the most radioactively contaminated sea in the world

We're about to approach the five-year anniversary of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, and this is a stark reminder that no matter where you are or how far away, nuclear power has a local and global impact.

I remember waking up to the news on March 11, 2011. Though I was at home in Scotland, I've never felt so connected to the people of Japan. Having spent decades with Greenpeace actively campaigning against nuclear power in Japan, I knew deep down that a catastrophic accident was only a matter of time. With media requests coming in thick and fast, I recall appearing on BBC World News live. In mid-interview, as I was talking about the specific threat at Fukushima, I was interrupted as the news crossed to Japan where Reactor 3 exploded.

Greenpeace Japan sent a team to the Fukushima evacuation zone to conduct independent radiation testing; and researchers on the Rainbow Warrior, kitted up in full body chemical suits, pulled floating seaweed from the surrounding area to use as samples. Our results were unfortunately as you would expect – high levels of contamination. Subsequently, we've also found radiation is still so widespread that it's unsafe for people to return across large parts of Fukushima.

Nearly five years later and I'm in Japan on-board the Rainbow Warrior - this time with the famously anti-nuclear former Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Naoto Kan. It's truly an honour and privilege to hear him describe the first hours and days of the accident in March 2011, as well as show him the research that we are carrying out. As we sailed within 2km of the nuclear plant the feelings are both profound and surreal. From the deck we've seen steel tanks holding hundreds of thousands of tons of contaminated water; the four reactors now shielded behind temporary structures in an effort to contain some of the radioactive material from being released into the atmosphere; and inside the reactors themselves lie hundreds of tons of molten reactor fuel for which there are no credible plans to deal with.

But there's another reason the Rainbow Warrior is here. A Greenpeace Japan research vessel is conducting underwater marine radiation surveys within a 20km radius of the Fukushima Daiichi plant, with the Rainbow Warrior acting as campaign ship. As with the radioactive contamination near my home in Scotland, Greenpeace is aiming to further the understanding of the impacts and future threats from nuclear power and in particular the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident.

For Mr Naoto Kan, who was Japan's leader when the disaster hit, this voyage is as much personal as it is political. In the years since 2011 he has spoken out publicly against the nuclear industry, standing alongside millions of Japanese people opposed to nuclear power – a far cry from the current “tone-deaf” Abe administration, which is desperately trying to save a nuclear industry in crisis. Opposed by the majority of citizens, and beset by enormous technical, financial and legal obstacles, it's an effort that I believe is doomed to failure.

But there's hope.

Like the many communities across the country that are switching to innovative renewable power projects, Mr Kan knows that nuclear should be buried in the past. Renewables in Japan are rising. In the 2015 fiscal year, solar power capable of generating an estimated 13 TWh was newly installed - more than the two Sendai reactors in southern Japan that were restarted that year can produce.

For Japan to go 100% renewable it must urgently formulate more ambitious targets; stop all planned investments in new coal power plants and finally abandon plans to restart its ageing reactors and remove the institutional and financial obstacles to renewable energy growth.

A nuclear free future is not only possible it is essential. Renewable energy is the only safe and secure energy for the people of Japan and the world. .

Shaun Burnie is a senior nuclear specialist with Greenpeace Germany.

Takahama's extension a way of bypassing 40-year rule?

February 25, 2016

Extension of nuclear reactor operations could water down 40-year rule

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160225/p2a/00m/0na/017000c>

The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) gave de-facto safety clearance to the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at the Takahama Nuclear Power Station in Fukui Prefecture on Feb. 24, effectively marking the first time for reactors aged over 40 years to pass new safety regulations introduced in the wake of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster.

While a rule limiting the operational period of reactors to 40 years has been passed in the Diet based on bitter lessons from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster, the NRA's move shows the country has moved a step forward toward prolonging the service life of aging reactors ahead of the fifth anniversary of the onset of the nuclear catastrophe.

As the government is also setting goals for a future energy mix on the premise of extending reactor operations, the 40-year rule appears destined to be watered down.

"We can overcome technical issues (with aging reactors) if we spend money on them," NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka told a press conference on Feb. 24, suggesting that reactors that have been running for over 40 years can be operated for longer if large amounts of money are spent on their refurbishment. When the NRA was launched in 2012, Tanaka had stated, "My understanding is that reactors reach a turning point after about 40 years," and "It would be quite a challenge to extend the service life (of aging reactors) by 20 years." Tanaka's latest remarks represent a major turnaround in his stance on the matter.

The 40-year rule is based on precedents in the United States, and was included in the revised Act on the Regulation of Nuclear Source Material, Nuclear Fuel Material and Reactors, which came into force in 2013. The then administration led by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) explained in the Diet that the 40-year rule was based on the timing of pressure vessel deterioration resulting from exposure to neutrons. The DPJ government also ruled out the possibility of ordinarily extending the service life of aged reactors by up to 20 years, calling this an "exception."

The Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan, however, opposed the introduction of the 40-year rule, saying that the rule would undermine technical achievements and spark confusion. The 40-year rule has also been "treated like a nuisance" within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), according to a senior LDP official, with legislators elected in prefectures hosting nuclear plants drawing up a statement calling for a review of the rule.

Amid such circumstances, Kansai Electric Power Co., which operates the Takahama nuclear plant, spent some 380 billion yen on the renovation of the plant's four reactors before obtaining de-facto safety clearance from the NRA.

In general, old, flammable cables are used at dated reactors. If nuclear plants are to extend their operations, utilities must implement large-scale fire-prevention measures. **Kansai Electric Power Co.**

replaced 60 percent of old cables -- stretching a total of 1,300 kilometers -- with flame-resistant ones at the No. 1 and 2 reactors at the Takahama plant, and also took measures to prevent fire from spreading by wrapping the remaining cables in fireproof sheets. These efforts won the NRA's de-facto stamp of approval. **If such a method is adopted at the seven other nuclear plants in Japan that use similar cables, it could create a loophole in the 40-year rule.**

The NRA, meanwhile, is under pressure to accelerate its safety screenings on the two reactors at the Takahama plant. For reactors over 40 years in service to be reactivated, they must not only pass safety screenings but also have their construction plans and the extension of operations approved before the legal deadline. The NRA is now set to conduct full-scale inspections on the pressure vessels and other apparatus at the plant to check the rate of their deterioration. The legal deadline for putting the No. 1 and 2 reactors back into operation is looming on July 7 -- the three-year mark since the new safety regulations came into force -- and the reactors must clear the relevant conditions before that deadline, or else they must be decommissioned.

Since last autumn, the NRA has had workers focus on screening the No. 1 and 2 reactors, effectively giving priority to the Takahama plant over the other plants awaiting screenings. The Feb. 24 issuance of de-facto approval for the two reactors' operation came only 11 months after Kansai Electric Power Co. filed an application for the safety review in March last year.

Swift measures were taken because the NRA may face litigation if a delay in screening results in reactor decommissioning.

There remain many hurdles ahead, however, before the two reactors can be reactivated. The NRA shelved work to examine the quake resistance of equipment inside the reactors until after the safety clearance. Even if the reactors manage to pass the quake resistance evaluations and gain final approval by July, the utility must also build domes shielding against radiation on top of the reactor buildings, among other construction work, in order to have their service life extended. Therefore, the resumption of operations of the two reactors is expected to come **sometime after October 2019**, even if all conditions are met.

"If the Takahama plant manages to have the extension of the reactors' service life approved, it will serve as a model for other plants in terms of expenses and the response to regulations," said a senior official with a major power company.

February 24, 2016

Analysis: Nuclear watchdog's green light for Takahama reactors a threat to '40-year rule'

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160224/p2a/00m/0na/017000c>

In putting together what is essentially a passing grade for the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at the Takahama Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture -- which have been in operation for over 40 years -- to further extend their operation, the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) could be signaling a trend of brushing aside what is supposed to be a general rule of decommissioning reactors after 40 years of service. Applications to have the NRA screen the two reactors for extensions were made in March last year. They were among the later applications on the list, numbering 22nd and 23rd. But the NRA has held evaluations

on the two reactors nearly every week since last fall, and they have become the sixth and seventh to have rough drafts of their evaluations approved.

This preferential treatment is irregular when considering that other nuclear reactors have been waiting over 2 1/2 years for their evaluation results.

Speeding up evaluations of the Takahama plant reactors paved the way for the NRA to beat a legal time limit that would require the reactors to be shut down if they weren't approved for extension by July this year.

Should the NRA's evaluation have dragged on past this time limit, it might have been sued by the reactors' owner, Kansai Electric Power Co.

The government wants to avoid older reactors being shut down so it can keep to its policy of having nuclear power account for 20 to 22 percent of Japan's power supply in fiscal 2030. However, an extension of reactor operations by up to 20 years beyond their designated operational life of 40 years is supposed to be limited to "exceptions."

At a press conference in 2012 right after the NRA's establishment, NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka commented, "It would be quite hard to get a 20-year extension." But after only 11 months of evaluation, the possibility of such an extension has come forward for the Takahama reactors. The Takahama case could serve as a springboard for more reactors to bypass the "40-year rule" on decommissioning.

The 40-year-rule was put together in the Diet to reduce the nation's dependence on nuclear power in the wake of the lessons learned from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster. It may be time for the NRA to return to the spirit of that original initiative.

Is the 40-year limit becoming meaningless?

February 25, 2016

EDITORIAL: Extending life of nuclear reactors should not be left solely up to utilities

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201602250031>

Japan's nuclear regulator has endorsed the safety of two reactors that have been in service for more than four decades.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) announced on Feb. 24 that the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors of Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture meet the new safety standards introduced after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The NRA's verdict has opened the door to an extension of the operating lives of the aging reactors to up to 60 years, one of Kansai Electric's key goals for its nuclear power generation.

A revision to a law following the catastrophic accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has set the legal life of nuclear reactors at 40 years. But one extension by up to 20 years is allowed with NRA approval.

To extend the operational lives of the two reactors, the operator must receive several approvals from the NRA. If the NRA decides that the reactors have fulfilled all the related criteria, this will become the first case of an extension of the legal life of reactors under the new system.

The 40-year limit was introduced by the government led by the Democratic Party of Japan, which was in power when the nuclear disaster occurred, to demonstrate its commitment to weaning Japan from its dependence on atomic energy. It was aimed at ensuring a steady phasing out of nuclear power generation through the decommissioning of aging reactors.

The provision for an extension of the life span was added in response to concerns about possible power shortages due to insufficient capacity.

But **no specific rules have been set with regard to what kind of circumstances should justify permitting extended operations.**

What is vital for electric utilities is the economic viability of their nuclear power plants. Five small reactors that are not sufficiently cost-effective under the 40-year limit on operations have been set for retirement. Of the remaining 43 reactors, 18 units have been in service for more than 30 years. **Utilities will apply for permission to run aging reactors beyond the 40-year legal life span if it makes economic sense.** Some applications for a longer license have already been filed with the NRA.

If an extension of the legal life of reactors is approved one after another, the 40-year limit could become meaningless.

With such decisions, we are concerned that the government's nuclear energy policy and the energy future of this nation are being defined under the initiative of electric utilities focused on generating profits.

Where is the political will that transcends the profit equations of power suppliers?

If aging reactors are allowed to exceed the 40-year life span in rapid succession, the disturbing safety risk posed by a thick cluster of reactors in Fukui Prefecture will not be reduced.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has repeatedly pledged to reduce Japan's dependence on nuclear energy as much as possible. **The government should make it clear that an extension can be made as an exception.**

Before the harrowing nuclear accident, there was no legal life for nuclear reactors. Initially, electric power companies said the operational life of their reactors was around 30 to 40 years.

Later, the former nuclear regulator, which has been replaced by the NRA, introduced a system that allowed utilities to operate reactors for up to 60 years if they submit maintenance plans every 10 years after the 30th year of service. The regulator cited progress in analysis technology as the reason for extending operational licenses for reactors.

The previous government's decision to replace this system with the new 40-year rule reflected its will to phase out nuclear power generation in this nation.

Immediately after assuming the post, NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka was skeptical about extending the life of reactors, saying it was "considerably difficult."

In assessing the safety measures Kansai Electric has taken for the reactors at the Takahama plant, however, the NRA has given the green light to the utility's plan to cover electric cables with a fire-resistant sheet where it is difficult to replace them with flame-retardant cables.

The NRA's move has greatly encouraged utilities seeking to gain permission to run reactors past the 40-year limit because this has been a major technical obstacle to meeting the safety standards.

In his policy speech at the beginning of the current Diet session in January, Abe made no reference to nuclear power generation. Does this indicate that the government will not do anything to stop the growing trend toward longer-term reactor operations?

If so, the government will act against both the past words of the prime minister concerning the issue and the wishes of many Japanese to see their nation free from nuclear energy.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Feb. 25

Indictment nears

February 26, 2016

Charges near for former TEPCO executives over Fukushima nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201602260087>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Lawyers on Feb. 29 are expected to indict three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. on charges of professional negligence resulting in death and injury in connection with the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The indictment mandated by a citizens panel will be filed at the Tokyo District Court by lawyers serving as prosecutors.

Tsunehisa Katsumata, a 75-year-old former TEPCO chairman, and two former vice presidents, Sakae Muto, 65, and Ichiro Takekuro, 69, led the utility when the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, triggered the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The indictment will say the three former executives were aware that such a large tsunami could strike the coast of the Tohoku region, but they did not take measures to protect the nuclear plant.

The indictment will also argue that their failure to carry out their professional duties led to the deaths of patients at hospitals in mandatory evacuation zones as well as injuries to other residents during the evacuation.

A **criminal complaint** was filed against the three former executives by residents and citizens groups. The Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office in September 2013 decided not to indict the former executives, saying it was difficult for TEPCO to forecast such a large-scale natural disaster hitting the nuclear plant.

However, the Tokyo No. 5 Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution in July 2014 overrode the prosecutors' decision, and sent the case back to them for a further look.

But the prosecutors again decided not to indict the three.

The citizens panel in July 2015 again overrode the decision, saying the three former executives should face mandatory indictment and be tried in court.

Court-appointed lawyers will serve as the prosecutors in the trial.

Ex-TEPCO executives face trial over disaster

February 26, 2016

3 ex-TEPCO execs to be indicted Mon. over Fukushima nuclear disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160226/p2a/00m/0na/005000c>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. will be indicted Monday for allegedly failing to take measures to prevent the tsunami-triggered crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex, a lawyer in charge of the case said Friday.

- **【Related】** TEPCO could have known Fukushima meltdown days after disaster
- **【Related】** Upcoming Tokyo photo exhibition to convey scars of 2011 quake disaster

The three, who will face charges of professional negligence resulting in death and injury, are Tsunehisa Katsumata, 75, chairman of TEPCO at the time, and two former vice presidents -- Sakae Muto, 65, and Ichiro Takekuro, 69.

Prosecutors decided not to indict the three in September 2013, but the decision was overturned in July 2015 by an independent committee of citizens that mandated the three be charged on the grounds they were able to foresee the risks of a major tsunami prior to the disaster.

Source close to the matter said the three will be indicted without being taken into custody.

But the trial to look into the criminal responsibility of the then key TEPCO figures is unlikely to start by the end of the year, as preparations to sort out evidence and points of issues apparently require a considerable amount of time, they said.

At the six-reactor plant located on the Pacific coast, tsunamis triggered by the massive earthquake on March 11, 2011, flooded power supply facilities and crippled reactor cooling systems. The Nos. 1 to 3 reactors suffered fuel meltdowns, while hydrogen explosions damaged the buildings housing the No. 1, 3 and 4 units.

The Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution has said the former executives received a report by June 2009 that the plant could be hit by tsunami as high as 15.7 meters and that they "failed to take pre-emptive measures knowing the risk of a major tsunami."

It also blamed the three for the injuries of 13 people, including Self-Defense Forces members, when hydrogen explosions occurred at the plant and the death of 44 hospital patients who evacuated amid harsh conditions.

A group of Fukushima citizens and other people filed a criminal complaint in 2012 against dozens of government and TEPCO officials over their responsibility in connection with what became one of the world's worst nuclear crises.

But as prosecutors decided not to file charges on them, including then Prime Minister Naoto Kan, the group narrowed down its target and asked the committee to examine whether the prosecutors' decision was appropriate.

See also:

Three ex-Tepco executives to be indicted over Fukushima nuclear disaster

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/02/26/national/crime-legal/three-ex-tepc-executives-indicted-fukushima-nuclear-disaster/#.VtBODOaDmot>

Kyodo

Three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. will be indicted Monday for the allegedly failing to take measures to prevent the tsunami-triggered disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, a lawyer in charge of the case said Friday.[...]

Ex-TEPCO executives face trial over Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160226_23/

Three former executives of the Tokyo Electric Power Company are set to face a court trial for the March 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

NHK has learned that court-appointed lawyers have decided to indict former TEPCO chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and former vice-presidents Sakae Muto and Ichiro Takekuro.

The 3 ex-executives are to be charged with professional negligence resulting in deaths and injuries. The lawyers were named by the court to act as prosecutors.

In 2013, public prosecutors decided not to press charges, but a prosecution inquest panel of citizens voted last July to indict them. This paved the way for the mandatory indictment by court-appointed lawyers.

Sources say the lawyers consider the three failed to implement necessary measures, despite being told a tsunami could cause flooding at the Fukushima plant.

The lawyers reportedly say the nuclear accident led to the deaths of patients after they were evacuated from Futaba hospital.

The 3 would-be defendants are expected to enter a plea of not guilty, saying they could not have predicted a massive tsunami.

Nobody has yet been held criminally responsible for Japan's worst nuclear accident.

And don't do it again!

February 25, 2016

Suga: Govt. to tell TEPCO to prevent recurrence

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160225_26/

Japan's government says it will instruct the operator of the damaged Fukushima nuclear plant to take steps to prevent a recurrence of its failure to swiftly determine that a meltdown occurred.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga on Thursday expressed regret over the delay by Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, in determining meltdowns had taken place at the Fukushima Daiichi plant in March 2011.

The utility on Wednesday said it could have judged the incidents at 3 reactors to have been meltdowns 3 days after the accident if it had followed an in-house manual. The firm did not determine there had been meltdowns until 2 months later.

Suga said it was extremely regrettable that TEPCO failed to properly check the manual at that time and gave wrong explanations about the meltdowns.

Niigata Prefecture, which hosts a nuclear power plant, has been asking TEPCO to clarify its grounds for determining meltdowns. The utility previously said no such grounds were determined, even though definitions of a meltdown were included in the manual.

Suga said TEPCO officials should be aware that nuclear power generation is not possible without a relationship of trust with host communities. He said the utility must provide detailed explanations to the prefecture.

He also said the industry ministry will strictly instruct the firm to look into what happened at the time and to take proper steps to prevent a recurrence.

Pr. Hirose: TEPCO's "big error"

Expert criticizes TEPCO's failure to follow manual

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160225_10/

A Japanese expert has criticized the operator of the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant for its failure to follow a manual on judging when a meltdown occurs.

Professor Emeritus Hirotada Hirose of Tokyo Woman's Christian University called the failure "a big error".

Nuclear fuel in 3 of the plant's reactors melted down following the earthquake and tsunami on March 11th, 2011.

Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, did not admit there had been meltdowns until 2 months after the accident.

The utility previously said it could find no grounds to conclude the reactors had melted down.

But it admitted on Wednesday that the utility's in-house manual noted that damage of more than 5 percent to a reactor core should be called a meltdown.

If the utility had followed the manual, it should have assessed the damage was a meltdown 3 days after the accident.

Hirose said it was a big mistake that TEPCO officials did not follow the manual's guidelines.

He says the delay in announcing the meltdown made people think that the situation at the plant wasn't as serious as it was.

Hirose said TEPCO has repeated accidents and falsified data, and that nobody will be able to trust the firm unless it changes such practices. He said TEPCO should proactively provide information on its errors.

TEPCO not very convincing

February 26, 2016

EDITORIAL: TEPCO gives unconvincing excuse for delay in meltdown declaration

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201602260057>

Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, said Feb. 24 that it could have declared the reactor meltdowns at the plant much earlier than it did.

The utility said it discovered a guideline in its operational manual that would have allowed it to announce core meltdowns only three days after the plant was struck by the tsunami in 2011 instead of the two months it actually took.

In a Feb. 24 news conference, a TEPCO official said the manual had been discovered for the first time earlier in February.

But the company's explanations about the delay in announcing the meltdowns, triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, and the recent "discovery" of the document are by no means convincing.

TEPCO initially maintained that the reactors suffered "core damage," a condition in which nuclear fuel inside a reactor core is damaged, rather than a "meltdown." It did not admit that meltdowns had occurred in the three reactors until late May 2011, more than two months later.

The utility claimed it had taken so long to acknowledge the meltdowns because there was "no basis" for making the judgment.

But this claim has proved false. At that time, TEPCO was suspected of concealing facts to make the accident look less serious than it actually was. The latest revelations revive such suspicions.

In a statement on Feb. 24, Niigata Governor Hirohiko Izumida called on TEPCO to conduct a thorough internal investigation to uncover the “truth behind its concealment of meltdowns,” including determining who gave the instructions.

Niigata Prefecture is home to TEPCO’s Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant, which the company aims to restart. Izumida has every right to make the demand.

Even more baffling is the “discovery” of the manual nearly five years after the nuclear crisis broke out. Back then, core meltdowns were clearly defined as nuclear emergencies under the nuclear disaster special measures law. Given that TEPCO has been very sensitive to the question of whether trouble at a nuclear power plant, no matter how minor, should be reported to the government, it is hard to believe that the company failed to remember the standard concerning meltdowns.

It is clearly impossible to directly confirm whether a core meltdown is taking place during a severe nuclear accident.

That’s apparently the reason why TEPCO established a clear criterion for a nuclear meltdown that required the company to declare a meltdown when damage to a reactor core exceeds 5 percent.

When a nuclear accident occurs, only the operator of the nuclear plant has access to detailed data about what is happening. Both the government and news media depend on information provided by the plant operator for related policy decisions and news coverage.

A utility’s failure to swiftly offer accurate information about the situation could cause the government to make misguided policy decisions and the media to distribute incorrect reports about the accident.

TEPCO’s report on its investigation into the nuclear disaster, released in 2012, defended the company’s use of the term “core damage.” The report argued that the company had tried to provide accurate information about the conditions of the reactors based on available data by avoiding the term “core meltdown” because there was no clear and widely shared definition of the term.

It cannot be said that TEPCO provided the entire picture of what happened based on exhaustive and effective efforts to identify all the factors involved.

The company’s guideline concerning core meltdowns was “discovered” during an in-house investigation into how the utility responded to the Fukushima nuclear crisis. That investigation was conducted at the request of a technical committee of the Niigata prefectural government.

The prefecture called for a fresh inquiry in connection with TEPCO’s plan to restart the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant.

TEPCO has said it will look into how it failed to notice the existence of the guideline through a probe involving outsiders.

The utility should determine who should be held accountable for that failure.

The company also needs to offer convincing answers to such questions as how it will prevent a recurrence and whether problems with its corporate culture played a role. Otherwise, its efforts to regain public trust are destined to fail.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Feb. 26

(Still) depending on TEPCO: Fukushima' dilemma

February 26, 2016

Fukushima towns grudgingly realize survival again depends on TEPCO

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201602260069>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Futaba Mayor Shiro Izawa was taken aback when the president of Tokyo Electric Power Co. paid a visit in early January.

Izawa has been working out of a temporary government office in the town of Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, since the disaster at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant forced all residents to evacuate Futaba in 2011.

"Have you perhaps forgotten that TEPCO is the perpetrator that has driven Futaba into the situation it finds itself?" Izawa grumbled at TEPCO President Naomi Hirose. "I am beyond furious."

But within minutes, Izawa was peppering Hirose with requests to rebuild life in his community.

Residents and government leaders around the still stricken nuclear plant continue to vilify the plant's operator, but they are increasingly aware that economic survival depends largely on the very entity that turned their communities upside down.

Before the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, the host and surrounding communities depended largely on nuclear power plants for government subsidies and employment.

They are resigned to having again depend on TEPCO for the billions of yen that will be sunk into the prefecture for work to decommission the reactors at the utility's No. 1 plant as well as its No. 2 plant in Fukushima Prefecture.

Every day, about 7,000 workers pass through the gates of the Fukushima No. 1 plant for the decommissioning process that is expected to take decades to complete.

Some say the nuclear plant has been a source of income than crosses generations.

A 61-year-old man who was part of the team that constructed the No. 6 reactor at the plant now dismantles tanks that once contained radiation-contaminated water there.

"The nuclear plant remains unchanged as a stable workplace from before the accident," he said.

His father was also involved in construction of the nuclear plant, which started operating in 1971.

After the 2011 disaster, relatives beseeched the man to cut all ties with the plant. But he has no intention of ending his work there.

The effects of the accident indeed sparked anger and distrust of TEPCO and nuclear power in general.

The Fukushima prefectural government decided to end its dependence on nuclear plants and supply all electricity through renewable energy sources. It has asked for the decommissioning of all reactors in the prefecture.

However, the prefectural government faces the difficult task of revitalizing the local economy because about 70,000 residents remain in evacuation close to five years after the accident.

Decommissioning work is now one of the only realistic large-scale options to support the local economy.

The central and prefectural governments are placing high hopes on research and development related to decommissioning the reactors.

In September 2015, after the evacuation order was lifted for the town of Naraha, the Japan Atomic Energy Agency built a facility in the municipality to conduct experiments on remote-control use of robots in the decommissioning work.

An international joint research center is planned for Tomioka, which lies immediately north of Naraha.

"Community development will not proceed unless there is a core structure," a government source said. "It would be perfectly all right if money was injected through the decommissioning business."

TEPCO has been constructing bases for decommissioning work in municipalities where evacuation orders are still in place.

In Okuma, a community that co-hosts the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, TEPCO has built a facility to prepare 2,000 meals a day for workers at the plant. There are also plans to construct dormitories that can house 750 employees.

By the end of March, TEPCO's Fukushima Revitalization Headquarters, now based at the J-Village training center about 20 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 plant, will move to Tomioka.

"It is the responsibility of the central and other governments as well as TEPCO to create a situation where those who want to return can do so," said Yoshiyuki Ishizaki, chief of the headquarters.

Kazuyuki Shima, 37, who has lived in temporary housing in Iwaki since evacuating from Okuma, believes that creating jobs will lead to a revitalized local community.

He now works at the TEPCO facility that prepares meals for workers.

"If people gather for decommissioning, the restart of supermarkets and hospitals will also be accelerated," Shima said. "That will make it easier for local residents to return. If that happens, I believe this community will not be forgotten."

At the same time, the decommissioning plans have led to unusual demographics.

Often, the number of workers involved in decommissioning exceeds the number of residents who have returned to their homes.

That is the case in Hirono, a town within a 30-kilometer radius of the Fukushima No. 1 plant. The town also has nearly twice as many men as women.

To prevent housing facilities from sprouting up all over the town, the local government plans to adopt an ordinance requiring prior notification of construction plans of such buildings.

About 1,300 workers involved in decommissioning and decontamination work around the plant now reside in Naraha, about triple the number of residents who have returned home.

The Naraha town government is encouraging the construction of housing for the workers at a golf course away from the residential area.

"Residents might be concerned about the large number of strangers in their community and will be hesitant about returning home," a high-ranking town official said.

In Mayor Izawa's deserted town of Futaba, there are no signs of when residents can return home.

After lambasting the TEPCO president, Izawa asked for help in persuading companies involved in decommissioning R&D to build offices in Futaba.

"I do feel the contradiction, and I am in quite a dilemma," Izawa said. "But without that, can a local government that never had any other major industry ever think of surviving?"

(This article was written by Chikako Kawahara, Akifumi Nagahashi and Takuro Negishi.)

False compensation claims with insider's help?

February 27, 2016

TEPCO insider helped cook up false nuke crisis compensation claims: ex-NPO exec

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160227/p2a/00m/0na/006000c>

An ex-NPO executive accused of making false claims for nuclear crisis compensation has testified in his trial that someone inside Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) provided instructions on how to make the claims, it has been learned.

Kazuaki Shindo, a 44-year-old former senior executive at Nakano Ward, Tokyo-based NPO "Higashinihon Daishinsai Genshiryoku Saigaito Hisaisha Shien Kyokai" (support association for victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake and nuclear disaster), made the statement at the Tokyo District Court on Jan. 25. Shindo is on trial for allegedly conspiring with an event management company in Fukushima Prefecture around April 2012 to extract about 12 million yen in compensation from TEPCO through a false claim for sales lost due to the nuclear disaster.

The NPO is accused of acting as a compensation claim agent for companies posing as victims of the nuclear disaster. Hiroshi Murata, 57, another former senior official of the NPO who was arrested and indicted with Shindo, was given a nine-year prison sentence on Feb. 15.

Shindo testified he was told by Murata, "If (the TEPCO employee) checks your documents and you then submit a perfect application, your claim will go smoothly."

According to Shindo's testimony, the TEPCO employee was a friend of Murata's, and he taught Shindo how to fill in the compensation claim forms. Shindo said that when a false claim was paid out, the NPO would give the insider a cut.

Shindo provided specific examples of the advice given to him by the employee, such as, "Subcontractor companies should apply for compensation individually." He also said there was at least one case where the NPO paid the insider a 5 percent cut of the compensation money. When a prosecutor asked, "What was the payment for?" Shindo said, "I think it was for the information provided and the quality of the instructions."

At the trial, the TEPCO employee was referred to only by the pseudonym "Yamazaki." Shindo said he had not met Yamazaki in person, and that he was told by Murata that Yamazaki joined the scam because, due to personal matters, his salary alone was insufficient. He also said that he gave Yamazaki's mobile phone number to investigators.

Shindo's lawyer told the Mainichi Shimbun, "The insider must have existed. The claims actually went through, and unless (the insider) was someone of significant standing, they could not have pulled this off." A representative for TEPCO's public relations office said, "We reserve comment on individual testimony, but we will cooperate earnestly with the authorities."

TEPCO's executives indicted

February 29, 2016

Three ex-TEPCO executives indicted over Fukushima nuclear disaster

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201602290064>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. will finally have to explain in court their actions--or inaction--in relation to the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant five years ago.

Court-appointed lawyers serving as prosecutors filed indictments at the Tokyo District Court on Feb. 29 against the three former executives on charges of professional negligence resulting in death and injury.

Former TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata, 75, and two former vice presidents, Sakae Muto, 65, and Ichiro Takekuro, 69, are accused of failing to implement safety measures despite being aware of the possibility that such an accident could unfold at the utility's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The indictment says the three knew beforehand that a tsunami exceeding 10 meters could hit the plant, flood a reactor building, cause a loss of electric power, and lead to an explosion. But they still did not take adequate measures to safeguard the plant.

The Fukushima No. 1 plant is located 10 meters above sea level.

A tsunami greater than 10 meters did hit the plant site following the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011. The waves flooded reactor buildings, knocked out power and caused hydrogen gas explosions.

A number of patients at hospitals in the vicinity of the stricken nuclear plant died or were injured in the subsequent evacuation. The indictment said the three former executives should be held criminally responsible for these deaths and injuries.

The three former executives are expected to plead innocent at their trial.

However, the trial is expected to bring into the open internal TEPCO documents that have not been released until now.

After a criminal complaint was submitted by residents and citizens groups, the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office decided in September 2013 not to indict the former executives, citing the difficulty in predicting such an accident.

However, in July 2014, the Tokyo No. 5 Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution overrode the prosecutors' decision and sent the case back to them for a further look.

But the prosecutors again decided not to indict the three.

In July 2015, the inquest committee handed down a second decision stating the three former executives should be indicted because "they bore the obligation to hold a high level of attention in order to prepare against the remote chance of an accident."

Before they submitted the indictment to the court, the five court-appointed lawyers serving as prosecutors read over the former executives' responses to questioning by prosecutors.

TEPCO issued a statement on Feb. 29 saying it would refrain from commenting on a legal case.

Ex-TEPCO officials indicted over Fukushima

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160229_23/

Three former executives of the Tokyo Electric Power Company have been indicted over the March 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Court-appointed lawyers indicted on Monday former TEPCO chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and 2 former vice presidents, Ichiro Takekuro and Sakae Muto.

The 3 former executives have been charged with professional negligence resulting in death or injury.

The lawyers were named as prosecutors by the court.

In 2013, public prosecutors decided not to press charges against the 3. But a prosecution inquest panel of randomly selected citizens voted last year to indict them.

The indictment says the former executives could have predicted that the nuclear power plant would be inundated by tsunami waves, but they failed to take appropriate safety measures. It says this led to hydrogen explosions at several reactor buildings and resulted in the injury of 13 people.

The indictment also says the former executives forced patients and others to evacuate a hospital in Okuma Town. It says that as a result, the conditions of 44 people worsened and they died.

While addressing a Diet committee, Katsumata said he did not receive a briefing on the possibility of tsunami-triggered flooding, because the report stopped at the division in charge of nuclear power and plant operation.

Takekuro told the committee they did not take substantial measures because the possibility of a serious accident was calculated based on an assumption.

Muto said they believed standards discussed by experts were enough to ensure safety.

Former Tepco execs indicted for failing to anticipate, prevent meltdowns

Kyodo

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/02/29/national/crime-legal/tepco-trio-face-charges-failing-act-prevent-11-meltdown-debacle/#.VtRZ-OaDmot>

Three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. were indicted Monday for allegedly failing to take measures to prevent the tsunami-triggered crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant in March 2011. The indictment, mandated by an independent panel of citizens after prosecutors decided against bringing charges, seeks to answer in court the question of whether the key Tepco figures should be held criminally responsible for the disaster.

The three executives facing charges of professional negligence resulting in death and injury are Tsunehisa Katsumata, 75, chairman of Tepco at the time, and two former vice presidents, Sakae Muto, 65, and Ichiro Takekuro, 69.

The indictment blames them for injuries to 13 people, including Self-Defense Forces personnel, from hydrogen explosions at the plant, as well as the deaths of 44 patients forced to evacuate from a nearby hospital.

In a statement Monday, Tepco's public relations office offered a renewed apology over the accident but declined to comment on the indictment because it concerns a criminal case.

The three executives were not taken into custody. They are likely to plead not guilty.

The crisis at the six-reactor plant on the Pacific coast started when tsunami triggered by the massive earthquake of March 11, 2011, flooded power supply facilities and crippled reactor cooling systems. Reactors 1, 2 and 3 suffered fuel meltdowns, while hydrogen explosions damaged the buildings housing reactors 1, 3 and 4.

The trial is expected to be long and is unlikely to start before the end of the year, as preparations to compile evidence and points of issue will require a considerable amount of time, sources familiar with the case said.

After prosecutors dropped their charges, the Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution, an independent committee of citizens, overturned the decision in July 2015, saying the three were responsible because they should have foreseen the risks of major tsunami prior to the disaster.

The prosecutors had determined it was hard for them to predict major tsunami.

The inquest committee has said the former executives received a report by June 2009 that the plant could be hit by tsunami as high as 15.7 meters and that they “failed to take pre-emptive measures knowing the risk of a major tsunami.”

A group of Fukushima residents and other people filed a criminal complaint in 2012 against dozens of government and Tepco officials over their responsibility in connection with the nuclear crisis.

But when the prosecutors decided not to file charges, including against then-Prime Minister Naoto Kan, the group narrowed its list of targets and asked the committee to examine whether the prosecutors’ decision was appropriate.

Criminal action against 3 former TEPCO bosses

February 29, 2016

Former Tepco bosses charged over Fukushima meltdown

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/feb/29/former-tepco-bosses-charged-fukushima>

First criminal action to be taken after 2011 disaster, in which three nuclear reactors went into meltdown after earthquake

Justin McCurry in Tokyo

Three former executives from Tokyo Electric Power (Tepco) have been charged with contributing to deaths and injuries stemming from the triple meltdown in 2011 at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Their indictment on Monday marks the start of the first criminal action to be taken in connection with the disaster, which forced the evacuation of 160,000 residents, many of whom are still unable to return to their homes.

Tsunehisa Katsumata, who was Tepco’s chairman at the time, has been charged with professional negligence resulting in death, along with two former vice-presidents, Sakae Muto and Ichiro Takekuro. The men, who have not been taken into custody, allegedly failed to take measures to defend Fukushima Daiichi, despite being aware of the risk from a tsunami.

Three of the plant's six reactors went into meltdown after a magnitude-9 earthquake triggered a tsunami along the north-east coast of Japan on 11 March 2011. The waves flooded the facility's back-up power supply and crippled the reactors' cooling systems, causing massive radiation leaks.

Experts say prosecutors could struggle to prove criminal responsibility for failing to prevent the meltdown. The trial, which is not expected to begin until next year, could reveal information about the disaster that Tepco has yet to make public.

Japan's public broadcaster, NHK, said the three former executives would plead not guilty to the charges and argue that it was impossible to predict the size of the tsunami.

An independent judicial panel of citizens ruled last July that the men should go on trial, after public prosecutors had twice decided not to pursue the case.

The 11-member panel, which has the power to compel prosecutors to act, said Katsumata, 75, Muto, 65, and Takekuro, 69, should be held criminally responsible for the deaths of 44 elderly hospital patients during and soon after the evacuation, and injuries to Tepco staff and members of the self-defence forces. Campaigners called the indictments "a major step", and called on Japan to abandon nuclear power.

Advertisement

"The people of Fukushima and Japan deserve justice," said Hisayo Takada of Greenpeace Japan. "The court proceedings that will now follow should reveal the true extent of Tepco's and the Japanese regulatory system's enormous failure to protect the people of Japan.

"Tepco and the Japanese regulator continue to ignore demands to disclose key details of what they know about the causes of the accident. The 100,000 people who still can't return home deserve to have all the facts."

Of the country's 43 working reactors, four have been restarted since last year, while the remainder are undergoing repairs and checks under stricter post-Fukushima safety regulations.

Reports by the government and MPs have been strongly critical of the safety culture at Tepco, and of lax oversight by the government and regulators.

Last year, the International Atomic Energy Agency pointed to a misguided faith in the safety of nuclear power as a key factor in the Fukushima accident. A 2012 parliamentary report said Fukushima was a "manmade disaster" caused by poor regulation and collusion between the government, Tepco and the industry's watchdog.

Tepco has insisted it was impossible to anticipate a tsunami of the size that struck the plant almost five years ago. The judicial panel said, however, that the executives ignored a 2008 internal report predicting that the plant could be struck by tsunami as high as 15.7 metres, adding that they had "failed to take pre-emptive measures, knowing the risk of a major tsunami".

Only last week, the utility admitted it had failed to announce that meltdowns had occurred in three Fukushima Daiichi reactors until two months after the accident.

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Tepco said it had been unaware of a company emergency manual that defined a meltdown as damage to more than 5% of the fuel inside a reactor. For weeks, the firm said the reactors had sustained less serious "core damage".

The nuclear and industrial safety agency, the industry watchdog at the time, also refused to describe the accident as a meltdown.

Tepco only started using the word meltdown May 2011, after a computer simulation showed fuel in one reactor had almost entirely melted and fallen to the bottom of the primary containment chamber, and that two other reactor cores had melted significantly.

The firm conceded its initial wording had been misleading, but insisted it had responded appropriately.

“Core damage or meltdown, it didn’t make any difference in how we responded to the emergency, which was to cool the cores no matter what,” said Tepco spokesman Shinichi Nakakuki.

Could the tsunami have been predicted?

February 29, 2016

Tsunami predictions focal point at court

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160229_35/

The outcome of the trial will be determined by whether the 3 defendants could have predicted a major tsunami such as the one that triggered the nuclear accident at Fukushima Daiichi.

Tokyo Electric Power Company was found to have predicted in 2008 that there was a risk that a tsunami of up to 15.7 meters could hit the plant.

It made the estimate based on an assessment by a Japanese government task force for the promotion of earthquake research.

But the utility failed to take specific measures on the grounds that a tsunami of that scale was unlikely.

In 2012, former TEPCO chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata told the Diet that he did not receive the report of his company’s prediction.

The 2 former vice presidents said they were aware of the report, but they maintained that the figure lacked sufficient basis.

The defendants will not be found accountable unless they are found to have neglected their professional duty.

The issue of whether the nuclear accident could have been avoided altogether will also be taken up at the trial.

Both the Diet panel and the government’s team of investigators have yet to unveil the contents of the hearings conducted with the 3 officials.

Third-party panel to be set up

February 29, 2016

Panel to probe why Fukushima meltdown criteria manual wasn't found for almost 5 years

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160229/p2a/00m/0na/015000c>

A third-party investigative panel to be set up by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) will focus on why the company failed to find its own manual containing criteria for judging nuclear reactor core meltdowns until nearly five years after the onset of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, and whether the document was covered up.

The discovery of the manual, which came earlier this month, highlights the lack of a crisis mentality among TEPCO employees, as well as the utility's fear of a negative reaction from the government, which was excessively nervous about the phrase, "reactor core meltdowns."

Akio Takahashi, president of the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum, Inc. (JAIF), who was in charge of responding to the March 2011 Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant accident as a then TEPCO fellow, declined to mention the manual issue.

"I don't know whether there was a judgment that meltdowns had occurred," he told a JAIF regular news conference on Feb. 25. This is despite the fact that there are records that TEPCO employees held teleconference discussions on the company's response to the accident on the assumption that meltdowns had occurred.

The manual on countermeasures against nuclear disasters, which was compiled in 2003, defines a meltdown as a situation in which over 5 percent of the core of a reactor has been damaged. Based on the manual, TEPCO could have determined three days after the onset of the disaster triggered by the March 11, 2011 quake and tsunami that meltdowns had indeed occurred at the Fukushima No. 1 complex. Yet it was more than two months after the disaster broke out that the company acknowledged the meltdowns. Questions remain as to whether the existence of the manual had been covered up. Tsuneo Futami, a specially appointed professor at the Tokyo Institute of Technology who served as head of the Fukushima No. 1 plant from 1997 to 2000, said, "I guess employees failed to share the manual because they were under the impression that meltdowns would never take place, and forgot its existence."

Some employees, however, should have been involved in compiling the manual.

One of the possible reasons the manual's existence was not disclosed is that TEPCO was wary of how the government would react.

At a news conference on March 12, 2011, following a hydrogen explosion at the power station's No. 1 reactor building, a then deputy director-general at the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA), who was serving as a spokesman for the now-defunct agency, clearly stated that a meltdown had occurred at the plant.

Fearing that the word, "meltdown," could give the public the impression that the nuclear plant had been disastrously damaged, however, the prime minister's office admonished NISA and its spokesman was

replaced. From then on, TEPCO avoided using the term "meltdown," and instead used softer words, such as "damage."

The possibility cannot be ruled out that TEPCO failed to check the plant's status against the manual, worrying about how the prime minister's office would react.

TEPCO's report on its investigation into the disaster, released in 2012, makes no mention of the manual, suggesting that its in-house probe was shoddy. If the third-party panel to be set up shortly is to end up releasing a report that is favorable to TEPCO, the utility would come under fire from the public. The emergence of the manual's existence has put TEPCO in a corner as it aims to restart its idled Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant in Niigata Prefecture.

TEPCO's delay led to govt's delay

March 2, 2016

FIVE YEARS AFTER: TEPCO admits to delay in reporting onset of Fukushima nuclear accident

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201603020041>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Tokyo Electric Power Co. delayed reporting the emergency at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant to the central government for about an hour after it started, according to an in-house investigation.

TEPCO's investigation provided details of the crisis that unfurled after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck on March 11, 2011, and confirmed the delay, the utility said March 1.

The lag led to a delay in the government's declaration of an emergency situation.

"In the chaos immediately after the outbreak of the emergency situation, staff members may have failed to make the report," a TEPCO official said. "We want to look in detail into whether they have appropriately dealt with the situation."

Electric power companies are required by law to report emergency situations at nuclear power plants to the government immediately after they occur.

It is a two-stage process involving a preliminary Article 10 report, which is followed with an Article 15 report. An Article 15 report leads directly to the government's declaration of an emergency situation.

The Great East Japan Earthquake struck at 2:46 p.m. At around 3:35 p.m., waters from the ensuing tsunami began to inundate the compound of the Fukushima plant.

From 3:37 p.m. to 3:41 p.m., all electricity sources for alternating current were lost in order for the No. 1, No. 3 and No. 2 reactors.

At 3:42 p.m., TEPCO judged that all electricity sources for alternating current at the three reactors were lost, including all the electric generators for emergency situations, and informed the government through an Article 10 report.

Around the same time, batteries became submerged at the No. 1 and the No. 2 reactors. Because of that, electrical sources for direct current were also lost. Those electricity sources were "lifelines" to monitor water levels in the nuclear reactors and manage cooling systems.

When all of those electricity sources were lost, the utility was required to immediately file an Article 15 report.

However, TEPCO made the Article 15 report at 4:45 p.m., about one hour later, on grounds that it was not able to monitor water levels at the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors.

The fax the utility sent to the government read, "As a precautionary measure, we made a judgment that the current situation corresponds to that described in the Article 15."

After the in-house investigation TEPCO admitted the possibility that it could have made the Article 15 report immediately after the tsunami struck the nuclear plant instead of delaying it for an hour.

The investigation results were further evidence that TEPCO failed to appropriately deal with the nuclear accident immediately after it unfolded.

Last month, it became known that the utility was unaware for five years of the existence of internal guidelines to assess whether meltdowns have occurred at nuclear reactors.

TEPCO's corporate culture hasn't changed, says NRA

March 3, 2016

Nuclear watchdog slams TEPCO over long overdue 'discovery' of meltdown manual

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160303/p2a/00m/0na/008000c>

The head of Japan's nuclear watchdog has slammed Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) over its recent announcement that it found an in-house manual containing criteria for judging nuclear reactor core meltdowns almost five years after the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant accident.

Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA), told a regular press conference on March 2, "It represents the corporate culture of TEPCO that has remained unchanged since before the nuclear accident. I want the company to seriously reflect upon its actions.

"While the company had properly prepared a manual, it insists that it failed to notice the existence of the manual up until recently. I wonder what the utility created the manual for?" Tanaka continued, raising questions about TEPCO's assertion that the manual only turned up in February this year.

With regard to the recent automatic shutdown of the No. 4 reactor at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture, which took place only three days after the reactor was reactivated on Feb. 26, Tanaka said, "I had told the utility that being free from any trouble would lead to regaining public confidence. The accident has betrayed such expectations, and it is utterly regrettable."

Will TEPCO's trial fill the (information) gaps?

March 1, 2016

EDITORIAL: Fukushima disaster trial offers chance to reveal TEPCO's organizational woes

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201603010033>

A case concerning responsibility for the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant will be brought to court.

Three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the plant, face a trial over the nuclear crisis triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in 2011.

Court-appointed lawyers serving as prosecutors filed indictments with the Tokyo District Court on Feb. 29 against the three former executives on charges of professional negligence resulting in death and injury. Former TEPCO Chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata, 75, and two former vice presidents are accused of failing to implement sufficient safety measures against tsunami. A number of patients at hospitals in the vicinity of the plant died in the subsequent evacuation and workers were injured at the plant.

The mandatory indictments reflect public criticisms and suspicions concerning the nuclear accident.

Many citizens have taken a dim view of the fact that nobody has been held accountable for the nuclear accident, which the company claims was “beyond expectation.” TEPCO’s profit-oriented policy is also believed to be behind the failure to take sufficient safety measures at the plant.

Such huge accidents are caused by a complicated confluence of factors. There is inevitably a limit to what the trial of the former TEPCO executives can do in terms of clarifying the whole picture of the disaster. The trial will be focused on the three individuals’ criminal liability for negligence from the viewpoint of the law and evidence.

Still, the trial can reveal important facts about the information the former executives had before the accident and the decisions they made in responding to the information.

We also hope the trial will shed light on problems with the organization and corporate culture of a large utility operating many nuclear reactors so that important lessons can be gleaned.

After residents and citizens groups filed a criminal complaint, the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office decided not to indict the former executives, citing the difficulty in predicting such an accident.

But a committee for the inquest of prosecution comprising 11 citizens has twice decided that the former TEPCO executives should be prosecuted, triggering the process for forced indictment.

A report on the accident published by TEPCO in 2012 did not make clear who should be held responsible and what kind of lessons should be learned. The document’s descriptions were vague about many key subjects, especially issues regarding TEPCO’s entire organization, such as the company’s advance assumptions about possible tsunami, steps it had taken against the risk, and how the company handled related information during the crisis.

The Diet-appointed commission tasked with investigating the nuclear accident said the root cause dated back before the disaster.

But many questions remain unanswered about how the utility dealt with the risks before the accident. Why didn’t TEPCO take stronger measures against the risk of tsunami even though it had estimated a tsunami of up to 15.7 meters could hit the plant? What was the thinking behind this failure to take such measures?

The government’s investigative committee has interviewed around 770 people and disclosed the testimonies of about 200, who have given their consent. But only about 20 of them are former TEPCO executives and other people linked to the utility.

We do hope the trial will fill in as many information gaps as possible.

The trial should also provide an opportunity to take a closer look at the roles played by the investigative panels.

All panels established to look into the accident finished their work in about one year, leaving many stones unturned.

These panels should scrutinize all relevant factors, including flaws with related organizations, to prevent a recurrence of the disaster. The systems and functions of investigations into nuclear accidents should be expanded and enhanced.

The damaged nuclear reactors that have spewed large amounts of radioactive materials into the environment must be continuously cooled with water. Water contaminated with radioactive substances keeps accumulating at the plant.

Around 100,000 people are still living away from their homes as evacuees. The nuclear accident has still not been brought under control.

Obviously, more efforts are needed to draw crucial lessons to ensure nightmarish nuclear accidents will never happen again.

5 years later and still often looking away from safety issues

Source : EcoWatch

<http://ecowatch.com/2016/03/01/fukushima-nuclear-waste/>

5 Years Later Fukushima Still Spilling Toxic Nuclear Waste Into Sea, Top Execs Face Criminal Charges

Lorraine Chow | March 1, 2016 8:42 am

Five years after the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl, three former executives of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Telco) were indicted Monday for allegedly failing to prevent the tsunami-sparked crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Former Tepco chairman Tsunehisa Katsumata and former vice presidents Ichiro Takekuro and Sakae Muto were charged with contributing to deaths and injuries stemming from the nuclear meltdown triggered by the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Their indictment is Japan's first criminal action taken in connection with the nuclear crisis. If convicted, the three men could face up to five years in prison or a penalty up to 1 million yen.

According to The Japan Times, the trio have been blamed for injuries to 13 people, including Self-Defense Forces personnel, hydrogen explosions at the plant and the deaths of 44 patients who were forced to evacuate from a nearby hospital. The indictment seeks to answer in court the question of whether the three bosses should be held criminally responsible for the disaster, the publication stated.

Tepco had been warned years earlier about the dangers of an earthquake and a tsunami hitting the plant. According to The Japan Times, the inquest committee said the former executives received a report by June 2009 that the plant could be hit by a tsunami as high as 15.7 meters and that they "failed to take pre-emptive measures knowing the risk of a major tsunami."

The three executives were not taken into custody and are likely to plead not guilty to the charges arguing that it was impossible to predict the size of the tsunami, according to Abc.net.au. The trial is not expected to begin until next year.

Still, many have been encouraged by the indictment.

“I’m full of emotion,” Ruiko Muto, head of a campaign group pushing for a trial, told a Tokyo press briefing. “This will be a great encouragement for hundreds of thousands of nuclear accident victims who are still suffering and facing hardship.”

Environmental group Greenpeace also called the charges against the Tepco executives a step forward for Fukushima victims.

“The court proceedings that will now follow should reveal the true extent of **Tepco’s and the Japanese regulatory system’s enormous failure to protect the people of Japan**,” Hisayo Takada, deputy program director at Greenpeace’s Japan office, said in a statement. “Tepco and the Japanese regulator continue to ignore demands to disclose key details of what they know about the causes of the accident. The hundred thousand people who still can’t return home deserve to have all the facts.”

In response to the indictment, a Tepco spokesman said, “We will continue to do our utmost to sincerely address the issue of compensation, decontamination and decommissioning of the plant, and at the same time we express our unflinching resolve to ensure strengthening the safety measures at our nuclear power plant.”

The nuclear meltdown forced the evacuation of 160,000 locals who lived around the power plant with many who will never return. The devastating fallout continues to this day, as Scientific American wrote in their upcoming issue:

The plant has yet to stop producing dangerous nuclear waste: its operator, the Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco), currently circulates water through the three melted units to keep them cool—generating a relentless supply of radioactive water. To make matters worse, groundwater flowing from a hill behind the crippled plant now mingles with radioactive materials before heading into the sea. Tepco collects the contaminated water and stores it all in massive tanks at the rate of up to 400 metric tons a day. Lately the water has been processed to reduce the concentration of radionuclides, but it still retains high concentrations of tritium, a radioactive isotope of hydrogen. Disputes over its final resting place remain unresolved. The same goes for the millions of bags of contaminated topsoil and other solid waste from the disaster, as well as the uranium fuel itself. Health reports, too, are worrisome. Scientists have seen an increase in thyroid cancers among the children who had lived in Fukushima at the time, although it is too early to tell if those cases can be attributed to the accident.

Indeed, as Beyond Nuclear reported in October, a study examining children who were 18 years and younger at the onset of the Fukushima nuclear meltdown found an increase in thyroid cancers, as predicted by World Health Organization initial dose assessments.

Despite the environmental and human health catastrophe—as well as widespread public opposition—Japan restarted its first nuclear reactor **in August**.

“Five years since the Fukushima accident began, Japan’s nuclear regulator is repeating the same kind of mistakes that led to the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Last week, the plutonium-fueled Takahama 4 reactor was restarted, just days after a radioactive leak in the primary coolant system,” Kendra Ulrich, senior global energy campaigner at Greenpeace Japan, said in a statement Monday.

“Japan’s nuclear regulator continues to look the other way on major safety issues. The government continues to press ahead with nuclear restarts despite unresolved safety problems that put the public at risk. It’s time to break free from nuclear and embrace the only safe and clean technology that can meet Japan’s needs—renewable energy.”

Last week, Greenpeace’s Rainbow Warrior vessel surveyed waters near the Fukushima plant to take samples from the seabed to be analyzed in independent laboratories in Japan and France.

"It's very important (to see) where is more contaminated and where is less or even almost not contaminated," Greenpeace's Jan Vande Putte told AFP, stressing the importance of such findings for the fishing industry.

Utilities only interested in overturning safety assessment

March 4, 2016

Utilities aim to overturn NRA expert panel's fault assessment

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160304/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

With the latest draft report from an expert panel at the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA), which pointed out the possibility of an active fault running beneath the Shika Nuclear Power Plant in Ishikawa Prefecture, fault assessments for all nuclear plants that face questions about their geological safety have been reported. The operators of these nuclear stations are now looking to overturn the panel's judgment in the NRA's safety screening process.

- **【Related】** Fault under Shika nuclear reactor likely to be active: NRA expert panel

Of 10 nuclear reactors at six nuclear power plants, three stations, including the Shika plant operated by Hokuriku Electric Power Co., have been judged to be likely situated above active faults. As the nuclear plant operators have raised objections to the panel's assessment results, the focal point of future safety screenings is whether they will be able to prove the panel's conclusion wrong.

The NRA had established an on-site field survey team with experts and carried out investigations of the six nuclear plants, over which the organization's predecessor the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency claimed that additional screening was necessary.

In addition to the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at the Shika nuclear plant, the expert team recognized the possibility of active faults under the No. 2 reactor at Japan Atomic Power Co.'s Tsuruga nuclear station in Fukui Prefecture and the No. 1 reactor at Tohoku Electric Power Co.'s Higashidori nuclear power plant in Aomori Prefecture.

The new regulatory standards for the operation of nuclear power plants adopted in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster forbid construction of key facilities such as a nuclear reactor right above an active fault. Since the No. 1 reactor at the Shika plant and the No. 2 reactor at the Tsuruga plant have been judged to be possibly located directly above active faults, they face higher chances of being decommissioned.

As for the No. 2 reactor at the Shika plant and the No. 1 reactor at the Higashidori plant, they are located near active faults, meaning that drastic anti-seismic reinforcement measures or relocation of facilities is necessary. This will likely push back the timing of the restart for these nuclear reactors.

Hokuriku Electric applied to the NRA for safety screening for the No. 2 reactor at the Shika nuclear plant in August 2014, and the nuclear watchdog will debate on the existence of an active fault at the safety inspection.

Meanwhile, the utility released a comment following the March 3 draft report on the Shika nuclear plant, saying, "The draft report is far from acceptable. We will submit new geological data to back our

argument." The company also plans to apply for a safety inspection of the No. 1 reactor at the Shika plant, which was pointed out to be located directly above an active fault.

March 4, 2016

Active fault likely runs under Shika nuke plant

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201603040047

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A Nuclear Regulation Authority panel has concluded that an active fault line likely runs under a reactor at the idled Shika nuclear power plant, which could threaten the reactor with decommissioning if the findings are confirmed.

The NRA panel of experts compiled its conclusions on March 3 regarding a study into the Shika plant in Ishikawa Prefecture.

"It is rational to interpret the fault (under the No. 1 reactor) as active," the panel said.

The panel is comprised of four outside specialists on geological faults and Akira Ishiwatari, an NRA commissioner.

Hokuriku Electric Power Co., the operator of the plant, intends to contest the panel's findings. The utility faces the possibility of having to mothball the No. 1 reactor if an active fault is confirmed to run under an important facility of the plant.

New safety standards for nuclear plants, which were put into effect after the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, prohibit major facilities in locations that lie above an active fault.

The panel plans to submit a report of its findings to the NRA in the near future. The NRA is expected to handle the report as "significant findings."

A final determination on whether active faults lie under the Shika plant will be made during safety screenings that will be conducted under the new standards.

The focus of the study was on three faults that run under the plant.

In the summer of 2015, the expert panel compiled a draft report that said, "The possibility of an active fault cannot be denied."

An additional expert asked to evaluate that draft concurred with the findings.

At the March 3 meeting, the panel examined the S-1 fault that runs beneath the No. 1 reactor building. The panel looked over detailed sketches of the geographical formation made when the nuclear plant was being constructed.

That led to the wording, "It is rational to interpret the fault (under the No. 1 reactor) as active," supporting past findings about the fault.

The panel indicated that its assessment was made based on a limited number of documents and called on Hokuriku Electric Power to provide additional data.

The panel also looked at the S-2 and S-6 faults, both of which run under important facilities of the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors. The panel concluded there was the possibility that those two faults were also active.

Such findings would mean that the No. 2 reactor could also not meet the new safety standards unless major anti-quake measures were implemented.

On March 3, Akizumi Nishino, an executive vice president with Hokuriku Electric Power, insisted that none of the faults were active and indicated that the utility would challenge the findings during safety screenings for the No. 2 reactor. He also said the company will seek to have a safety screening for the No. 1 reactor as well.

A major question will be whether Hokuriku Electric Power can submit additional geological data that can overturn the findings of the expert panel.

(This article was written by Masanobu Higashiyama and Koji Kitabayashi.)

Impact of radiation should not be played down

March 4, 2016

Mutations, DNA damage seen in Fukushima forests, says Greenpeace

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/04/national/science-health/mutations-dna-damage-seen-fukushima-forests-greenpeace/#.VtnNuaDmot>

AFP-JIJI

Conservation group Greenpeace warned on Friday that **the environmental impact of the Fukushima nuclear crisis five years ago on nearby forests is just beginning to be seen and will remain a source of contamination for years to come.**

The March 11, 2011 magnitude-9.0 undersea earthquake off the nation's northeastern coast sparked a massive tsunami that swamped cooling systems and triggered reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Radiation spread over a wide area and forced tens of thousands of people from their homes — many of whom will likely never return — in the worst nuclear accident since Chernobyl in 1986.

As the fifth anniversary of the disaster approaches, Greenpeace said **signs of mutations in trees and DNA-damaged worms were beginning to appear, while “vast stocks of radiation” mean that forests cannot be decontaminated.**

In a report, Greenpeace cited “apparent increases in growth mutations of fir trees, ... heritable mutations in pale blue grass butterfly populations” as well as “DNA-damaged worms in highly contaminated areas.”

The report came as the government intends to lift many evacuation orders in villages around the Fukushima plant by March 2017, if its massive decontamination effort progresses as it hopes.

For now, only residential areas are being cleaned in the short-term, and the worst-hit parts of the countryside are being omitted, a recommendation made by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

But **such selective efforts will confine returnees to a relatively small area of their old hometowns, while the strategy could lead to re-contamination as woodlands will act as a radiation reservoir, with pollutants washed out by rains,** Greenpeace warned.

The conservation group said its report relies largely on research published in peer-reviewed international journals.

But “most of the findings in it have never been covered outside of the close circles of academia”, report author Kendra Ulrich said.

The government's push to resettle contaminated areas and also restart nuclear reactors elsewhere around the country that were shut down in the aftermath of the crisis are a cause for concern, Ulrich said, stressing **it and the IAEA are using the opportunity of the anniversary to play down the impact of the radiation.**

"In the interest of human rights — especially for victims of the disaster — it is ever more urgent to ensure accurate and complete information is publicly available and the misleading rhetoric of these entities challenged," she said.

Scientists, including a researcher who found mutations of Fukushima butterflies, have warned, however, that **more data are needed to determine the ultimate impact of the Fukushima accident on animals in general.**

Researchers and medical doctors have so far denied that the accident at Fukushima would cause an elevated incidence of cancer or leukemia, diseases that are often associated with radiation exposure. But they also noted that long-term medical examination is needed, especially due to concerns over thyroid cancer among young people — a particular problem for people following the Chernobyl catastrophe.

LDP arguments often "incoherent"

March 6, 2016

INSIGHT: LDP warns of crises, but not the one at home

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/column/AJ201603060012>

By HIROHITO OHNO/ Director of The Asahi Shimbun Editorial Board

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party argues the Constitution of Japan should be amended to include provisions on emergency situations. But the party's argument, once again, is incoherent.

According to the LDP's commentary in Q&A format on its draft of an amended Constitution: "The provisions would allow, among other things, an emergency situation to be declared and the prime minister or other officials to be temporarily empowered to deal with the emergency situation in case a military contingency, a large-scale disaster or other circumstances has taken place."

"Has taken place" sounds odd. Japan has always been in the midst of an emergency situation since that fateful day five years ago. It's not that the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disaster "has taken place." It "is taking place."

The government's "declaration of a nuclear emergency situation," issued immediately after the disaster started, has never been lifted.

The generation of huge amounts of highly radioactive water at the nuclear plant has not been brought under control. And what has become of the melted nuclear fuel is anybody's guess.

Plans to send in robots to determine the location and situation of the melted fuel have not progressed as desired. As many as 7,000 workers are doing their best every day to bring the situation under control, but the end is nowhere in sight.

Still, the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is rushing to restart nuclear reactors, although emergency evacuation routes have yet to be finalized and evacuation drills have been insufficient.

It is quite difficult to find any consistency between the reactor restart decision of the administration and the headlong way it is seeking to establish the emergency situation provisions.

I met Ulrich Beck (1944-2015), an erudite sociologist known for his theory of “risk society,” in Munich two months after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the Fukushima nuclear disaster on March 11, 2011.

The argument that the catastrophe was caused by a natural disaster “is ... categorically a mistake,” I remember him saying at the time. “**The decision to build an atomic industry in the area of an earthquake is a political decision; it’s not done by nature.**”

He argued that **a natural phenomenon turned into a disaster precisely because humans had brought risk to that area.**

AIR OF VAGUE ANXIETY

The current administration says it wants to be prepared for risks, but it does not appear to be looking squarely at the true situation.

This is not the first time the Abe administration has appeared incoherent. It was just as incoherent when it railroaded the security legislation bills through the Diet last year.

The Abe administration has repeated the slogan “proactive pacifism” and emphasized unrealistic scenarios, such as a blockade of the Strait of Hormuz in the Middle East and a Japanese mother and her children forced to flee from a military encounter.

That said, the administration has shown little interest in the huge numbers of refugees fleeing conflict in the Middle East, even though their mass exodus not only represents a humanitarian issue but also constitutes a crisis that is shaking global stability.

Real emergency situations are posing serious challenges to political leaders although solutions are not readily available. By contrast, the administration’s imaginary emergency situations are nowhere to be found.

When the national security bills were before the Diet, conservative politicians and commentators reiterated, “Abide by the Constitution, and the nation will be lost.”

They also churned out an air of vague anxiety to win public support, a favorite trick used in all ages and countries by those in power.

VACUUM OF LAWMAKERS

The LDP also argues that a military contingency or a disaster that obstructs voting in a Lower House election could lead to a Lower House devoid of all members. The party says emergency provisions should be in place to prevent such a situation from occurring.

But if the party is so concerned about a vacuum of lawmakers in case of an emergency, then why are party members calling for a snap Lower House election to be held on the same day as the Upper House election this summer?

If simultaneous elections are held for both chambers of the Diet, all Lower House members and half of the Upper House lawmakers, up for election, would be outside of parliament engaging in election campaigns. That would create a greater vacuum of lawmakers than if only one election is held.

This is probably more proof that LDP officials’ talk of “emergency situations” refers to imaginary scenarios that they are not concerned about after all.

If they were really worried, they wouldn’t dare hold a double election.

They argue that a potential vacuum in the legislature poses a major risk, but they are quite nonchalant about a greater vacuum that would result from a double election.

Those pushing for constitutional amendment in this manner are hardly deserving of the description of “having a strong sense of responsibility,” a phrase that Abe has used to describe them.

Fukushima: What lessons for Japan?

March 7, 2016

Editorial: What has Japan learned from the nuclear crisis?

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160307/p2a/00m/0na/013000c>

One cannot help but wonder what Japan has learned from the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant triggered by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, and how the country should build a new society.

Many members of the public apparently feel frustrated when they look back on the past five years. A nuclear accident can happen even if preventive measures are taken. Japan has higher risks of nuclear disasters than other countries as it is prone to earthquakes and has numerous active volcanoes. Following meltdowns at the power station, many people decided that Japan should create a society that does not rely on nuclear power even if it is difficult to achieve.

Five years have passed since the outbreak of the nuclear disaster. Nevertheless, some 100,000 residents of the affected areas are unable to go back to their hometowns, and are still taking refuge elsewhere in Fukushima and outside the prefecture. Radioactive substances that leaked from the crippled plant contaminated soil in wide areas, dealt a fatal blow to local industries and caused splits in families and local communities.

While witnessing such extensive damage, the government has adopted a policy of retaining nuclear power and electric power companies restarted four nuclear reactors over the past year. Those who are in favor of maintaining nuclear power even say, "An accident like one in Fukushima will never occur again." Japan should squarely face this serious nuclear crisis and consider whether the country should revive its reliance on atomic power.

Shortly after the outbreak of the disaster, the then administration of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) reversed Japan's energy policy and set a goal of eliminating atomic power stations by the 2030s. However, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)-led government that was launched in late 2012 retracted the previous administration's strategy, and adopted a policy of maintaining nuclear power while aiming to decrease Japan's reliance on atomic energy for power generation.

In deciding on a power supply configuration for 2030, the LDP-led administration placed priority on reducing near-term costs. **The government's policy-making process returned to the pre-disaster system without trying to reflect public opinion.**

The Mainichi Shimbun has been of the view that restarting atomic power stations is inevitable under certain conditions if Japan is to pursue a society without nuclear power and pay close attention to economic and social risks involving the use of such energy. However, it must be premised on broad consensus among the public. Ensuring the safety of residents in areas around nuclear plants is a prerequisite for restarting nuclear power plants.

True, regulations on safety measures have been revised. The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) independent of the executive branch of the government has been established and regulatory standards

have been stiffened. Safety measures have also been beefed up to include responses to serious nuclear accidents.

However, Japan has only improved its defective safety measures to meet global standards. Measures to protect residents from radiation are still not subject to regulatory standards and the NRA is not responsible for checking regional disaster prevention plans and resident evacuation plans. Japan should review these matters since such safety measures are subject to regulatory standards in the United States. Lessons from problems involving the chain of command in response to the nuclear disaster and confusion over disclosure of information to the public have not been put to good use. Furthermore, it recently came to light that Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the crippled Fukushima plant, found an in-house manual containing criteria for judging nuclear reactor core meltdowns nearly five years after the accident, showing that the utility could have declared much earlier that meltdowns occurred at the power station. **This reflects the failure to re-examine the way relevant information is disclosed.**

Kyushu Electric Power Co. has stated recently that it will not construct a seismic isolated building, which will serve as a key building for responses to an accident, on the premises of nuclear plants it intends to reactivate.

These attitudes of power companies have raised serious questions about their awareness of the need to enhance safety measures at nuclear plants. If power companies believe that it is all right if they only meet regulatory standards, it could lead to the revival of the myth of the infallible safety of nuclear plants. Both the NRA and operators of atomic power stations should continue to warn that serious accidents could occur at such plants and regularly review how to respond to accidents.

At the end of last month, three former executives of TEPCO were indicted over the nuclear disaster after a prosecution inquest panel concluded for the second time that the three deserve prosecution. The move is in line with public sentiment as there are apparently numerous members of the public who are dissatisfied with the fact that nobody has been held criminally responsible for the disaster. **A system that fails to clarify responsibility for serious accidents has remained unchanged since the Fukushima accident. It is necessary to make it clear specifically who should take responsibility for a serious nuclear accident and how.**

It is also a serious problem that the government has been unable to drastically change its policy of promoting the nuclear fuel cycle project -- in which fuel spent at nuclear plants is reprocessed and reused at power stations -- even though the project has been deadlocked. If the government is to continue the project as it is, Japan would have to operate nuclear reactors to consume plutonium generated through the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel, running counter to phasing out of nuclear power. The government is trying to continue reprocessing spent nuclear fuel, but it rather should consider burying such waste deep underground.

Even if Japan were to completely eliminate nuclear power, the country would not be able to avoid the final disposal of highly radioactive nuclear waste. Following the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis, the government has changed the way to select candidate sites for final disposal facilities, and is set to announce a "hopeful" candidate site from a scientific viewpoint by the end of this year. However, questions remain over how to form consensus among members of the public over the matter. The government does not appear truly enthusiastic about settling the issue. If the government is to go ahead with reactivation of idled nuclear reactors without addressing the issue, it would represent a return to the pre-disaster atomic energy policy.

Judging from these circumstances, critics might lament that Japan failed to learn anything essential from the nuclear disaster. However, it is important to solve all these problems one by one without giving up hope. **Public awareness of the need to save electric power has not been completely lost, even if it may have**

diminished. Last summer, there was enough electric power despite the scorching heat, largely because of efforts to cut back on electric power consumption.

Another way to prevent moves to revive Japan's reliance on atomic power may be to reform the electric power supply system by eliminating power companies' regional monopolies. While promoting transparent competition, power suppliers should be encouraged to introduce renewable energy and the public should be urged to reduce power consumption, both to the maximum extent. Japan still has these options. The country should take the opportunity of the fifth anniversary of the outbreak of the nuclear disaster to pursue a society that does not depend on nuclear power.

Questioning Gov't compensation conditions

March 8, 2016

5 years on: Fukushima residents raise questions about gov't compensation scheme

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160308/p2a/00m/0na/013000c>

In June 2015, the central government decided to retain evacuation orders up until March 2017 and set the target deadline for paying compensation to Fukushima residents affected by the 2011 nuclear disaster at March 2018 regardless of the timing of lifting evacuation orders.

Before the government made that decision, the period for paying compensation to residents of zones under the evacuation order had been set "until one year after the lifting of the evacuation order" under the then compensation standards set by the government in connection with the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

Under the previous scheme, the later the evacuation order was to be lifted, the longer the government was to continue to pay compensation. The scheme, therefore, prompted some people within the central government and local bodies to argue that reparations were preventing affected residents from returning to their original hometowns or preventing them from becoming independent. However, the government's move to set the uniform deadline for compensation has raised questions that the scheme does not take into account the conditions of each individual region.

In the winter of 2014 -- nearly three years after the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis -- Tadamori Oshima, then chairman of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Headquarters for Accelerating Reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake, and Naraha Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto were seen at a small restaurant in the Fukushima Prefecture city of Iwaki. While the snow was falling silently outside, the two men were sipping sake. It was a get-together meeting aimed at discussing how to lift the evacuation order for Naraha, which could be the first among municipalities whose entire areas were under evacuation orders to do so.

In May 2014, about several months later, Naraha Mayor Matsumoto said at a news conference that Naraha residents would return to the town "after the spring of 2015." The LDP's Oshima, who had known what

Matsumoto would say in advance, called for early lifting of the evacuation order by urging the mayor to drop the word "after." But Matsumoto adamantly refused to do so.

Behind the clash between Oshima and Matsumoto over the issue was the compensation period set until "one year after the lifting of the evacuation order." During the 13 rounds of town hall meetings held between April and May 2014, Matsumoto was told by local residents that "it will take several years from the lifting of the evacuation order before we settle down to a good life. We should also have the government continue to pay compensation." Therefore, Matsumoto called on the central government to keep paying compensation to the local residents, saying, "They need compensation money for a while even after the evacuation order is lifted." Unless his demand was accepted, it would be difficult for him to agree to lift the evacuation order.

"We needed a political decision that would change the rules over the lifting of the evacuation order for Naraha. Even for other municipalities, setting a deadline rather than idly postponing lifting of evacuation orders will lead to their independence," said LDP lower house legislator Masayoshi Yoshino from Fukushima Prefecture, a senior official of the LDP Headquarters for Accelerating Reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Under the ruling party proposal worked out by Oshima and others in May 2015 and presented to the central government, the evacuation orders for residence restriction zones and zones preparing for the lifting of the evacuation orders would be lifted by March 2017 at the latest. The proposal set the period for compensation for psychological difficulties up until March 2018 regardless of the timing of the lifting of evacuation orders. In June 2015, the government made a decision at a Cabinet meeting in line with the proposal.

For the central government, the lifting of the evacuation order for Naraha was more significant as compared with the Miyakoji district of Tamura city and the eastern part of Kawauchi village for which evacuation orders had already been lifted because it had a larger population. If the compensation period were to be set for March 2018 regardless of the timing of the lifting of the evacuation orders, there would be no point in delaying the return of local residents to their original hometowns. Using Naraha as a model, the central government would be able to push other municipalities to return to where they used to be and demonstrate its efforts to rebuild the disaster-stricken region.

The central government set the target period for lifting evacuation orders as March 2017 partly in order to bring it in line with the definition of difficult-to-return zones. That's because they were defined from the beginning as zones whose annual radiation dose would not likely drop below 20 millisieverts -- a minimum reference dose that would allow residents to return home -- even six years after the outbreak in March 2011 of the nuclear disaster.

Mayor Matsumoto subsequently accepted the central government's plan to lift the evacuation order for Naraha in September 2015. He welcomed the central government's Cabinet decision to extend the compensation period by about 18 months from the period until "one year after the lifting of the evacuation order," saying that his demands were "granted in full."

Matsumoto said, "When I said I want them (local residents) to become independent at a recent town hall meeting, most of them understood what I said."

The government's move to set the uniform deadlines for lifting evacuation orders and for the compensation period has sparked a backlash from some people and municipalities. That's because it is difficult for many of the municipalities where decontamination has been moving more slowly than in Naraha to predict how many of their residents will return home even if decontamination is completed and the evacuation orders are lifted as planned. If no one lives there, there will be no commercial activities there, either.

In the Fukushima Prefecture town of Namie, 44 percent of decontamination work on residences carried out by the Environment Ministry was completed as of Feb. 15, 2016.

According to a survey conducted in 2015 by the Reconstruction Agency, 48 percent of Namie residents decided not to return to the town, while only 17.8 percent of residents were willing to do so. "The central government is telling us to become independent, but even if I reopen my business, if no one returns, it will hardly pay its way," said Fumitaka Kanazawa, a 59-year-old man who used to run a funeral business with 20 employees in Namie. His five-member family lives mostly on compensation money for psychological damage -- 100,000 yen each a month. But if the evacuation order is to be lifted by March 2017 in accordance with the government plan, there will be no compensation payments one year later. Moreover, compensation for damages to business operations will stop after February 2017.

Vigilance must be redoubled to ensure safety

March 8, 2016

Japan's nuclear watchdog chief urges safety vigilance by government, utilities

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/08/national/japans-nuclear-watchdog-chief-urges-safety-vigilance-government-utilities/#.Vt6im-aDmot>

Kyodo

The head of the Nuclear Regulation Authority is urging the government and utilities to redouble their vigilance to ensure reactor safety, warning them not to drop their guard simply because units have cleared the NRA's tough safety screening.

NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, said passing the screening is "not enough" during an interview Monday ahead of Friday's fifth anniversary of the Fukushima No. 1 disaster.

The government calls the new regulations the best in the world and has promoted the restart of reactors that were taken offline in the wake of the Fukushima crisis.

Tanaka said the strict regulations should not promote any new "safety myth," referring to the pre-Fukushima situation in which nuclear plants in Japan were assumed to be accident-free.

"If they are to establish a new safety myth, it would be better to cancel nuclear power," he said.

Tanaka stressed that it is not just Tokyo Electric Power Co. but the entire nuclear industry that should bear responsibility for Fukushima, and that no reactor should be allowed to resume operations unless it is approved under the new regulations.

The NRA chairman said the situation at Fukushima No. 1 is calm, with cleanup work making steady progress.

But he expressed doubts about the efficacy of an underground ice wall that Tepco has built around reactor buildings to prevent groundwater from flowing into their basements.

The wall "will not essentially help reduce the risk" of an increase in toxic water, he said.

Decontamination work, on the other hand, is effective and should help more people return to their homes in the evacuation zones, as radiation levels in many such areas have fallen to acceptable levels, he said.

Akio Matsumura: Our lessons from Fukushima

Our Lessons from Fukushima: New Concerns for the Future

March 6, 2016 Environment, Japan, Nuclear

français

Akio Matsumura

This week people across the world are commemorating the fifth anniversary of the worst nuclear power accident in history, which occurred at the Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant in Japan on March 11, 2011.



A woman is seen at a temporary housing complex covered in snow that accommodates nuclear evacuees from Okuma, a town inside the exclusion zone next to Tokyo Electric Power Co's (TEPCO) tsunami-crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, in Aizuwakamatsu, Fukushima prefecture, February 17, 2015. REUTERS/Toru Hanai

Many aspects of the crisis continue to affect human and environmental safety. There are still 178,000 evacuees in total (99,750 at Fukushima) who do not know when they can return home. 400 tons of contaminated water run into the sea every day. Frequent torrential rains wash away radioactive materials remaining at the site into the sea. 814,782 tons of contaminated water are stored at about 1,000 tanks, with more tanks built every month. The 7,000 workers at the site undertake dangerous tasks every day. The dedicated workers have solved many problems so far, but many continue to perplex managers and cleanup crews. No one approaches reactors 1, 2, and 3 due to strong radiation, and no scientific solution is expected for at least forty years. Unfortunately, future disruption cannot be discounted – the possibility of another strong earthquake in forty years is non-zero.

Since the Fukushima accident, we were fortunate to quickly receive opinions and recommendations across many fields. Nuclear scientists, medical doctors, military personnel, seismologists, biologists, oceanographers, volcanologists, journalists, spiritual leaders, parliamentarians, students and grass-root organizations, and public opinion leaders all weighed in. The horizontal perspective that emerged offered

a different view than was possible from any single discipline, no matter how expert the practitioner. The Japanese benefited from these messages that cut through the confusion that pervaded the media at the time.

On the occasion of the 5th anniversary of the Fukushima nuclear accident, I would like to recall the early stages of the event, and share my own appraisal and recommendations from the lessons I have learned from this painful event.

In the first two weeks, experts and the public alike sought technical solutions. Panic grew when few were available. Did the cores meltdown? What was the appropriate distance to evacuate? How could we maintain the cooling systems for the reactors through multiple system failures? Are the ventilation systems working? Was this worse than Chernobyl? Can Self-Defense Force helicopters drop water on the spent-fuel pools of units 3 and 4?

It might be impossible to accurately describe the panic shooting through Japan's leaders and the public at the time. Government agencies and the utility in charge, the Tokyo Electric Power Company, were unprepared for the catastrophic nuclear disaster. The public blamed both parties, and they blamed each other, for poor communication and delays.

The confusion and panic were not limited to Japan, but extended to the US government as well. There was a huge gap between the two governments' assessments of the damages of the six reactors, in particular of the fourth reactor, which because of coincidental maintenance was in a unique position. Mixed messages on safety and damage caused more panic: Japan's government decided 12.5 miles (20 km) was an appropriate evacuation zone while the US government settled on 50 miles (80km) for its citizens. The United Kingdom, France, Germany, and other countries told their citizens to consider leaving Tokyo, 125 miles away (200 km).

From the start, a few experts knew the crisis went beyond current technical solutions, but that any step forward would require more information. Early in the confusion, my good friend, the late Dr. Hans-Peter Durr, former Director of Astrophysics at the Max Planck Institute in Germany, called me to suggest I inform the Prime Minister of Japan that the Fukushima accident was much worse than Japan's government had let on. Although Japan had not admitted the core meltdown then, Hans-Peter knew that Fukushima had brought us to the edge of our scientific knowledge. He recommended Japan invite an independent assessment team of top nuclear scientists and structural engineers to develop a solution. I passed his urgent message on to the Prime Minister office and party leaders.

What was the scope of the problem? A year after the crisis and we still had little quantitative sense. One way to begin to get a sense was to know the number of spent fuel assemblies on site. TEPCO did not share this information, so I asked Ambassador Mitsuhei Murata to check discretely with inside sources. He informed us that the total number of spent fuel assemblies at the Fukushima Daiichi site, excluding the assemblies in the pressure vessels, was 11,421. Then I asked Robert Alvarez, former Senior Policy Adviser to the Secretary and Deputy Assistant Secretary for National Security and the Environment at the U.S. Department of Energy, an explanation of the potential impact of the 11,421 assemblies.

On April 3, 2012, Bob interpreted this number for us. The results were astounding. The Cesium-137 at the site was 85 times greater than at the Chernobyl accident.

While it would not necessarily go "boom" like a nuclear bomb, this amount of radiation had enormous destructive potential. People were shocked to find this out. The article quickly gained over one million readers and was shared virally through the Internet. There is no doubt that without the warnings by international scientists about the potential global catastrophe of the fourth reactor, Japan's government would not have made it a priority to remove the 1,535 fuel assemblies, which contained 14,000 times the radiation of the Hiroshima bomb.

Without experts from multiple fields, important information would have been remained with the government and nuclear utility, rather than with the public.

But even with this information, large aspects of the crisis and its cause are hidden if the focus remains technical. Mr. Kiyoshi Kurokawa, chairman of the National Diet of Japan Fukushima Accident Independent Investigation Commission, has a different, but definitive, perspective.

The earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011 were natural disasters of a magnitude that shocked the entire world. Although triggered by these cataclysmic events, the subsequent accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant cannot be regarded as a natural disaster. It was a profoundly manmade disaster – that could and should have been foreseen and prevented. And its effects could have been mitigated by a more effective human response.

How could such an accident occur in Japan, a nation that takes such great pride in its global reputation for excellence in engineering and technology? This Commission believes the Japanese people – and the global community – deserve a full, honest and transparent answer to this question. What must be admitted – very painfully – is that this was a disaster “Made in Japan.”

Its fundamental causes are to be found in the ingrained conventions of Japanese culture: our reflexive obedience; our reluctance to question authority; our devotion to ‘sticking with the program’; our groupism; and our insularity.

For me, Fukushima taught that we live with new threats, and have been living with them for decades. I learned that a nuclear power plant accident can have an unimaginable impact over human life for centuries. The accident has caused untold harm to those whose lives were disrupted by the plant. If things had gone worse, what about the effect of 24,000 years of environmental harm on future generations?

It is one thing if the public had been aware of and accepted these risks when the plant was constructed. Unfortunately, this was not the case in Japan. Those in charge did not even accept these risks, not at the time of construction, nor at the time of the accident. Not even now.

TEPCO has admitted only last month, five years later, that it delayed two months in using the term “meltdown” at the site. Arnie Gundersen of Fairewinds and Mycle Schneider, author of the World Nuclear Industry Status Report, have indicated that it was obvious from the moment there were massive releases of fission gases that a meltdown was underway. But TEPCO’s denial had an impact on how they handled the panic. As Dr. Helen Caldicott suggested, it was obvious that Japan’s government should have evacuated women and children sooner and much farther away. Helen wrote for our blog: *The Nuclear Sacrifice of Our Children : 14 recommendations to help radiation contaminated Japan.* TEPCO and government authorities refused to hear the wake-up call, brushing off the warnings of many experts.

After five years of reflection, Fukushima has pointed me to new concerns with nuclear power plants. It is my important discovery from the Fukushima nuclear power accident that we failed to understand the radiation from the nuclear bombs and the radiation from the nuclear accident are little different in terms of the risk for human life. We have long accepted the dangers of attacks by state actors with nuclear weapons, and now we understand the threat of human error and natural disasters like earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanoes, on nuclear power plants. What about attacks on nuclear power plants? Above all, I am concerned with terrorist attacks on nuclear power plants in volatile countries, especially Pakistan.



Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and President Xi Jinping shake hands as China agrees to build more nuclear power plants in Pakistan.

The odds are high and increasing that a terrorist group will target one or more of the many nuclear power plants around the world. These as well as many other such plants remain insecure from various threats – and intelligence of some threats remains hard to share between governments. The United States could not warn Japan, a close ally, of some specific threats if they wanted to! Other nuclear threats, like a small suitcase-sized nuclear device exploding in Times Square, continue to give experts and presidents nightmares. Given the probability of these risks in the year ahead, regardless of whether we live in a democratic or authoritarian society it is surprising that the public has no information on the matter. As we saw in Fukushima, so much pain is caused by the sudden realization that we have been asked to live with risks that were hidden from us until it was too late.

Experts will and should do much of the work in defining, examining, and making recommendations for solutions on these risks. This responsibility increases as more nuclear power plants are built and planned – especially in China, India, the United Arab Emirates, Vietnam, and Indonesia. But an open conversation with the public brings many benefits for preventing attacks and accidents and reacting appropriately once they have occurred. Social media presents itself as a potential bridge between society and experts from many fields when a nuclear accident or attack occurs. Indeed, this could be a powerful tool to complement efforts of other organizations working hard to prevent nuclear disasters. Loss of control of information is difficult for any authority, but Fukushima and other scenarios like Ebola have shown the limits of top-down communication channels.

Politicians face many competing challenges and interests in their jobs as they lead society forward. Nuclear energy looks like a good fit for the challenges of climate change, for example. But no assessment can be considered correct or honest if the risks of any solution are not presented openly to all interested parties, including the public. Fukushima has offered us an opportunity to have a wide-ranging debate on the challenges we face at the intersection of many human needs – carbon-free energy, safety, environmental health, human security, and preservation for future generations. These are issues that will define our human society for centuries to come – we should not miss the chance to discuss them with all the facts on the table.

A parting note: Sir Brian Flowers, a prominent British nuclear physicist, pointed out that if nuclear power plants had been built and deployed in Europe before WWII, then large parts of Europe would be

uninhabitable today because of conventional warfare and conventional sabotage directed against those nuclear plants.

Reactions to court order

March 9, 2016

Fukui, Shiga gov. react to court order

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160309_36/

Fukui Governor Issei Nishikawa says it is extremely regrettable that inconsistent court decisions have been making those in areas hosting nuclear power plants worry about nuclear power.

He made the remarks after a Japanese court on Wednesday issued an injunction suspending 2 reactors' operations at a Takahama plant.

Nishikawa says the issue of nuclear power should be dealt with by the government, including judiciary authorities and nuclear regulators as a whole, to deepen people's understanding about the issue.

He says the government, including the Nuclear Regulation Authority, need to squarely face up to the issue.

Shiga Governor Taizo Mikazuki said in a statement he sees the injunction as a decision by the court, which placed emphasis on the safety of the nuclear plant.

He says the government and operators of nuclear plants need to take seriously the continuing public skepticism about nuclear power and take every safety measure available.

Mikazuki will also continue asking the government and the industry to respond sincerely and responsibly to lingering concerns among the people in areas with nuclear plants.

Kansai Electric: Injunction is unacceptable

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160309_28/

Kansai Electric Power Company issued a statement saying it is regrettable that the court failed to understand its claim, and that the injunction is totally unacceptable.

The utility said it will halt the No.3 reactor as ordered. But it says it will quickly take steps to lodge an objection and prove the reactors' safety to have the injunction canceled as soon as possible.

Surprise court order: Reactions

March 9, 2016

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What is the priority?

Editorial: Give priority to putting disaster victims' lives back in order

March 9, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160309/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

Efforts to restore regions hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and ensuing nuclear crisis and the livelihoods of residents in affected areas have come to the crossroads as March 11 marks the fifth anniversary of the triple disasters. The government is ending its intensive reconstruction period and is poised to implement a new policy to support disaster-ravaged areas.

About 30 percent of communities ravaged by tsunami have completed their relocation to higher ground, but there are many areas that face harsh realities, such as depopulation and the aging of society. It is necessary to consider what is needed to support the livelihoods of disaster victims.

Newly built houses are lined in a residential area developed on a hilly area in the Koizumi district of southern Kesennuma, Miyagi Prefecture, which faces the Pacific coast.

Residents of the Koizumi district, hit hard by the tsunami, began consultations on relocation of their entire neighborhood to higher ground shortly after the disasters. The construction of the new residential area based on advice from scholars is viewed as a model of local resident-led regional development.

However, some unexpected problems have surfaced over the past five years. Some people unable to wait for the development of the new residential area acquired land lots in other areas while others left their hometown. Koizumi residents had initially planned to develop 90 land lots but actually created 65. Some 17 of them remain unsold.

The biggest problem for residents of the area is that little progress has been made on efforts to attract shops to their neighborhood, forcing residents to go far away for shopping. Many households in reconstruction housing units in the same district comprise of elderly people. Shigeaki Oikawa, who served as a coordinator in the relocation of the neighborhood, says, "Government organizations should pay closer attention to securing means of transportation for us."

Over the five-year intensive reconstruction period, the national government set aside 26 trillion yen for disaster recovery efforts. In particular, the central government has characterized relocation of neighborhoods devastated by tsunami to inland areas or higher ground and land elevation and readjustment projects as the core of what it calls "creative reconstruction." Projects to relocate tsunami-hit neighborhoods to higher ground materialized in many areas because the central government agreed to fully foot the cost of such relocations.

In some regions, such relocation projects were carried out smoothly thanks to in-depth discussions among local residents, like one in Iwanuma, Miyagi Prefecture. Projects to relocate whole neighborhoods hit by tsunami to higher ground have played a certain role in maintaining these communities.

In many other areas, however, such relocation projects were not carried out as planned. Many residents were forced to abandon moving to new neighborhoods as time went by. As a result, the number of households covered by these projects in all the disaster-ravaged areas decreased by some 8,000 from approximately 28,000 as initially planned.

Many coastal areas in the Tohoku region have been suffering from depopulation and the aging of their populations for many years. The Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and the nuclear crisis have further contributed to the outflow of younger people. According to the latest census, all municipalities in coastal areas of Iwate Prefecture saw their populations shrink from pre-disaster periods. In Miyagi Prefecture, the populations in Onagawa and Minamisanriku among other municipalities decreased sharply.

Some neighborhoods that relocated to higher ground or inland areas are just like marginal villages because there are few young residents. Serious questions remain as to whether these neighborhoods will be able to maintain their communities in the long run.

It is expected to take a considerable amount of time to complete large-scale projects to elevate land in the Iwate Prefecture city of Rikuzentakata and other areas. One cannot help but wonder whether it is appropriate to force residents of these areas to live in temporary housing for more than five years while waiting until the elevation work is completed. The national government should scrutinize whether it could have shown residents sufficient options regarding reconstruction methods that suit the situation of each area.

The government should be aware that many residents face difficulties in putting their livelihoods back in order because the reconstruction of their housing has been delayed. Officials regard the next five years as a period when the government will aim to complete its disaster recovery efforts. However, much of the 6.5 trillion yen that will be set aside for recovery efforts over that period will be used for building infrastructure, such as storm surge barriers and roads.

The central government should shift its disaster recovery efforts from public works projects to livelihood assistance and the creation of new industries. Projects for building large-scale storm surge barriers with the aim of blocking tsunami, which stirred controversy over landscape conservation, are being delayed because of a shortage of construction materials and soaring personnel costs. The necessary height of such levees should be flexibly reviewed.

Priority should be placed on efforts to create new jobs and maintain regional communities. Even if communities in disaster areas are urged to be independent and self-reliant, this would not sufficiently tap the latent strength of regional communities. Private-sector ideas are becoming more important under such efforts rather than assistance that the central and local governments extend to disaster-ravaged areas.

There are good examples of efforts to revitalize the economies in disaster areas. In Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, "Ishinomaki 2.0," an organization made up of local residents and those from other prefectures, is promoting the revitalization of the local economy. The organization is aiming to build better neighborhoods than the pre-disaster period under the slogan, "We never think of restoring our town to the pre-3.11 (March 11) situation."

Specifically, the group is carrying out projects to support young people's efforts to start businesses in the city after they visited the area to participate in volunteer activities and promoting exchanges between these young people. Architect Tsukasa Nishida, 40, a resident of Yokohama who is involved in the group's activities, says, "Participation of young people living outside is necessary for disaster recovery."

Young people who have moved to the Karakuwa Peninsula in Kesenuma, Miyagi Prefecture, from various other areas have launched a project to revitalize the local economy. Close attention should be paid to these activities even though they are still small-scale.

Use of vacant lots and vacant rooms in newly developed residential areas on higher ground and reconstruction housing will likely pose a challenge. It is necessary to consider allowing young people, who are interested in the reconstruction of disaster-ravaged areas, to move into these vacant lots and rooms. Such efforts will help maintain communities in these areas.

The situation of disaster-hit regions that suffer from depopulation and the aging of their populations reflect Japan's future. The government as well as the general public should take the reconstruction of disaster-ravaged areas as a task for the entire nation and support such efforts from a long-term perspective.

Edano blasts Govt. for pushing nukes

March 9, 2016

Face of government in Fukushima aftermath blasts Abe push for nuclear power

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/09/national/face-of-government-in-fukushima-aftermath-blasts-abe-push-for-nuclear-power/#.VuEhMOaDmot>

by Andy Sharp and Maiko Takahashi

Bloomberg

In his trademark blue jumpsuit, the bleary-eyed Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano became the government's face of the Fukushima nuclear crisis as he faced the press every few hours. Five years later, he has **stern words for Japan's atomic watchdog, the plant's operator and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's nuclear restart policy.**

Edano, secretary-general of the now-opposition Democratic Party of Japan, refutes claims by the current administration that the Nuclear Regulation Authority is imposing the world's most stringent safety standards in the earthquake-prone nation.

"The government's explanation is mistaken," the 51-year-old said in an interview last week at his Tokyo office. "The regulations have not won international recognition as the world's toughest."

The NRA was set up in 2012 by Edano's party to replace a predecessor criticized for ignoring warnings before the Fukushima disaster and having cozy ties with operators. The NRA judges whether facilities meet safety guidelines for restart, and is viewed by the International Atomic Energy Agency as demonstrating independence and transparency.

The regulatory body regards its regulation as "one of the most stringent standards in the world," and from time to time, has been inaccurately quoted and criticized as if we were saying it was "the most," NRA spokesman Go Kobayashi said in an email.

Edano's comments come just weeks after three former executives of plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. were indicted for professional negligence over the disaster, which prosecutors say led to the death of more than 40 people during the evacuation. The indictments are the first time a court will examine whether the failure to prevent the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl constituted a crime.

Last month, Tepco said that it knew of meltdowns at the Fukushima reactors in the days after the March 11, 2011 disaster — something it refused to acknowledge for about two months after the accident, triggering speculation about a cover-up.

Edano said that on March 14 — three days later — he thought the possibility of a meltdown was very high. "While we amateurs took action based on that hypothesis, Tepco — who are supposed to be the professionals — kept on saying 'things are not yet clear,'" he said. "It was we amateurs who were right." Regarding Tepco's announcement that it was aware of the meltdown, Edano said it was better to be late than "continuing to hide" this information. "It's a problem if Tepco doesn't take responsibility like it should."

Tepco spokesman Yukako Handa said by email that the company will investigate the sequence of events and causes of why it couldn't declare the nuclear core meltdown.

Edano was born in Tochigi Prefecture, which borders Fukushima; his alma mater is the University of Tohoku in Sendai, a coastal city devastated by the tsunami. His role during the crisis was a combination of deputy prime minister and chief of staff, holding an average of five televised briefings a day in the weeks after the magnitude-9.0 earthquake and enormous tsunami hit northeastern Japan.

Getting about two hours sleep a night, he patiently provided details on radiation levels, evacuation orders, power rationing and recovery efforts. He was praised on social media for his work ethic, with some pleading with him to get more sleep.

The Abe administration goal is to have nuclear power make up as much as 22 percent of the nation's energy needs by 2030. A total of about 30 to 33 reactors of Japan's operable 43 reactors will have to be restarted to meet the target, according to Syusaku Nishikawa, a Tokyo-based analyst at Daiwa Securities Co.

Edano said he had deep reservations about the government's restart plan.

"As things stand I strongly question whether evacuation plans can be said to be sufficient," he said. "The government isn't getting involved, the government isn't taking responsibility."

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters in Tokyo on Tuesday that Edano's criticism of the plan was "way off the mark." He said that safety was the top priority and there were no problems whatsoever with the evacuation plan.

A Kyodo News survey over the weekend showed that about two-thirds of local government leaders across Japan wanted the government to reduce its reliance on nuclear power, or scrap it completely.

Still, Edano said he felt it was his duty to serve the public in a time of crisis, giving news conferences even when he had no new information to provide. He continues to feel that burden.

"Even though five years have passed, people are still living in temporary housing, and many are living a long way from the hometowns they want to return to," he said. "Even though we are now in opposition, I always feel a heavy responsibility as part of the administration at the time."

Asked whether he had kept any of the jumpsuits, Edano said: "They are government property. I can't even take one as souvenir."

March 9, 2016

Mr. Suga not happy about court decision

March 10, 2015

Suga: Govt. won't review nuclear regulations

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160310_26/

Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary says the government will continue to promote the restart of nuclear reactors, despite an injunction ordering 2 reactors at the Takahama plant to be taken offline.

Yoshihide Suga said on Thursday the reactors were judged by the Nuclear Regulation Authority to have met new regulations said to be the world's toughest.

He said the government honors that judgment, and added it has no plans to review those regulations.

Court injunction a major blow to Kepco's business

March 10, 2016

Takahama reactor injunction torpedoes Kansai Electric's business strategy

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160310/p2a/00m/0na/007000c>

The court-ordered suspension of the No. 3 and 4 reactors at the Takahama Nuclear Power Plant is a major blow to operator Kansai Electric Power Co.'s business, sending the utility's strategy for the April liberalization of Japan's retail electricity market back to square one.

- **【Related】** Utility begins work to halt Takahama reactor following court order
- **【Related】** Japan court rules against operating restarted Takahama reactors
- **【Related】** Shiga Pref., Takahama nuclear plant operator sign safety accord
- **【Related】** Mayor OKs reactor restarts at Takahama nuke plant; questions remain on evacuation plan

Bringing the generating capacity of the Takahama reactors back online was directly connected to Kansai Electric's plans to lower power prices to boost the company's competitiveness in a wide-open retail electricity market. The March 9 injunction issued by the Otsu District Court, however, has torpedoed that scenario.

Kansai Electric's plan appeared to be progressing smoothly. The Takahama reactors in Takahama, Fukui Prefecture, passed the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA)'s strict new safety inspections, and the No. 3 reactor resumed operations in January. Some technical trouble would delay the restart of the No. 4 reactor "for about a month," according to one Kansai Electric executive, but the firm could look forward to the plant once again generating income. As such, the utility was ready to launch a retail power marketing strategy in May that would play up its business stability and reduced household electricity prices. Now, after the injunction, Kansai Electric will be getting zero power out of the Takahama reactors. At a March 9 news conference at the company's headquarters in Osaka's Kita Ward, atomic fuel cycle section chief Kazuo Kijima told reporters, "We believe this will have an extremely severe impact" on the utility. Before the Fukushima nuclear crisis, Kansai Electric had been Japan's most atomic power-reliant utility, and thus has been the hardest hit by the eventual shutdown of all the country's reactors in the wake of the March 2011 disaster. Fuel costs for thermal power generation sank Kansai Electric into the red for four straight fiscal years, up to March 2015.

Household electricity rate hikes in 2013 and 2015, plus plunging crude oil prices, will finally get the firm back in the black for the year ending in March 2016, with an expected profit of 150 billion yen. Kansai Electric estimates, however, that the Takahama reactors will cost the company some 300 million yen for every day they remain idle. The expenses won't affect fiscal 2015 results, but "there could be some impact" on profitability for the fiscal year ending March 2017, according to Kansai Electric business planning head Takeshi Tanihara.

The company may lose customers when the retail electricity market opens to competition in April. According to the Organization for Cross-regional Coordination of Transmission Operators, some 73,400 applications to alternate household electricity suppliers had been submitted in Kansai Electric's service area as of Feb. 26.

"There are probably a lot of households that were putting off a decision on switching suppliers until they could get a definite idea of how much Kansai Electric would reduce its prices," an executive at one company set to join the retail electricity market told the Mainichi Shimbun. "If Kansai Electric can't cut rates now, it's certainly possible its customer base will become extremely fluid."

NRA should help relieve residents' worries

March 11, 2016

NRA chairman urges caution in plant decommissioning amid residents' radiation fears

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/11/national/nra-chief-urges-careful-decommissioning-plant-ease-minds-nearby-residents/#.VuK9euaDmot>

by Kazuaki Nagata

Staff Writer

As five years have now passed since the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant meltdowns began, the chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority on Friday stressed that regulators must firmly monitor the decommissioning of the crippled plant to ease concerns of residents affected by the event.

Addressing hundreds of fellow regulators, NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka said towns near the Fukushima plant are still struggling to revive their communities and **former residents are constantly worried about radiation levels.**

"There are many things that we can do to help them," Tanaka said.

"First, we need to direct our utmost efforts to the decommissioning of the Fukushima No. 1 plant, so that it won't be a cause of concern" for Fukushima residents, he said.

The NRA has been tasked with overseeing the decommissioning of the plant, which is being carried out by operator Tokyo Electric Power Co.

Tanaka also said **regulators can help by providing more efficient decontamination plans and maps to show radiation levels near the plant.**

While evacuation orders have been lifted for some areas close to the plant, **nearly 100,000 people are living in limbo after being evacuated.**

The NRA chairman mentioned that some evacuees from the town of Tomioka plan to return home to see the cherry blossoms this year.

However, they will only be able to see the sakura blossoms and get glimpses of their hometown from the inside of a bus because they are worried about radiation exposure.

"I think we share the feeling that we want them to be able to see the cherry blossoms, but not from inside a bus," he said. "What can we do to realize that? What can we do to prevent more people from seeing such

a sad scene? I want you to think about it again by taking this opportunity on March 11," said Tanaka, who has headed the NRA since its inception in 2012.

The NRA was born of lessons learned from the Fukushima meltdowns — the world's worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl, Ukraine, in 1986.

Before the disaster, the regulatory body was under the wings of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which actually promotes the use of nuclear energy, which is why it was strongly criticized, because its regulators lacked the necessary teeth to strictly regulate plant operators.

Now, the agency has been separated from the nuclear promotional body and boasts a considerable degree of independence from politicians.

And counting

March 10, 2016

Tepco's nuclear crisis has cost Japanese people ¥3.46 trillion

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/10/national/tepcos-nuclear-crisis-cost-japanese-people-%C2%A53-46-trillion/>

Jiji

Japanese people have paid more than ¥3.46 trillion over the past five years in costs associated with the triple meltdown at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, Jiji Press learned.

The per capita cost of damages, decontamination work, measures against tainted water and other relevant work needed to deal with the crippled plant, which was heavily damaged in the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, came to ¥27,000.

The disaster-response costs are the aggregate of the government's direct fiscal spending, expenses from the proceeds of the sale of government-held Tepco shares and from the government's energy-related special account, and additional charges that Tepco and six other power firms received through rate increases to cover damages.

Following the Fukushima accident, the seven power firms have raised rates to cover damages by at least a total ¥327 billion through fiscal 2015, which ends this month.

In its rate increases, Tepco included over ¥219.3 billion of costs for maintaining equipment that treats tainted water, and operating call centers that handle inquiries about damages.

The additional charges are paid to the government, which is paying damages temporarily on behalf of Tepco, through the Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp. after operational fees for the institution are deducted. The institution's operational expenses through fiscal 2014 came to ¥11.7 billion.

The proceeds from the Tepco share sale and disbursements from the energy-related special account are used to fund decontamination work, disposal of radioactive waste and interim storage facilities for tainted soil. Such costs totaled ¥1.69 trillion through fiscal 2014, and the government has temporarily paid that amount on behalf of Tepco.

Loans extended by banks to fund the institution's purchases of Tepco shares are guaranteed by the government. If the loans turn sour, taxpayer money will be used to cover the losses.

The institution expects some ¥2.5 trillion in capital gains through selling of the Tepco shares if the share price goes up sharply, which it says will be enough to cover costs related to the decontamination work. From the energy-related special account, which includes revenues from the tax designed to encourage the development of electric power sources, some ¥1.1 trillion is used to build interim storages. In the government's direct spending through fiscal 2014, a total of ¥1.21 trillion was spent on decommissioning work, radiation checkups and the maintenance of research and development. **Including costs for decontamination work and other direct spending by the government in fiscal 2015 that have yet to be confirmed, the public burden is estimated to grow further.**

Court injunction: The shock

March 10, 2016

Takahama injunction delivers body blow to Japan's nuclear power industry

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/10/national/takahama-injunction-delivers-body-blow-to-japans-nuclear-power-industry/#.VuK8zuaDmot>

by Eric Johnston

Staff Writer

OSAKA – Wednesday's decision by an Otsu District Court judge to slap a provisional injunction on the restart of the No. 3 and 4 reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama nuclear plant has sent a shock through the nuclear power industry.

Moreover, pro-nuclear politicians fear that the nation's push to restart as many reactors as possible as quickly as possible has come to a halt.

On the eve of the fifth anniversary of the 2011 disaster, which included the meltdown of three reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 plant and led to the nation suspending its use of nuclear power for an extended period, only two reactors, Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai No. 1 and 2 reactors, were generating electricity.

The Takahama No. 3 reactor was restarted in January. Kepco officials said it would be shut down in accordance with the court order by Thursday evening.

The No. 4 reactor was already idle after a malfunction forced Kepco to abandon its restart last month.

The Otsu court said the shutdowns were ordered partially because Kepco failed to submit documentation backing up its claims that the reactors meet new safety standards.

One of the most significant aspects of Wednesday's ruling was that the judge sided with the plaintiffs over whether or not Kepco's earthquake prediction methods were valid.

The court found Kepco's standards and conclusions for what is the most "probable" and the "average" quake to not be backed up by sufficient documentation.

“This is a central point in other lawsuits elsewhere in Japan that are trying to halt restarts. The fact that the Otsu judge sided with the plaintiffs on this point will have an effect nationwide,” said Hiroyuki Kawai and Yuichi Kaido, who head a group of nationwide lawyers fighting for Japan to pull the plug on nuclear power.

What happens next? Kepeco can file an objection to the ruling with the Otsu court, which would decide to either uphold or dismiss it. If the injunction is dismissed, the reactors can be restarted.

But upholding the ruling likely means Kepeco would appeal to the Osaka High Court for a review of the lower court ruling. Regardless, the entire legal process would take many months, and possibly years, with no clear path to restarts.

That possibility is distressing local leaders in Fukui, who approved the restarts in the expectation that central government financial assistance would begin to flow again.

It is the second time a provisional injunction has been placed on the Takahama reactors. Last year, one was issued and then withdrawn by a separate court.

On Wednesday, Fukui Gov. Issei Nishikawa criticized the injunction.

“We at the local level take the problems of nuclear power seriously,” he said. “The repetition of the courts shutting them down and then overturning the decision and then shutting them down again is cause for concern about a loss of trust and create unease among residents.”

The Otsu ruling also calls on the national government to take the lead in formulating evacuation plans for residents within 30 km of a nuclear plant, and not just leave such planning to local governments.

That raises the possibility of further lawsuits seeking injunctions against other reactors on the grounds that the central government has not taken the lead in formulating evacuation plans. Nationwide, there are 135 cities, towns, and villages in 21 prefectures within 30 km of nuclear power plants.

"It's unclear who is responsible for whatever is done"

March 11, 2016

Editorial: Face the reality of Fukushima to move forward together

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160311/p2a/00m/0na/020000c>

Five years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami horrified the whole nation. The disasters left more than 18,000 people dead or unaccounted for. Approximately 174,000 people are still taking shelter. Efforts to restore disaster-hit areas are only half way through. The entire country must continue to support the recovery of disaster areas.

In particular, the situation of Fukushima Prefecture affected by the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant remains severe. There are no prospects that the prefecture will completely recover from the nuclear disaster in the foreseeable future, and those who were forced to leave their hometowns affected by the crisis have been scattered around the country. Over 2,000 Fukushima residents have died as a

result of factors related to the disasters, far more than other disaster-hit prefectures. The disasters are continuing to place a heavy psychological and physical burden on Fukushima Prefecture residents. Large black bags stuffed with waste generated by decontamination work are being piled up like a mountain in many places in disaster-hit areas of Fukushima Prefecture. How much land has been contaminated with radioactive substances? How can damage from the nuclear disaster be repaired? Can those who have evacuated from their hometowns go home in the future?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to grasp the real state of radioactive contamination and the amount of damage that is still continuing now.

What is needed now is to seriously face the situation of Fukushima and move forward with residents of the prefecture toward recovery.

The investigative committees set up by the executive and legislative branches of the government as well as private panels have examined the process of the nuclear accident and compiled reports. Still, the government has not sufficiently conducted a comprehensive investigation or evaluation focusing on specific damage caused by the nuclear disaster. A certain amount of relevant data has been accumulated, but no records have been put together in a systematic way.

Fukushima University professor Ryota Koyama says, "A lack of a government report on the nuclear disaster means that the government has failed to fully examine and evaluate the accident."

Specifically, Koyama underscores the need for the government to grasp the situation concerning the evacuation of residents and the state of contamination of soil with radioactive substances, conduct a survey on residents' health conditions, analyze the results of an examination of locally made agricultural products, carry out radiation countermeasures and assess such efforts.

In particular, it is essential to conduct a detailed survey on the livelihoods of some 100,000 residents who are taking shelter in and outside the prefecture. A growing number of these people have made up their mind to settle down in areas other than their hometowns, but many people cannot have clear prospects for their future.

The government can offer options that suit the livelihood of each evacuee only by understanding the difficulties they face, including those who have voluntarily fled their affected hometowns.

Ukraine, where the Chernobyl nuclear disaster occurred in 1986, and its neighbor Belarus release detailed reports on the accident every five years since the crisis broke out.

Ukraine's reports list the situation of radioactive contamination and residents' health conditions, as well as the accident's economic impact among other items. The attitudes of the governments of these countries to compile reports on the disaster to fulfill their responsibility should be appreciated.

A road map toward disaster recovery can be drawn and the scope of damage that needs to be recovered can be specified only after the state of damage becomes clear. Currently, the government is implementing recovery policy measures without clarifying the specific damage.

The safety of Fukushima rice, which had enjoyed a reputation for its quality, is guaranteed through inspections on all rice. Nevertheless, Fukushima rice still cannot regain its pre-disaster reputation. Groundless rumors have damaged the brand image of Fukushima rice, and the prices of the products are being reduced in the process of marketing. However, such a structural problem is not taken into account in calculating the amounts of compensation. Nor has the problem led to the government's review of its agricultural policy.

The fact that numerous disputes over compensation for residents have been entangled is also rooted in the same problem. More than 12,000 people have launched class action lawsuits over compensation for damage from the nuclear disaster with district courts across the country. This is apparently because the

government's compensation policy and its framework are far from the state of damage felt by residents affected by the nuclear disaster.

Kiyoshi Kurokawa, a visiting professor at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, who served as chairman of the Diet's investigative panel on the nuclear crisis, pointed to the lack of clarity in who is responsible for disaster recovery work.

"It's unclear who's responsible for whatever is done. The irresponsibility of leaders, which is a reality of Japanese society, has led to opportunistic and deceptive responses, damaging the international community's confidence in the country," he told a recent news conference at the Japan National Press Club in Tokyo.

What he pointed out is closely related to the basis of the country. Japan must not adopt its past stance in implementing disaster recovery measures over the next five years. The government should implement realistic policy measures. The time is ripe for the country to begin drawing up an annual "Fukushima white paper" that squarely faces damage from the atomic power disaster to provide a basis for such realistic disaster recovery measures.

It is the role of politics to take responsibility for the compilation of such an annual report.

The government should consider having the legislative branch play a leading role in working out such a report, as done in a report by the Diet's investigative panel on the nuclear disaster, in order not to be bound by the vertically divided administrative structure.

Signs of recovery are beginning to show in disaster-hit areas in Fukushima Prefecture.

The central government suggested that it will lift the evacuation order for the Odaka district of the prefectural city of Minamisoma in April. Residents of the district are divided over whether they should be fully allowed to return because infrastructure remains inadequate. Still, the number of residents temporarily visiting their homes is growing, and they say lights can be seen in their hometown, although the residential area had previously been pitch-black at night.

It is a long way to go for evacuees to fully restore their hometowns, but it is essential to steadily rebuild affected areas to ensure all residents can go home. Support from the public will be a driving force behind such efforts.

TEPCO promises compensation and complete clean-up

March 11, 2016

TEPCO president vows to fulfill responsibility

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160311_35/

The president of Tokyo Electric Power Company has pledged that the utility will fulfill its responsibility for dealing with the aftermath of the accident at the Fukushima nuclear power plant.

Naomi Hirose observed a minute of silence at 2:46 PM at the Fukushima Daiichi plant on Friday. It was the exact time the massive earthquake occurred on March 11th in 2011. He was joined by about 80 staff members, who are taking charge of decommissioning the plant.

Hirose told them that the tsunami shattered the plant operator's overconfidence and conceit.

He said many tasks remain to be done, such as retrieving nuclear fuel and paying damages to affected people. He called for unity in carrying out the tasks.

Hirose later told reporters that the accident has forced residents near the plant to evacuate and suffer hardships, and many of the affected people have died. He said he is very sorry for them.

The TEPCO president also said people may be reluctant to return to the area when evacuation orders for their communities are lifted.

He promised that **his company will complete its tasks that include scrapping the plant, compensation, and removing radioactive fallout from the environment.**

New York Times: Fukushima keeps fighting

March 11, 2016

Fukushima Keeps Fighting Radioactive Tide 5 Years After Disaster

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/11/world/asia/japan-fukushima-nuclear-disaster.html?emc=edit_th_20160311&nl=todaysheadlines&nlid=32427321&r=0

By JONATHAN SOBLEMARCH 10, 2016



Little is left on a stretch of tsunami-scarred land in the vicinity of Fukushima Daiichi, the ruined and radioactive nuclear power plant in northeastern Japan. Credit Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Little is left on a stretch of tsunami-scarred land in the vicinity of Fukushima Daiichi, the ruined and radioactive nuclear power plant in northeastern Japan. Credit Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

TOKYO — Of the thousands of workers who have answered the help-wanted ads at Fukushima Daiichi, the ruined and radioactive nuclear power plant in northeastern Japan, the part-time lettuce farmer and occasional comic-book artist Kazuto Tatsuta must be among the least likely.

“I needed a job,” Mr. Tatsuta, 51, recalled of his decision in 2012 to accept work at the site of one of the world’s worst nuclear accidents.

His duties included welding broken water pipes and inspecting remote-controlled robots that survey radioactive hot spots. And his comic strips, once populated with baseball players and gangsters, now tell stories of middle-aged, blue-collar men like himself who do the grunt work at Fukushima, some of whom find a sense of purpose and belonging they lacked in the outside world.

At Fukushima, Five Years Later

The head of Tokyo Electric Power Company, Tepco, decommissioning and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan spoke about the task of radioactive containment at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

By REUTERS on Publish Date March 10, 2016. Photo by Kazuhiro Nogi/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images. Watch in Times Video »

“It’s secure. You’re not going to get laid off there,” Mr. Tatsuta said. “But you’re also working for a goal.”

Five years after a powerful earthquake and tsunami struck, causing three reactors at Fukushima to melt down, that goal is the focus of a colossal effort at once precarious and routine. A veneer of stability at the plant masks a grueling, day-to-day battle to contain hazardous radiation, which involves a small army of workers, complex technical challenges and vexing safety trade-offs.

Fukushima has become a place where employees arrive on company shuttle buses and shop at their own on-site convenience store, but where they struggle to control radiation-contaminated water and must release it into the sea. Many of the most difficult and dangerous cleanup tasks still lie ahead, and crucial decisions remain unsettled.

“There’s no precedent or manual,” said Prof. Tatsujiro Suzuki, a former vice chairman of the Japanese Atomic Energy Commission who is now at Nagasaki University.

A smooth cleanup is a top priority for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who wants to rebuild Japan’s tattered nuclear power industry. He has had little success so far. This week, a court ordered one of only two atomic power stations operating in the country to shut down, saying new safety measures it put in place after the Fukushima disaster were inadequate. More than 40 reactors are sitting idle.

The effort at Fukushima has reached a few milestones. About 1,500 spent fuel rods were successfully removed from a damaged storage tank in late 2014, a delicate and risky operation. Much of the contaminated rubble left by the tsunami and hydrogen explosions has been cleared, and overall radiation levels are down. Workers will soon be able to enter some areas of the plant without full-body protective gear.

Fukushima Five Years After Nuclear Disaster

Five years after an earthquake and tsunami devastated the northeast Japanese coast, Japan has not fully recovered.

But a full cleanup of the site — including the extraction of melted uranium fuel from the damaged reactor cores — is expected to take at least 40 years according to the government’s timetable and a century by other estimates. In the meantime, officials acknowledge, Fukushima remains vulnerable.

“The question is, Is there a Plan B to deal with another big quake or tsunami?” Professor Suzuki said.

The duration of the cleanup also creates the risk of labor shortages, he said, especially in jobs requiring special skills. Japan’s population is shrinking and, with the future of nuclear power uncertain, many young people are unwilling to stake careers on the industry.

By the Numbers

- Fukushima residents displaced by radiation as of January 2016: 99,750
- Total people displaced by the tsunami and radiation: 174,000 as of February 2016
- Still living in temporary government housing: 60,784 people as of January 2016
- Nuclear reactors back online: One as of March 2016

By Makiko Inoue. Sources: Fukushima Prefecture & Reconstruction Agency

For now, Fukushima is bustling with about 7,000 workers, much more than before the disaster and twice as many as two years ago. The town of Iwaki to the south has become a kind of workers' village. At dawn, vans and buses line up to ferry workers to the plant via staging areas where they don protective white Tyvek suits, radiation monitors and gas masks.

"You think of it as totally normal work," said Mr. Tatsuta, who asked to be identified only by his pen name to avoid being blacklisted by the plant's owner, Tokyo Electric Power Company.

Water is perhaps the biggest challenge at Fukushima. Engineers must keep it flowing through the damaged reactor cores to prevent the melted fuel from overheating, and then through miles of plastic pipes to recycle it inside the plant. But because the buildings are damaged, radioactive water leaks out and builds up in the basements. When it rains, more water seeps in.

To prevent it from spreading, Tokyo Electric pumps out about 720 tons of water from the basements every day, storing it in huge tanks that workers are building. About 1,000 of the tanks have already been filled. But because there are not enough tanks, the plant also releases 2,000 tons of the water into the ocean every week after a process that removes most, but not all, of the radioactive particles.

Tokyo Electric says the water poses no danger to people or marine life because radiation levels are low and further diluted in the ocean. But environmentalists are worried, nearby fishing grounds remain closed and it is a public-relations nightmare for the government.

Other workers are building a mile-long "ice wall" around part of the plant to prevent rain and groundwater from seeping into the basements. The plan is to pump chemicals into the soil to freeze it, but the technique has never been used on such a large scale before.

The company says it may not be able to solve the water problem until 2020. Other goals, including the removal of spent fuel rods stored inside the reactors, are still further off.

And then there is the problem of the melted nuclear fuel itself. Tokyo Electric has ruled out burying the buildings in thick layers of concrete as the Soviets did at Chernobyl, because so much radioactive material remains that it could explode during the burial process or burn through the concrete or into the ground.

Robots have recently begun mapping out areas around the cores, which are still too dangerous for workers to approach. Engineers are trying to determine if cracks in the containment vessels can be repaired, which would allow them to fill the cores with water to ensure the fuel remains submerged as it is extracted, minimizing the risk of releasing radiation. The process is expected to take decades and cost billions.

For workers at the site, radiation is a constant enemy — though many see it more as a threat to their livelihoods than their lives. Government regulations forbid cleanup workers to be exposed to too much radiation, and when they hit the limits, they risk being laid off or reassigned to lower-paying jobs.

"If you go over the radiation limits, you can't work," Mr. Tatsuta said. "You're always calculating how to keep the dose low."

The temptation to cheat can be strong, for both workers and their managers. A government examination of Tokyo Electric's safety practices in 2013 found that it had underreported the radiation exposure of a third of the workers whose records were reviewed. The company says it has since tightened reporting procedures.

Minoru Ikeda, 63, a retired postal worker, said he had joined the cleanup in 2013, over his wife's objections, because of a sense of social obligation and curiosity. "Fukushima felt so close and so far away at the same time," he said. "I wanted to see for myself."

He started out cutting contaminated weeds in a town deserted since the accident and stuffing them into plastic bags. Mountains of collected soil and leaves have piled up across the region, as politicians debate how to dispose of it.

Eventually, Mr. Ikeda got work in the plant itself, picking up papers and broken glass in the administrative offices. "There was still sand on the floor from the tsunami," he recalled, "and newspapers dated March 11," the day of the disaster.

He later wrote a memoir describing the rhythm of life in the cleanup zone, where almost the entire work force is male and many have little history of stable employment.

Because it took so long to change in and out of protective gear and pass through radiation checks, he usually worked only two to three hours a day, he said. In off hours, he and his colleagues slept, drank or played pachinko, a Japanese gambling game that resembles pinball.

Mr. Ikeda still carries a small "radiation book," similar to a bank passbook. Over 15 months, it shows, he was exposed to 7.25 millisieverts, well below the regulatory limit but still high enough that, should he contract cancer during his lifetime, he would be eligible for workers' compensation.

Mr. Ikeda's last job at Fukushima involved the destruction of used protective coveralls. Tens of thousands had been compacted into cubes for incineration, but they were too big for the incinerator. Mr. Ikeda and his team broke the cubes apart and repacked the coveralls in smaller bundles.

"The work's not hard," he said, "if you don't think about radiation."

Not worth it...

March 14, 2016

Fukushima evacuations were not worth the money, study says

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/14/national/fukushima-evacuations-were-not-worth-the-money-study-says/#.VuaL4-aDmot>

by William Hollingworth

Kyodo

LONDON – The costs of evacuating residents from near the Fukushima No. 1 plant and the dislocation the people experienced were greater than their expected gain in longevity, a British study has found.

The researchers found that at best evacuees could expect to live eight months longer, but that some might gain only one extra day of life. They said this does not warrant ripping people from their homes and communities.

The team of experts from four British universities developed a series of tests to examine the relocations after the Fukushima crisis and earlier Chernobyl disaster in 1986.

After a three-year study, the academics have concluded that Japan “overreacted” by relocating 160,000 residents of Fukushima Prefecture, even though radioactive material fell on more than 30,000 sq. km of territory.

“We judged that no one should have been relocated in Fukushima, and it could be argued this was a knee-jerk reaction,” said Philip Thomas, a professor of risk management at Bristol University. “It did more harm than good. An awful lot of disruption has been caused. However, this is with hindsight and we are not blaming the authorities.”

The team used a wide range of economic and actuarial data, as well as information from the United Nations and the Japanese government.

In one test, an assessment of judgment value, the researchers calculated how many days of life expectancy were saved by relocating residents away from areas affected by radiation.

They compared this with the cost of relocation and how much this expenditure would impact the quality of people’s lives in the future.

From this information, they were able to work out the optimal or rational level of spending and make a judgment on the best measures to mitigate the effects of a nuclear accident.

Depending on how close people were to the radiation, the team calculated that the relocations added a period of between one day to 21 days to the evacuees’ lives.

But when this was compared with the vast amounts of money spent, the academics came to the conclusion that it was unjustified in all cases.

In some areas, they calculated that 150 times more money was being spent than was judged rational.

Thomas adds, the tests do not take into account the physical and psychological effects of relocating, which have been shown to have led to more than 1,000 deaths among elderly evacuees.

Other studies have also found that once people have lived away for a certain period of time it can become increasingly difficult to persuade them to return.

After Chernobyl, the world’s worst nuclear disaster, around 116,000 people were initially relocated away from the disaster zone.

Looking back on the incident, the team judged it was only worthwhile to relocate 31,000 people because they would have lost in excess of 8.7 months in life expectancy had they remained.

However, for the rest of the 116,000 people, it would have been a more rational decision to keep them where they were, given that their average loss of life was put at three months.

Four years later, a further 220,000 people were relocated from areas close to Chernobyl. Researchers found this unjustified.

Thomas says the loss in life expectancy following a nuclear accident has to be put into context alongside other threats all people face.

For example, it has been claimed that the average Londoner will lose about 4½ months in life expectancy due to high pollution levels.

Thomas concludes governments should carry out a more careful assessment before mounting a relocation operation of at least a year. A temporary evacuation could be a good idea while authorities work out the risk from radiation, he said.

In the future, Thomas would like to see more real-time information made available to the public on radiation levels in order to avoid hysteria and bad planning.

On a plus note, the team found that other remedial measures — decontaminating homes, deep ploughing of soil and bans on the sales of certain food products — were far more effective.

Thomas has already discussed his findings with colleagues at the University of Tokyo and he is keen that his findings can help better quantify the risks from radioactive leaks.

The project was sponsored by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, Britain's main agency for funding research in engineering and the physical sciences. **It was intended to give advice for nuclear planners both in Britain and India.**

The research team comprised specialists from City University in London, Manchester University, the Open University and Warwick University.

Compare with recent report :

Fukushima Report: 10,000 Excess Cancers Expected in Japan as a Result of 2011 Reactor Meltdowns, Ongoing Radiation Exposure

Report Gauges Cancer Prospects for Children, Rescue/Recovery Worker, and General Population; Japanese Government Criticized for "Disturbing" Failure to Examine Wider Radiation-Related Diseases

March 9, 2016

WASHINGTON, D.C. & BERLIN – March 9, 2016 – Residents of the Fukushima area and the rest of Japan will experience more than 10,000 excess cancers as a result of radiation exposure from the triple-reactor meltdown that took place on March 11, 2011, according to a new report from Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) and International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW).

Titled "*5 Years Living With Fukushima*" and available online at www.psr.org/FukushimaReport2016, the PSR/IPPNW report laments that the full impact of Fukushima may never be known, due to Japan's failure to immediately and fully track radiation exposures, as well as a "disturbing" lack of testing of the general population for radiation-related diseases and other impacts (miscarriages, fetal malformations, leukemia, lymphomas, solid tumors or non-cancerous diseases). The massive initial radioactive emissions were not recorded at the time of the triple-reactor meltdown and some radioactive isotopes (including strontium-90) have not been measured at all.

The PSR/IPPNW report uses the best available science and data to gauge the excess cancer rates among children, rescue and clean-up workers, and the general population of Japan. In addition to the 200,000 Fukushima residents relocated nearby into makeshift camps, the exposed include millions of others in Japan as a result of fallout-contaminated food, soil and water. Fukushima is often incorrectly seen as a "past" event; the reality is that radioactive emissions from the wrecked reactors continue to this day both into the atmosphere and in the form of 300 tons of leakage each day into the Pacific Ocean.

Key findings of the PSR/IPPNW report include the following:

- **Children.** "116 children in Fukushima Prefecture have already been diagnosed with aggressive and fast-growing, or already metastasizing, thyroid cancer – in a population this size about one to five cases per year would normally be expected. For 16 of these children a screening effect can be excluded as their cancers developed within the last two years."
- **Workers.** "More than 25,000 cleanup and rescue workers received the highest radiation dose and risked their health, while preventing a deterioration of the situation at the power plant site. If data supplied by the operator TEPCO is to be believed, around 100 workers are expected to contract cancer due to excess radiation, and 50 percent of these will be fatal. The real dose levels, however, are most likely several times higher, as the operator has had no qualms in manipulating

the data to avoid claims for damages – from hiring unregistered temporary employees to tampering with radiation dosimeters and even crude forgery."

- ***The rest of Japan.*** "The population in the rest of Japan is exposed to increased radiation doses from minor amounts of radioactive fallout, as well as contaminated food and water. Calculations of increased cancer cases overall in Japan range from 9,600 to 66,000 depending on the dose estimates."

Catherine Thomasson, MD, report co-editor, and executive director, Physicians for Social Responsibility, said: **"The health legacy of Fukushima will haunt Japan for years to come and it cannot be wished out of existence by cheerleaders for nuclear power. Unfortunately, the pro-nuclear Japanese government and the country's influential nuclear lobby are doing everything in their power to play down and conceal the effects of the disaster. The high numbers of thyroid cancers already verified with 50 additional waiting for surgery in the children of Fukushima prefecture is astounding. The aim seems to be to ensure the Fukushima file is closed as soon as possible and the Japanese public returns to a positive view of nuclear power. This rush to re-embrace nuclear power is dangerous to the extent that it sweeps major and very real medical concerns under the rug."**

Dr. Alex Rosen, pediatrician and vice-chair, International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War, said: **"One is of course reminded of the tobacco lobby disputing the notion that the horrific effects of its products have no adverse health impacts. This self-serving falsehood echoed for decades was made possible simply because the long-term health effects of smoking were not immediately observable. The 10,000 to 66,000 people who will develop cancer solely as a result of the "manmade disaster" are neither 'negligible' nor 'insufficient,' as Japanese authorities, the nation's nuclear lobby, and various industry-dominated international bodies, would have you believe."**

Tim Mousseau, PhD, professor of Biological Sciences, University of South Carolina, said: **"It is unfortunate that, in some regards, we have better and more complete data about the impacts of Fukushima radiation on trees, plants and animals than we do on humans. We are seeing higher mortality rates, reduction in successful reproduction and significant deformities. A great deal of this research has been done to date and it has troubling implications. The research findings should be heeded to direct human studies, particularly regarding the question of genetic and transgenerational effects of radiation."**

Robert Alvarez, senior scholar specializing in nuclear disarmament, environmental, and energy policies, Institute for Public Studies, and former senior policy advisor, US Department of Energy, said: **"Radioactive fallout from the reactors has created de facto 'sacrifice zones' where human habitation will no longer be possible well into the future. In November 2011, the Japanese Science Ministry reported that long-lived radioactive cesium had contaminated 11,580 square miles (30,000 sq km) of the land surface of Japan. Some 4,500 square miles – an area almost the size of Connecticut – was found to have radiation levels that exceeded Japan's allowable exposure rate of 1 mSV(millisievert) per year. Fourteen of the nation's 54 reactors are permanently shut down as they are on fault lines and only four have been restarted."**

The PSR/IPPNW report also cautions that Fukushima was far from a one-time radiation incident: "The wrecked reactors have been leaking radioactive discharge since March 2011, de-spite assurances by the nuclear industry and institutions of the nuclear lobby such as the International Atomic Energy Organi-zation that a singular incident occurred in spring 2011, which is now under control. This statement ignores the continu-ous emission of long-lived radionuclides such as cesium-137 or strontium-90 into the atmosphere, the groundwater and the ocean. It also ignores frequent recontamination of affected ar-eas due to storms, flooding, forest fires, pollination, precipitation and even clean-up

operations, which cause radioactive isotopes to be whirled into the air and spread by the wind. Thus, several incidents of new contamination with cesium-137 and strontium-90 have been discovered during the past years, even at considerable distance beyond the evacuation zone."

The report also notes: "Finally, there are frequent leaks at the power plant itself – particularly from the cracked underground vaults of the reactor buildings and from containers holding radioactive contaminated water, which were hastily welded together and already exhibit numerous defects.

According to TEPCO, 300 tons of radioactive wastewater still flow unchecked into the ocean every day – more than 500,000 tons since the beginning of the nuclear disaster. The amount and composition of radioactive isotopes fluctuate widely so that it is not possible to ascertain the actual effect this radioactive discharge will have on marine life. What is clear, however, is that increasing amounts of strontium-90 are being flushed into the sea. Strontium-90 is a radioactive isotope that is incorporated into living organisms in a similar way to calcium - in bones and teeth. As it travels up the marine food chain, it undergoes significant bioaccumulation and, because of its long biological and physical half-lives, will continue to contaminate the environment for the next hundreds of years."

ABOUT THE GROUPS

Physicians for Social Responsibility has been working for more than 50 years to create a healthy, just and peaceful world for both the present and future generations. PSR advocates on key issues of concern by addressing the dangers that threaten communities. www.psr.org.

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War is a non-partisan federation of national medical groups in 64 countries, representing tens of thousands of doctors, medical students, other health workers, and concerned citizens who share the common goal of creating a more peaceful and secure world freed from the threat of nuclear annihilation. www.ippnw.org

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EDITOR'S NOTE: A streaming audio replay of the news event is now available.

Judging on site

March 18, 2016

Judges inspect evacuated areas in Fukushima for on-site evidence

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/recovery/AJ201603180055>

By MANA NAGANO/ Staff Writer

FUKUSHIMA--Fukushima District Court judges inspected the houses of three evacuated plaintiffs on March 17 in connection with a lawsuit filed against the government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. over the nuclear disaster.

It marked the first visit by judges to evacuation zones regarding litigation concerning the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which was caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

Called "Nariwai Soshō" (livelihood suit), the lawsuit has about 4,000 plaintiffs seeking consolation money and the restoration of their former lives that were lost because of the nuclear accident.

What was gleaned from the on-site inspections will be used as evidence in the trial.

The plaintiffs had called for the judges to visit the affected sites and hear their explanations to assess the scope of damage of the nuclear disaster.

The inspections involving about 50 people, which were closed to the media, started at 10:45 a.m. and ended around 4:30 p.m.

Three judges, including Presiding Judge Hideki Kanazawa, first visited the home of Sadatoshi Sato, a 68-year-old who raised livestock before the disaster, in Namie.

Other plaintiffs, government officials and TEPCO representatives accompanied the judges. All participants wore white protective suits and masks.

At Sato's home, the judges viewed empty cattle sheds. Sato had been raising about 150 cattle when the nuclear accident unfolded, but most of them starved to death while he was evacuating. Sato also took the judges to the site where the dead cattle were buried.

"I want the judges to give a thoughtful ruling so that the dead cattle would rest in peace," Sato told reporters after the inspection.

The judges also visited the homes of 67-year-old Yuji Fukuda in Futaba and a woman in Tomioka who had been operating a piano school out of her house before the nuclear accident.

Fukuda's house is in a difficult-to-return zone about 4 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. He showed the judges his once-thriving garden. He also told them about a local store that is now desolate.

"I told the judges from the bottom of my heart that I am not the only one who has suffered," Fukuda said.

"I had wanted the judges to come sooner. But my hope has finally come true."

Fukushima: What lessons for EU energy future?

Lessons from Fukushima for EU energy policy

<https://euobserver.com/opinion/132640>

By Ian Hudgton

BRUSSELS, 11. Mar, 08:44

On 11 March 2011, one of the biggest earthquakes in history shook Japan's northeast. The Tohoku earthquake triggered a 10-metre (33ft) tsunami, which smashed into the power plant on the Fukushima coastline precipitating three nuclear meltdowns and forcing nearby towns to evacuate.

The disaster killed over 19,000 people across Japan and caused an estimated 16.9 trillion yen (€136 billion) in damages.

Five years on from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster - which remains the world's second worst disaster after Chernobyl in 1986 - some 10,000 children whose families fled Fukushima Prefecture have yet to return.

Despite Tokyo's pledge of 26.3 trillion yen (€211 billion) over five years and a further 6 trillion between now and 2020 to rebuild the disaster area, the Japanese population are reported to be picking up the bill. The Financial Times recently found that the nuclear disaster has cost Japanese taxpayers almost €90.8 billion, as the underlying cost of the disaster is mainly "being pay by the public, either through electricity bills or as tax", according to Ritsumeikan University professor Kenichi Oshima.

The wider consequences stemming from the Fukushima disaster are far-ranging. Radioactivity from the nuclear disaster can still be found in some freshwater fish and ocean bottom dwellers near Fukushima have a higher risk of contamination with the radioactive chemical cesium.

Public awareness

In a recent investigation, Greenpeace found that over 9 million cubic metres of nuclear waste are scattered over at least 113,000 locations across Fukushima prefecture.

The NGO's underwater investigation is set to release findings on the extent to which the Pacific Ocean and local rivers have been contaminated by radioactive material later this month.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that a cautious, sceptical attitude over Japan's nuclear future is prevailing. The disaster changed the national debate over energy policy overnight. As some analysts suggest, the crisis "dramatically raised public awareness about energy use and sparked strong anti-nuclear sentiment".

But the New York Times recently commented despite the legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the accidents at the Three Mile Island and Chernobyl nuclear plants, Japan never faced the levels of popular opposition to nuclear power seen in the US and Europe, before the disaster at Fukushima.

I welcome the measures taken by Japan to address the disaster - including the recent indictment of three former Tokyo Electric Power (TEPCO) executives on charges of criminal negligence - but there remains a lot to be done.

Following the Fukushima disaster, one by one the country's nuclear plants were shut-down for maintenance checks and prevented from restarting as a result of widespread public concern.

Anti-nuclear sentiment

Earlier this week, the Otsu District Court ordered Kansai Electric Power to shut down two of its nuclear reactors in Takahama, western Japan following complaints by local residents over the safety of the plant. It seems that even despite the Nuclear Regulation Authority being established in 2012, the Japanese population are wary of any nuclear plant restarting. Yet so far four out of the 43 operable reactors in Japan have restarted under the new, post-Fukushima safety rules.

Japan still relies heavily on nuclear power for domestic energy purposes, which constituted almost 30 percent of Japan's energy mix prior to 2011.

The country's industry ministry is aiming to make nuclear energy account for 20-22 percent of the country's electricity mix by 2030 with renewable energy sources to make up for 22-24 percent, liquefied natural gas set at 27 percent and coal at 26 percent of electricity generation between now and 2030.

Earlier this week Japan's former prime minister, Naoto Kan, who held office at the time of March 2011 stated that over the past five years, Japan spent two years without a single nuclear plant on line.

He said that "we can secure enough power without nuclear plants and I believe we should stay away from the large risk posed by nuclear plants and focus instead on renewable energy by changing our sources of power".

Opinion polls across Japan reveal a growing anti-nuclear sentiment. In a nationwide survey sent to all of Japan's local authorities - of which 99.6 percent responded - 44.6 percent sought cuts in Japan's dependence on nuclear power and 21 percent requested the eventual abolishment of nuclear power generation.

Renewable energy

Given the public mood, I am hopeful that Japan continues to diversify its energy mix, and decrease its over-reliance on nuclear energy altogether.

For a country such as the UK, who is undoubtedly able to rely on a diverse range of energy options, the nuclear way is quite clearly not the way forward.

As I said back in 2011, Fukushima offers us a clear-cut example of why we must retain our opposition to the development of nuclear power stations in Scotland and across the UK. The construction of the two nuclear reactors at Hinkley Point in Somerset, England is therefore an unwelcomed, costly and high-risk expense for the taxpayer.

The Guardian reports that the UK government agreed to pay £92.50 (€119.40) for each unit of electricity: more than double the market price now.

With an abundance of natural resources and opportunities for renewable energy sources, not at least offshore wind and tidal power along with wave energy, there is simply no justification for the UK Government to opt out of a cleaner, safer, more cost effective solution to the UK's energy needs.

Five years on from the Fukushima disaster, I hope that Japan finds alternative, renewable efficient and most importantly safe means to provide energy and that the UK, along with other EU states, commemorate the victims of Fukushima with the view to opt for renewable sources of energy over a high-risk and unnecessarily expensive nuclear energy future.

Ian Hudghton is the president of the Scottish National Party and a member of the European Parliament's delegation to Japan

Deregulation: What's in it for people?

March 22, 2016

What benefits, options will liberalization of electricity industry bring to consumers?

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160322/p2a/00m/0na/015000c>

The country's retail electricity market will be fully liberalized in April, allowing consumers to freely choose and decide which companies they want to buy electricity from.

Ten major regional power companies such as Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) have so far been monopolizing the retail electricity market for regular households, but a number of business operators have decided to make new entrants into the market, competing to acquire customers through cheaper rate plans and other means. What changes will the power deregulation bring to people's livelihoods? The following are some key points for choosing power suppliers and related issues.

There were 253 new entrants or new electricity companies registered with the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry as of March 18, and nearly a half of them are planning to sell electricity to households. There are a variety of new entrants: major oil wholesalers that have their own thermal power plants; major telecom carriers that are set to sell electricity purchased from other suppliers as packages with their own services; start-up companies that are set to sell mainly renewable energy such as solar generated electricity; and other firms. They have actively been engaged in publicity campaigns to attract customers, presenting rates that are up to 10 percent cheaper than those from major power companies. JX Nippon Oil & Energy Corp., Japan's largest oil wholesaler, emphasized its experience in selling electricity for more than a decade, with a campaign slogan saying, "We are an experienced power

distributer." The company entered the electricity market for businesses in 2003. It has a production capacity of 1.63 million kilowatts of electricity that exceeds the capacity of a single nuclear power plant, using oil leftover from refining petroleum, among other means. Tokyo Gas Co., too, has been generating electricity by using liquefied natural gas it procures on its own as raw material and selling the electricity to businesses through its affiliated companies. Gas and oil companies are challenging major power companies by taking advantage of their accumulated expertise to sell electricity at low prices. KDDI Corp., a major telecom carrier, is to enter the retail electricity market under the banner of its "au denki" brand. It will not have its own power plants, but rather receive power supplies from Kansai Electric Power Co. and other utilities. KDDI is to attract its users by returning up to 5 percent of their electricity bills to its mobile phone service contractors in the form of electric money. Jupiter Telecommunications Co., Japan's top cable television operator, is to procure electricity from a trading company that also is an investor of the telecom firm and offer discounts on electricity bills for its customers who have signed up for packages of electricity and cable television services.

In addition to rate plans for electricity supplied by TEPCO, mobile company SoftBank Corp. has set up a plan with renewable energy sources such as solar power making up 57 percent of the total supply. There have been movements aimed at securing "local production and local consumption" by utilizing renewable energy generated in each region. One of the examples is Miyama Smart Energy Co. launched by the Miyama Municipal Government in Fukuoka Prefecture.

Major power companies have prepared to compete with new electricity providers, with TEPCO, for example, offering rate plans designed to give discounts of up to 5 percent. However, Kansai Electric has abandoned its plan to start offering discounts on power bills from May after the Otsu District Court issued a provisional injunction ordering the company to suspend operations of the No. 3 and 4 reactors at its Takahama Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture. The utilities could face an uphill battle if their nuclear reactors that are capable of generating power at low costs remain idled.

Meanwhile, new electricity providers are entering the retail electricity market mainly in densely-populated Tokyo, Osaka and other major cities. According to the Japan Organization for Cross-regional Coordination of Transmission Operators, which promotes consumers to switch power providers, there were 274,000 applications filed for new rate plans as of Feb. 26. But more than 90 percent of them were concentrated in the service areas of TEPCO and Kansai Electric. Therefore, there are still insufficient options for households in regions where the number of new entrants is small.

March 12, 2016

Knowledge is power: Navigating the household electricity market after deregulation

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/12/business/tech/knowledge-power-navigating-household-electricity-market-deregulation/#.VuVEG-aDmot>

by Eric Johnston
Staff Writer

The country's household and small business electricity market will be deregulated from April 1, allowing individuals to choose their electricity provider. Optimists, especially renewable energy advocates and small entrepreneurs, hope the development will break the stranglehold that the country's 10 regional utilities have on a market worth an estimated ¥8 trillion.

However, while around 200 firms are currently prepared to sell electricity generated by a wide range of sources under a broad range of plans, **utilities still control the distribution grid.** That, combined with intense price competition and restrictions on how sellers advertise, means consumers hoping to reduce their dependency on, or break free entirely of, nuclear and fossil-fueled electricity after April 1 are going to have to research different firms, costs and plans very carefully before signing a contract.

At the end of February, Kansai Electric Power Co. was feeling upbeat about the future of nuclear power. Five years after the March 11, 2011, earthquake, tsunami and meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, it had restarted its Takahama No. 3 reactor and was preparing to extend operations of its Takahama No. 1 and 2 reactors, now more than 40 years old, for another two decades.

With a Nuclear Regulation Authority widely seen as favorable toward restarts, a fundamentally pro-nuclear Fukui prefectural governor and local town councils hosting its nuclear plants desperate for the money that comes with restarts, Kepco was confident that nuclear power was finally back.

It helped that Takahama's No. 4 reactor was also scheduled to restart at the end of February. To the shock of Kepco officials, however, television cameras invited to broadcast live the flick of a switch to restart the reactor instead recorded loud alarms and scenes of worried staff running around, realizing there was a problem and that the reactor could not be restarted, at least on that day.

Then, in a move that shocked the utility, the Otsu District Court in Shiga Prefecture issued a provisional injunction last week that forced the Takahama No. 3 reactor to shut down a little over 40 days after it had restarted. The injunction also applied to the idled No. 4 reactor.

Why the rush to restart? Without as many of its reactors as possible back online as quickly as possible, Kepco says it will be unable to reduce electricity rates. That means the utility, which relied on nuclear power for nearly half of its electricity prior to March 11, 2011, and has enjoyed a virtual monopoly in Kansai for decades, could lose out once the country's household electricity market is deregulated on April 1 and it faces new competition.

To date, nearly 200 enterprises — ranging from the 10 regional utilities to SoftBank, Lawson's convenience stores and new firms emphasizing gas or renewable-generated electricity — are officially authorized to sell electricity to consumers. **A price war has broken out, with some newcomers promising rates that are often lower than the utilities.**

Yet the deregulation, as noted previously, is only partial. The major utilities will still be in control of the electricity grids. For the first time, however, individual consumers will be able to pick and choose who sells them the electricity off the grid.

The opening of the household and small business sector to retail competition has created a lot of interest among firms seeking to enter the market, but it has also created a number of concerns about supply and service, even as consumers express show a keen interest in switching.

A survey of 1,000 people last November by the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy on how they felt about the deregulation showed that if their electricity bills were to come down by at least 10 percent, 62 percent would consider changing suppliers. Just 8 percent said they would not switch companies, no matter how much lower the competition might be.

In an attempt to allay such fears, the government has said that switching providers will not mean a decrease in the quality of electricity and that in the event of problems at one of the newer firms with

distribution, the major utilities would back them up by sending power down the line, thus preventing blackouts.

From the end of January, a number of companies began offering electricity plans on various websites. Consumers looking for the best deals can begin by going online to those websites that compare the different firms, their provider contracts and prices. Three popular sites (available only in Japanese) can be found at Kakaku.com, Enechange.jp and Enepi.jp.

Each site will request basic information, such as where you live, how many people live with you, and what kind of building (house or apartment) you live in.

You may then be asked who your current electricity supplier is, how much electricity you are contracted for and how much you actually use. The latter information is available on the meter card of your current provider.

Depending on the site, you might also be asked the amount of your most recent electricity bill, or other information about your electricity use and preferences.

Once the pertinent data has been entered, you'll be taken to a simulation site that offers a list of firms each with different prices, plans and conditions. And it's here where the buyer needs to beware. **There are any number of plans from any number of firms. Some lock you into a two-year contract and place financial penalties if you cancel before that (very important to know if you're planning to move within one or two years). Some plans may have strict conditions on the price offered, depending on how much electricity you buy and the time of day you want to use it.**

After doing a simulation that compares prices and services from different plans, you can make your choice and sign a contract.

Roughly three weeks later, on average, the firm will send someone to your home to install a smart meter. In principle, you won't be charged for the cost of replacing your old meter with a new one, unless there are special construction needs.

Once the new meter has been installed, you're on the new plan and you can cancel your contract with whoever was providing you electricity before.

Kikuko Tatsumi, a member of the Nippon Association of Consumer Specialists' environment committee, notes that many of the plans currently on offer are package deals that include services other than electricity, and that people need to consider the sorts of add-ons that might be included in a plan and consider their needs carefully.

"Don't forget that what you're buying is electricity," she says.

In addition, Tatsumi cautions, be prepared for **aggressive sales tactics** from those representing, or claiming to represent, an electricity supplier.

"I've heard stories of people getting phone calls from those claiming to represent a group like the 'security association,' who inquire about a person's electricity bill and say they want to visit to discuss it," Tatsumi says. "There are a lot of complaints about flyers being stuffed in mailboxes or salespeople telephoning, trying to sell electricity plans."

Price, of course, will be the final determining factor for many consumers. This may well mean going with firms that get their electricity mostly from fossil fuel sources (and possibly nuclear power) if they want the cheapest plan.

For environmentally concerned households that dislike nuclear power, don't mind paying a bit extra if necessary, and demand to know what energy source the electricity from the firm they are purchasing comes from in order to select a supplier that minimizes, or even excludes entirely, coal, oil or nuclear-generated electricity, there is good news and bad news.

The good news is that **firms are being encouraged to offer customers a breakdown of the different sources of electricity they're selling, and over what period they plan to use that energy mix.** For example, sellers are allowed to let households know that, over a certain length of time, they'll be sending them electricity, of which, for example, 50 percent is generated from coal or oil, 10 percent is from liquefied natural gas, 30 percent is from nuclear and 10 percent is from renewables.

The bad news is that providing as much detailed information as possible on energy sources is not a legal requirement for the firms, merely something that is "desired."

In fact, very few of those registered to sell electricity so far appear to be that specific. A survey of 20 firms in the March 1 edition of the Japanese magazine *Economist* showed less than half were offering detailed information on their sites about the energy mix they were using.

Furthermore, in the case of renewable-generated energy covered by the country's feed-in tariff, firms are being discouraged from using phrases such as "we sell green power" or "we sell clean power."

In one sense this is good — it will make it tougher for unscrupulous firms to misrepresent themselves by using such language if the majority of power they're selling comes from energies that are anything but clean.

However, it also forces consumers searching for firms and plans that offer the greenest possible supply source at the most affordable price to make some tough choices if the company offering a deal within their budget won't say where the electricity comes from.

For those want to go as green as possible, one option is to visit the Power Shift website. Run by Friends of the Earth Japan, here you will find a dozen firms (as of early March) that offer customers their energy mix and environmental impact; concentrate on purchasing renewable energy under the feed-in tariff program; agree to not use nuclear or fossil fuel-generated electricity, except as backup sources; emphasize local usage of renewable energy; and are not funded by the big utilities. Of the dozen firms currently listed, eight are in the Tokyo region, two are in Kyushu and there is one each in the Osaka and Nagoya regions. "We interview firms that want to prioritize renewable energy and have plans for doing so," says Akiko Yoshida of Power Shift. "Many are small — and the amount of renewable energy in Japan is still limited — so it's really difficult for the firms we list to sell only renewable-generated electricity. It doesn't mean companies focused on selling renewable-energy generated electricity are expensive, but they can't offer supercheap prices, either."

As the major utilities control the grids and because they remain wary of renewable energy, the extent to which the sector will expand from April is as yet unclear, even if some firms offer plans that are very competitive with fossil fuel electricity. **By 2020, however, grid transmission of electricity will be deregulated, theoretically allowing for competition and easier access to renewable energy sources.**

Of course, the utilities know this, which is why **firms such as Kepco are in a race against time.** Even as the Takahama reactors sit idle under the injunction, the utility wants to restart them and run them for another two decades.

Not only to revive nuclear power, which Kepco claims will allow it to lower its own prices, but also to ensure that, as Japanese bureaucrats once did when they picked and chose which industries to support, that deregulation does not lead to "excessive competition" that would threaten to impede their old ways of doing business, or cause too much "confusion in the marketplace" of the kind that is not good for the politically connected utilities.

Dissecting consumer energy choices online

For more information on finding and selecting a new electricity supplier after April 1, check the following websites:

The Electricity Market Surveillance Commission: The commission is the government body that monitors firms selling to the home electricity market. It can provide information on which ones are officially registered, and offer consultations if you run into trouble with the firm you're buying from. www.emsc.meti.go.jp

The National Consumer Affairs Center: The center offers basic advice along the lines of "let the buyer beware," with suggestions on the kinds of questions to ask anyone who shows up at your door on a Sunday morning, or calls during dinner and tries to sell you a new electricity plan. www.kokusen.go.jp

Electricity Plan Comparison Sites: At Kakaku.com (kakaku.com/energy), Enechange.jp (enechange.jp) or Enepi.jp (enepi.jp), consumers can log on, provide basic details about themselves, their energy lifestyles and the amount they are currently paying, and receive a list of different plans from different firms that might suit their needs.

Power Shift: This is the site for consumers who want to be clean, green and nuclear-free to the greatest extent possible using government-approved, local sellers, and don't mind paying extra. power-shift.org/choice

Kankeiren's utter contempt for people and judiciary

March 19, 2016

VOX POPULI: On a precarious slide to utter disrespect of all Japan stands for

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/vox/AJ201603190019>

Vox Populi, Vox Dei is a daily column that runs on Page 1 of The Asahi Shimbun.

At a news conference on March 17, top officials of Kankeiren (Kansai Economic Federation) pulled no punches in criticizing the Otsu District Court's March 9 injunction ordering the shutdown of the No. 3 and No. 4 nuclear reactors at the Takahama power station operated by Kansai Electric Power Co.

As a group that represents the interests of the regional business community, Kankeiren obviously has its own case to make. However, I was quite taken aback by some of the remarks officials made to reporters. The vice chairman, Kazuo Sumi, said at the outset that he was angered by the court's decision, and then thundered, "How is it possible for a judge of a mere district court to throw a monkey wrench into our nation's energy policy?"

Sumi went on to call for "speedy legal revision to ensure that something like this will never happen again."

No court decision can be expected to satisfy all of the people all of the time. But even so, I must say that Sumi's remarks amounted to utter contempt of one of the three branches of government. Essentially, what he said was this: "If the judiciary doesn't do what the administration says, the legislature must take care of that."

If this sort of reasoning came from his lack of understanding of what the separation of powers is all about, that is a truly sorry state of affairs.

A reporter at the news conference tried to nail down Sumi's intent by pointing out that his remarks were "rather extreme." But Sumi apparently meant exactly what he said, as he stuck to his guns.

Still, he would not have said "a mere district court" with contempt, had he ever thought about Article 76 of the Constitution that provides: "**All judges shall be independent in the exercise of their conscience and shall be bound only by this Constitution and the laws.**"

But where **contempt of the Constitution** is concerned, the current coalition government has an even worse track record. The manner in which the Abe administration enacted the highly questionable national security legislation is only one example.

And let's not forget how the administration ignored demands by the opposition parties last autumn for the convocation of an extraordinary session of the Diet under Article 53.

The snub was all the more outrageous because the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's draft of a revised Constitution spelled out that the Cabinet is required to call an extraordinary Diet session within 20 days of the demand.

Not only the judiciary, but the legislature--the supreme organ of government--was also treated with contempt.

This is what Japan has become under the Abe administration, and this just cannot be right.

--The Asahi Shimbun, March 19

* * *

Vox Populi, Vox Dei is a popular daily column that takes up a wide range of topics, including culture, arts and social trends and developments. Written by veteran Asahi Shimbun writers, the column provides useful perspectives on and insights into contemporary Japan and its culture.

Power industry, Govt. and NRA should heed the Court

March 19, 2016

A caution on nuclear restarts

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/03/19/editorials/caution-nuclear-restarts/#.Vu1-C-aDmot>
The Otsu District Court's provisional injunction earlier this month ordering Kansai Electric Power Co. to shut down reactors 3 and 4 at its Takahama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture — against which the utility filed a complaint last week— carries a significance that other power companies, the government and the nation's nuclear regulators must not ignore.

The court charged that Kepco's explanations as to why the reactors' safety in the event of severe accidents is secure are inadequate, called on the national government to develop standards for evacuation plans for residents in the event of a nuclear accident, and expressed concerns about the Nuclear Regulation Authority's basic approach toward nuclear safety following the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The power industry and the government should take the decision as a warning that they should not push for the restart of idled plants unless they can fully ensure the plants' safety and are prepared to adequately protect residents in the event of a major accident.

The NRA also needs to carefully weigh the decision and should not hesitate to update its post-Fukushima plant safety standards if necessary.

The injunction was issued in response to a lawsuit filed by residents of Shiga Prefecture — which is not the host of the Takahama plant. **Power companies should take the court order as a rejection of their**

position that merely getting the consent of host prefectures and municipalities is sufficient to put nuclear power plants back online.

After the meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima plant in 2011 caused an extensive radiation fallout, local governments within 30 km of a nuclear power plant were required to devise evacuation plans for residents in the event of a major nuclear accident. But Kepco obtained approval from only the host prefecture and host municipality to restart the Takahama reactors.

The court decision makes it clear that people living outside the host prefecture and host municipality have a right to take legal action against the operation of a nuclear power plant. **The decision may lead to similar lawsuits against other nuclear plants.**

The court decision is significant in that it refers to **the most important lesson of the Fukushima disaster — that the supposed cost advantages of nuclear power cannot justify the devastating effect of a major accident and subsequent environmental destruction**, which, as the court pointed out, can cross national borders.

Although it appears that this lesson may have been forgotten by the power industry and government officials who are pushing for restart of idled nuclear reactors, it represents the doubts about nuclear power that are held by a majority of people in this country five years after the Fukushima catastrophe. The court also made a point about the investigation into the cause of the Fukushima nuclear debacle, saying that it is only halfway through and that **it remains unclear whether it is correct to identify the massive tsunami caused by the magnitude 9 earthquake as the primary cause of the meltdowns**. It expressed a “strong concern” over the attitude of the NRA, which compiled the new safety standards despite the absence of a thorough probe and analysis of the causes of the Fukushima calamity. The Abe administration has touted the standards as being the most stringent in the world — but has not given concrete evidence, such as comparison with standards adopted in other countries, to prove why the standards can be characterized as such.

In addition, the court said that nuclear plant safety standards should be created on the principle that even if a severe accident happens due to the failure to incorporate necessary safety steps, it must be prevented from developing into a calamitous situation.

Since the current standards written in 2013 will continue to be used in screening nuclear power plants to determine if they should be restarted, **the NRA should heed the court, study what is insufficient in the standards and take corrective measures where necessary.**

Evacuation plans continue to be a major issue for residents living near nuclear power plants. In its ruling the Otsu court stated that in the wake of the Fukushima catastrophe the national government has the duty to draw up standards for evacuation in the event of a nuclear accident.

Given that **the NRA standards do not cover evacuation plans and because evacuation plans devised by local governments around nuclear power plants have many questionable points**, the court's position should be taken seriously by the Abe government as it continues to push for the restart of idled nuclear power plants.

Sounds like intimidation

March 23, 2016

Kansai Electric chief lambasted over 'threats' against plaintiffs

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201603230074

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Lawyers protested what they described as "threats" from the chief of Kansai Electric Power Co., who suggested that **the company may seek damages from plaintiffs if successful in overturning an injunction to shut down its nuclear reactors.**

Two groups of lawyers sent a letter of protest to Makoto Yagi, Kansai Electric's president, on March 22, saying his remark is tantamount to "threats" against plaintiffs and "absolutely unacceptable."

At a news conference on March 18, Yagi said, "If a higher court overturns the injunction, seeking damages (from the plaintiffs) could be a possible option."

Yagi, who was speaking as chairman of the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan, said that the losses caused by the suspension of reactor operations is estimated to be 10 billion yen (\$89.06 million) a month.

He noted that lodging a claim for damages "could possibly be considered in general terms, but we have not made any decision at the moment."

The remark was referring to the Otsu District Court's injunction on March 9 against the operations of the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at Kansai Electric's Takahama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture.

The case involved 29 plaintiffs from Shiga Prefecture living in areas 30 to 70 kilometers from the plant. Otsu is the prefectural capital.

The protest letter was sent jointly by the attorneys representing the plaintiffs behind the injunction and another group of lawyers called Datsugenpatsu Bengodan Zenkoku Renrakukai (Nationwide liaison group of lawyers seeking a break from nuclear power).

It urged Yagi to retract his remark, saying that it **"can only be understood to have an intention to put a brake on people planning new requests for court injunctions against nuclear reactors across Japan."**

Yuichi Kaido, a co-leader of the liaison group, said Yagi's remark is totally inappropriate.

"On all accounts, it is a threat to people who requested the court injunction in line with judicial proceedings in hopes that another nuclear accident should not be allowed to occur."

In response to the letter, Kansai Electric's public relations office issued a statement.

"The remark explained that in general terms, lodging a claim for damages could be an option only after a lower court ruling is overturned. At present, nothing has been decided about seeking damages," the statement said. "The remark was not made to intimidate the complainants (behind the injunction) nor to rein in (future legal actions)."

Moral responsibility of nuclear burden

March 14, 2016

Japan Political Pulse: What will become of the nuclear burden?

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160314/p2a/00m/0na/023000c>

Japan's only option is to get away from nuclear power. The spent nuclear fuel that comes from nuclear plants is nothing but a burden, and the same is true of the plutonium at research facilities. This burden grows and grows, and so not even a final place to store high-level radioactive waste can be decided upon. I would like those pretending that such a place is going to be decided on soon to end such thinking, and those talking as if the nuclear fuel cycle will be completely established soon to stop their lies.

On March 9, the Otsu District Court issued a provisional injunction to halt the Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama Nuclear Power Plant in Takahama, Fukui Prefecture. As always, the various newspapers were divided in their take on this. Even if in the end it is simply considered to be a difference of opinions, I cannot ignore the arguments of the pro-nuclear energy group -- that the injunction is "an outrageous demand for a no-risk solution," or that it is "out of step with the precedent set by the Supreme Court" -- and I wish to respond.

When a severe nuclear disaster happens even once, an area some dozens to hundreds of kilometers from the plant becomes contaminated with radiation. More than 100,000 people have their livelihoods destroyed -- many more if the disaster affects an urban area -- and lose the land that is their home. Because of the effects of radiation on genes, future generations are threatened as well. **In terms of both its scale and nature, it is a whole different level of disaster compared to others. To even be discussing it in the same terms as something like an airplane crash is a mistake.**

Even if the likelihood of such a disaster is said to be "once in a million years per reactor," that doesn't mean we can accept that and agree to reactivate them.

One other thing I wish to say -- to those who criticize the district court's injunction as out of line with the Supreme Court ruling -- is that we must ask, what is wrong with being out of step? The only Supreme Court ruling in a case on nuclear power was in 1992, well before the Fukushima nuclear disaster, for a case involving the Ikata Nuclear Power Plant. The essence of that ruling was that "Whether or not a nuclear plant is safe will be left to the decision of the prime minister after hearing the opinions of experts." There is no reason that we must humbly abide by that ruling, made based on a policy of green-lighting administrative actions after the fact, a policy that formed out of Japan's economic growth years. There have been court rulings allowing for the reactivation of nuclear plants, so it may be too early to say that the tide has turned in the court battles over plant reactivation, but the judges are also citizens of this country, and **it is the original, proper function of the judiciary to hold basic doubts, to think freely and unfettered and speak out against the administration.**

There is also another burden, in the form of **excess plutonium**. According to a special report on March 5, coming out of Washington D.C. through Kyodo News, in the middle of this month a British-registered nuclear fuel transport ship will load up 331 kilograms of research-use plutonium at Tokai, Ibaraki Prefecture, and head to the U.S.

Japan holds 37 metric tons of plutonium in Great Britain and France, where it was sent for reprocessing, and 10.8 metric tons within its own borders. This is by far the greatest amount for a country not armed with nuclear weapons. The plutonium used at research facilities is of high purity and easily converted to military use, and this is why the United States, the standard bearer for the reduction of nuclear material, moved to retrieve it under a publically-released agreement between Japan and the United States.

However, China, seeing no progress on this front, had its ambassador to the United Nations level criticism last fall that Japan had enough plutonium to load in 1,350 nuclear warheads.

While China -- lacking results of its own in reducing its nuclear arsenal -- is not in a position to criticize Japan, Japan and the U.S. are moving forward with the transport of the plutonium so that they will be

backed by their actions when they speak at the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington D.C. at the end of this month, which Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will attend.

Even if Japan sets out now on a path away from nuclear energy, it will have to move forward while shouldering the burden of a massive amount of nuclear waste. We have a moral responsibility to not create any more nuclear pollution than we have already, and to not place additional burdens on our future generations. (By Takao Yamada, Special Senior Writer)

Fraudulent claims for compensation

March 24, 2016

TEPCO employee faces prosecution over alleged nuke accident compensation fraud

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160324/p2a/00m/0na/011000c>

Police sent papers on a Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) employee to the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office on March 23 for alleged fraud after advising members of a nonprofit organization in a fake compensation scheme after the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster, it has been learned.

- **【Related】** TEPCO insider helped cook up false nuke crisis compensation claims: ex-NPO exec

The employee, a man in his 40s, was referred to prosecutors by the third division of the National Police Agency organized crime policy unit for his connection to the fraud. According to individuals connected with the investigation, his role involved instructing two former senior executives of the NPO in how to submit false compensation claims to TEPCO on the basis of revenue being lost due to the nuclear accident. According to the allegations, the TEPCO employee worked together with the two employees of the Nakano, Tokyo-based NPO -- the "Higashinihon Daishinsai Genshiryoku Saigaito Hisaisha Shien Kyokai" (support association for victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake and nuclear disaster) -- between December 2011 and January 2012 to submit the fraudulent claims on behalf of a civil engineering and construction firm in Fukushima Prefecture, for which the NPO was acting as an agent.

A total of between 10 and 20 million yen in compensation fees was consequently received from TEPCO, among which the employee pocketed more than 4 million yen.

When questioned by the police agency's organized crime unit officials regarding the case, the suspect admitted that he had received the funds from the NPO officials. He said, however, "I did not believe that I was involved in making fraudulent claims."

Meanwhile, an official with the TEPCO public relations department said, "We understand that prosecutors are continuing to investigate (this case), and we are declining to comment upon it -- including with respect to whether or not the company is aware of the individual in question."

The two NPO affiliates were arrested by the police unit in August 2014 for their alleged role in the scheme. Kazuaki Shindo, 44, is presently undergoing court proceedings for fraud in conjunction with the case, while Hiroshi Murata, 57, received a nine-year prison sentence for the same crime, which he is presently appealing.

During a court hearing conducted at the Tokyo District Court in January last year, Shindo testified that 5 percent of the fraudulently-received compensation funds had been paid to the TEPCO employee "for the information provided and the quality of the instructions."

According to TEPCO, companies seeking compensation must prove that their revenue fluctuated before and after the nuclear disaster by submitting tax returns -- or financial statements showing account settlements of income and expenditures -- in addition to other documents specified by TEPCO. Either original or copied versions of the documents are accepted.

With respect to the incident in question, the materials submitted by the NPO included copies of tax returns that had been falsified in order to inflate pre-disaster profits. TEPCO, not realizing the fraudulent nature of the materials, approved the compensation requests.

An official connected to the investigation commented, **"Copies of documents are easier to falsify than originals, which is one explanation for the submission of the bogus claims."**

Police officials in both Osaka and Fukushima prefectures have detected additional fraudulent claims following the nuclear disaster.

"Such incidents are likely being enabled by an insufficient system for screening (such claims)," commented one investigator. "TEPCO bears a portion of the responsibility."

Why has slogan signboard been removed?

March 27, 2016

Fukushima town remains empty, but nuclear slogan disappears

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160327/p2g/00m/0dm/034000c>

March 27, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

FUTABA, Fukushima (Kyodo) -- The clock at a train station here still points to 2:46 p.m., the time when the massive earthquake occurred on March 11, 2011, triggering devastating tsunami.

The town, which is home to part of Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s radiation-leaking Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, remains empty as all residents had to evacuate due to high levels of radiation following the nuclear accident triggered by the natural disaster five years ago.

At a gymnasium in Futaba, fallen ceiling panels were left without being cleared. Everything is covered with dust.

Just outside the gymnasium, there used to be a slogan which appeared frequently in media reports in the past five years. The signboard reading "Nuclear power: the energy for a bright future," has turned into an ironic reminder of how Japan had blindly worshipped nuclear energy's safety.

In December last year, the slogan was removed from the signboard by town authorities. The town explained that the signs had become "decrepit" and they could fall, according to Yuji Onuma, a Futaba resident who has evacuated to Ibaraki Prefecture near Tokyo.

Onuma, 40, is the one who created the slogan in 1988 when he was in the sixth grade. Back then, he was commended by the town mayor and felt "proud." Onuma recalls that he used to pass under the signboard every day on his commute to work.

But since the disaster and ensuing nuclear crisis, he started to feel "ashamed." Every time TV footage showed the slogan and the abandoned town as its background, Onuma says the conflicted feelings got worse.

Onuma then thought that he had to "deal with it once and for all." He asked the town to keep the signboard as it is to remember the nuclear accident, even though the request could see him face ridicule in the community.

On March 17 last year, however, the town assembly decided to remove it. Earlier in the month, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Futaba. Town officials trimmed grown tree branches to welcome the premier, which made the sign even more visible.

Onuma opposed the removal, collecting some 7,000 signatures for his cause. In June, Mayor Shiro Izawa decided to keep the removed signboard at the town hall, but Onuma's request that it remain in its original position was denied. The signboard itself was taken away on March 4 this year.

Continuing to show the slogan "may have been inconvenient for (the government's plan to) resume idle nuclear reactors," said Onuma.

"The town put priority on the elimination of the slogan rather than cleanup of the debris" that still remains on the streets in Futaba, he added.

The town's no-go zone is eerily silent. The only things that hint of the life that was once there are blinking traffic lights.

At an elementary school's gymnasium, red-and-white curtains hang on the walls, probably for a graduation ceremony that had been planned in March five years ago.

A radiation detection device placed next to a thermometer in the school yard showed radiation levels of 2.141 microsieverts per hour -- some 10-times the level the government expects in decontaminated areas. Construction works to boost the quake-resistance of the school building had been finished the year before the earthquake and tsunami occurred. "The building survived the quake, but the works were in vain because of the nuclear accident," said Onuma.

Can utilities sue for lost revenue?

March 27, 2016

Ikata restart ruling prompts Kepco to raise threat of countersuits

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/27/national/ikata-restart-ruling-prompts-kepco-raise-threat-countersuits/#.VvfKHHpdeot>

by Eric Johnston

Staff Writer

OSAKA – Kansai Electric Power Co., angered by the decision earlier this month by the Otsu District Court in Shiga Prefecture to slap a provisional injunction on restarting two reactors at the Takahama nuclear power plant on safety grounds, is lashing out at its critics and threatening to sue them for lost revenue.

“As a general rule, seeking damages against such people is a possible target for discussion, although we’ve not decided anything,” Kepco President Makoto Yagi said at a new conference on March 18.

Kepco said it was desperate to have Takahama reactors 3 and 4, which are in neighboring Fukui Prefecture, back online before April 1 so it can offer more competitive rates when full deregulation of the electricity market takes place. The utility loses about ¥10 billion a month when the reactors are offline. The plaintiffs in the Shiga case, however, fired back at Yagi last week.

“Such comments are a threat to others who don’t want to see another nuclear accident and want to go to court to seek provisional injunctions against other possible restarts throughout Japan,” two groups involved in the Shiga case said in a formal letter of protest to Kepco.

With anti-nuclear citizens and their lawyers energized by the court ruling, Kepco and other nuclear advocates in Japan fear a flood of new lawsuits will emerge from residents near any reactor that gets the green light to restart.

Just a couple of days after the Otsu ruling, 67 plaintiffs including atomic bomb survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki announced they had filed a lawsuit at the Hiroshima District Court to prevent the restart of three reactors at Shikoku Electric Co.’s Ikata nuclear power plant in Ehime Prefecture.

Some of them also filed a separate suit seeking a provisional injunction to effectively block Shikoku Electric from restarting the Ikata plant’s reactor 3, which has already cleared new safety inspections and received local political approval, paving the way for its restart as early as this summer.

Is an apology good enough?

March 23, 2016

TEPCO apologizes for meltdown announcement delay

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160323_30/

Tokyo Electric Power Company has apologized to a Niigata Prefectural Government panel for not realizing sooner that 3 reactors at its Fukushima Daiichi plant had melted down in March 2011.

The panel is studying the safety of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in the prefecture. Niigata has made verification of the details of the Fukushima accident a prerequisite for the plant's restart.

TEPCO waited 2 months after the Fukushima accident to announce the meltdowns. The panel had questioned the delay. But TEPCO insisted it had no basis for making the determination.

Last month, nearly 5 years after the disaster, the utility revealed it could have declared the reactors had melted down 3 days after the accident if it had adhered to an in-house manual.

On Wednesday, Managing Executive Officer Takafumi Anegawa apologized to the panel. He said the utility should have realized and reported the existence of the manual sooner.

Panel members asked the utility why the manual went unnoticed for 5 years. They said the utility's longstanding and false claim that it had no standards for determining a meltdown makes it an untrustworthy nuclear plant operator.

The prefectural panel says it will resume discussions after a panel of outside experts set up by TEPCO submits a report on the cause of the delay.

Forget profitability when it comes to decommissioning

March 26, 2016

Editorial: 40-year reactor life rule must prevail over profitability

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160326/p2a/00m/0na/014000c>

Shikoku Electric Power Co. has decided to decommission the No. 1 reactor at the Ikata nuclear power complex in Ehime Prefecture, as the reactor will have been in operation 40 years come September next year.

In the wake of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster, the government has set a new rule limiting the operational life of reactors to 40 years, in principle. An extension of up to 20 years can be granted by the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA). Ikata nuclear plant operator Shikoku Electric Power Co. had sought to have the No. 1 reactor's lifespan extended, but abandoned the idea after finding the enormous safety improvement costs would make it unprofitable to keep the reactor running.

Reactor pressure vessels are said to deteriorate in 40 years due to being bombarded by neutrons. From the viewpoint of ensuring nuclear plant safety, reactors over 40 years of age need to be decommissioned, regardless of their profitability. It is hoped that Shikoku Electric's decision will set a precedent for other power companies.

Five other reactors around the 40-year limit are already set to be decommissioned, including the No. 1 and 2 reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Mihama nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture, and the No. 1 reactor at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Genkai nuclear station in Saga Prefecture -- decisions made in March last year. With the decommissioning of the Ikata plant's No. 1 reactor, the number of reactors in Japan will be reduced to 42.

The six reactors facing decommissioning are relatively small, with output in the 300,000 to 500,000 kilowatt range. More recent reactors can generate 1 million kilowatts each.

The decision over whether to decommission reactors is left up to each utility, and behind Kansai Electric and Kyushu Electric's decisions to decommission the aforementioned reactors also lay the issue of profitability. The smaller the output of a reactor is, the less profitable it is considering the massive cost of safety measures.

Meanwhile, Kansai Electric has applied to the NRA to extend the service life of the No. 1 and 2 reactors at the Takahama nuclear plant, and the No. 3 reactor at the Mihama plant, both in Fukui Prefecture. The utility decided that those reactors -- which can each generate about 800,000 kilowatts -- will be profitable enough even with the immense safety costs.

However, aging reactors are fraught with more problems than deteriorating pressure vessels. The longer it has been since a reactor entered operation, the fewer engineers there are who can pass down legacy technologies. Some experts point out that there is a limit to how much the safety of elderly reactors can be

improved because their design concept itself is outdated. The question of decommissioning a reactor and its output and economic efficiency should be considered separately.

Furthermore, utilities face a host of other challenges to moving ahead with steady decommissioning. **First and foremost, the final disposal site for the colossal amount of radioactive waste that will be generated by dismantling reactors has yet to be decided. There are not even regulatory standards for disposing of the severely contaminated inner components of reactors.**

It is also imperative to **secure storage locations for spent nuclear fuel generated by nuclear plants.** Under the government's nuclear fuel cycle policy, spent fuel had been destined for the reprocessing plant in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture. However, the plant is under safety review by the NRA, and there is no prospect of it becoming operational anytime soon.

Power companies and the government need to overcome these challenges. Reactor decommissioning seriously affects regional economies and the finances of local governments dependent on nuclear plant hosting subsidies. The central government's support is indispensable in associating the decommissioning business with regional revitalization, among other measures.

Just another form of blackmail

March 28, 2016

EDITORIAL: Nuclear power proponents still scoffing at public safety concerns

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201603280014>

An Otsu District Court injunction has suspended operations of two reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture, one of which was online.

Again, the significance of that development should be taken to heart. Proponents of nuclear power, in particular, should squarely face up to the public anxiety that lies in the backdrop of the court decision. But instead they are boiling with disgruntlement.

"Why is a single district court judge allowed to trip up the government's energy policy?" Kazuo Sumi, a vice chairman of the Kansai Economic Federation, said resentfully.

"We could demand damages (from the residents who requested the injunction) if we were to win the case at a higher court," Kansai Electric President Makoto Yagi said, although he prefaced his remark with a proviso that he is arguing only in general terms.

The government is maintaining a wait-and-see attitude.

The decision called into question the appropriateness of the Nuclear Regulation Authority's new regulation standards and government-approved plans for evacuations in case of an emergency.

But NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka argued, "Our standards are nearing the world's top level."

And the government has no plans to review its emergency evacuation plans. It has only reiterated that it will "proceed with restarts of nuclear reactors in paying respect to NRA decisions."

The Otsu decision is the third court order issued against the operation of nuclear reactors since the meltdowns five years ago at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

There has, in fact, been no fixed trend in court decisions. Another court rejected residents' request last year for an injunction against reactor restarts at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai nuclear plant in Kagoshima Prefecture.

But courts appear to be playing a more active role now than before the Fukushima disaster.

The nuclear proponents' reactions reveal an underlying thinking: "The use of nuclear power is indispensable for Japan, which does not abound in energy resources. The government set up the NRA following the Fukushima disaster to increase expert control. Regional utilities have also taken safety enhancement measures. Courts are therefore asked not to meddle."

But they should have a deeper understanding that this argument is no longer convincing to the public and court judges.

Some critics say the latest decision deviated from the 1992 Supreme Court ruling saying that decisions on the safety of nuclear plants should be made by administrative organs on the basis of expert opinions. But that argument is also off the mark.

The ruling, given in a case over Shikoku Electric Power Co.'s Ikata nuclear plant, certainly presented that point of view. But it also stated that the objective of safety regulations based on the Law on the Regulation of Nuclear Source Material, Nuclear Fuel Material and Reactors is to "make sure that no serious disaster will happen by any chance."

A safety net, left in the hands of experts, collapsed all too easily during the Fukushima disaster, turning the phrase "by any chance" into reality.

Courts, which are the guardians of law, should rather be commended for trying to find out independently, to the extent that they can, if there is enough preparedness when a nuclear reactor will be restarted.

The latest alarm bell sounded by the judiciary sector provides an opportunity to ask once again why all the safety measures taken after the Fukushima nuclear disaster are still struggling to win the trust of the public.

The Fukushima disaster changed the awareness of the public. The judiciary sector was also affected.

It is high time for a change among nuclear proponents.

--The Asahi Shimbun, March 27

March 27, 2016

Ikata restart ruling prompts Kepco to raise threat of countersuits

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/27/national/ikata-restart-ruling-prompts-kepco-raise-threat-countersuits/#.VvfKHHpdeot>

by Eric Johnston

Staff Writer

OSAKA – Kansai Electric Power Co., angered by the decision earlier this month by the Otsu District Court in Shiga Prefecture to slap a provisional injunction on restarting two reactors at the Takahama nuclear power plant on safety grounds, is lashing out at its critics and threatening to sue them for lost revenue.

“As a general rule, seeking damages against such people is a possible target for discussion, although we’ve not decided anything,” Kepco President Makoto Yagi said at a new conference on March 18.

Kepco said it was desperate to have Takahama reactors 3 and 4, which are in neighboring Fukui Prefecture, back online before April 1 so it can offer more competitive rates when full deregulation of the electricity market takes place. The utility loses about ¥10 billion a month when the reactors are offline. The plaintiffs in the Shiga case, however, fired back at Yagi last week.

“Such comments are a threat to others who don’t want to see another nuclear accident and want to go to court to seek provisional injunctions against other possible restarts throughout Japan,” two groups involved in the Shiga case said in a formal letter of protest to Kepco.

With anti-nuclear citizens and their lawyers energized by the court ruling, Kepco and other nuclear advocates in Japan fear a flood of new lawsuits will emerge from residents near any reactor that gets the green light to restart.

Just a couple of days after the Otsu ruling, 67 plaintiffs including atomic bomb survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki announced they had filed a lawsuit at the Hiroshima District Court to prevent the restart of three reactors at Shikoku Electric Co.’s Ikata nuclear power plant in Ehime Prefecture.

Some of them also filed a separate suit seeking a provisional injunction to effectively block Shikoku Electric from restarting the Ikata plant’s reactor 3, which has already cleared new safety inspections and received local political approval, paving the way for its restart as early as this summer.

TEPCO's executives won't be prosecuted

March 30, 2016

Prosecutors drop TEPCO case over radioactive water leakage

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201603300068>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

FUKUSHIMA--The Fukushima District Public Prosecutor’s Office announced on March 29 that it will not prosecute Tokyo Electric Power Co. or its executives for violating an environmental pollution law.

The decision came two and a half years after a group of plaintiffs, including residents of Fukushima Prefecture, filed a criminal complaint against TEPCO, operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, and its 32 current and former executives.

The group sought to bring charges against the utility and its executives for allowing radioactive contaminated water to be discharged into the sea.

In its decision, the prosecutors said there was “insufficient” evidence to press charges against TEPCO and some of its executives, including Naomi Hirose, company president. The remaining executives, the prosecutors said, “had no authority or responsibility to set measures to avoid the leakage in the first place,” therefore, the accusation has “no grounds.”

“The Fukushima police investigated the case for almost two years. It is extremely disappointing,” said Ruiko Muto, 62, the head of the plaintiff’s group, at a news conference in Tokyo on March 29. “We wanted them to look into the case further. We can’t accept this decision.”

The group is planning to appeal to the Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution. The group will meet with its lawyers on March 30 and decide on whether it will pursue further action.

Charges ruled out for Tepco figures over Fukushima No. 1 radioactive water spillage into sea

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/30/national/crime-legal/charges-ruled-tepco-figures-fukushima-no-1-radioactive-water-spillage-sea/#.VvurrHpdeot>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – Public prosecutors decided on Tuesday not to indict Tokyo Electric Power Co. President Naomi Hirose and other current and former executives of the utility over radioactive water leaks from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant into the ocean.

Sufficient evidence was not found, the Fukushima District Public Prosecutor’s Office said.

In September 2013, a civic group filed a criminal complaint against 32 current and former Tepco executives, including Hirose and Tsunehisa Katsumata, former chairman of the operator of the northeastern nuclear power plant, saying tainted water leaked from storage tanks into the ocean due to their failure to take preventive measures.

Through its investigation, the Fukushima Prefectural Police concluded that some 300 tons of stored radioactive water had flowed into the sea as of July 2013 because Tepco executives neglected to monitor the tanks or take leak-prevention measures, and sent the case to the prosecutors last October.

The prosecutors said there was no evidence supporting the allegation that the leaked tainted water was carried into the sea by groundwater at the plant, which suffered meltdowns following the massive earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

The group said it will ask for a prosecution inquest panel’s investigation.

Power to the people?

March 31, 2016

Electricity shake-up gives power to the people

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/31/reference/japans-electricity-shake-gives-power-people/#.Vv0jjnpdeot>

by Kazuaki Nagata

Staff Writer

Japan’s electricity market receives a fundamental shake-up on Friday, with the introduction of greater competition for households and small businesses. Until now, regional utilities have monopolized supply. There will be some unfamiliar names among the new entrants, bringing with them a wide range of choices and benefits.

Following are questions and answers about deregulation in the household electricity market:

What does it mean for me?

Consumers can now choose their electricity provider.

Previously, the 10 regional utilities, including Tokyo Electric Power Co. and Kansai Electric Power Co., were the sole providers for their areas. But with deregulation, a wide range of companies can sell power. As of March 25, 266 firms had registered to become electricity providers.

Consumers should benefit as providers compete on price and incentives.

Users can also choose providers by the way they generate electricity, such as picking those that avoid nuclear or use renewables.

How will rate plans differ?

Many new players claim their rates will be lower than those charged by the regional utilities.

Tokyo Gas Co., a major gas supplier in the Kanto region and one of the new electricity providers, says a household that uses 4,700 kilowatt-hours a year can save ¥8,500 a year by switching to its plan from the one offered by Tepco.

There may be conditions attached. Tokyo Gas clients need to get their gas from the company to qualify for a ¥270 monthly discount.

Cellphone carrier KDDI Corp. is entering the market. It will return up to 5 percent of monthly power rates in the form of electronic cash credits, but only to its cellphone subscribers.

Will switching provider entail rewiring my home?

No. The new suppliers will use a household's existing power cables.

However, electricity meters will be replaced, at no charge, with so-called smart meters.

Is there a risk of brownouts with small providers?

Basically, no.

Electricity quality will not change, and if a new provider comes up short for some reason, other companies will supply power to make up for the shortage.

Why are so many firms getting involved?

Some operators say electricity supply is not that profitable. But it is a good chance for energy-related firms to expand their businesses, while companies in other fields see electricity provision as a way to draw customers to their core pursuits.

"As an energy business operator, we always wanted to be a one-stop provider of gas and electricity," said Kawori Koya of the Residential Sales Strategy Department at Tokyo Gas.

Tokyo Gas dominates the household gas market in Kanto and is widely expected to become a strong player in the electricity market.

It also provides electricity for large-scale business users, whose market is already liberalized, so it is only natural for it to enter the household market, Koya said.

As consumers focus on prices and companies' reputation in choosing their provider, she said Tokyo Gas has an edge because its rates are some of the lowest and the firm has established a name as a reliable gas provider.

Tokyo Gas said that as of Feb. 24, it had about 54,000 contracts from customers waiting to jump ship from Tepco.

It aims to have a 10 percent market share in Kanto by 2020.

Firms whose main businesses are unrelated to power supply include KDDI and rival cellphone carrier SoftBank, railway operator Tokyu Corp. and travel agency H.I.S.

Takiguchi, senior manager at Japan Research Institute, said these firms will use their electricity supply to promote their main businesses.

"Electricity is something that everybody uses, so they can approach a wide range of customers," Takiguchi said.

Will regional utilities be able to retain their market share?

Possibly. Tepco spokesman Kiyomitsu Kawamoto says while it is true the market environment has changed, Tepco sees the liberalization of the household market as an opportunity, since regional utilities will be able to sell electricity outside their boundaries.

Kawamoto admits that when it comes to price, the newcomers are ahead. Utilities were required to get government approval for their rates and therefore could not set a high profit margin. They have already been lowering their prices, leaving little room for further cuts, he said.

He said Tepco, which has about 20 million household customers, needs a strategy that does not focus on rates alone.

Tepco has partnered with more than 15 firms to provide benefits. For example, SoftBank subscribers can receive discounts on their phone bills.

As well as promoting such deals with partners, Tepco believes its customer service know-how, which the firm has built up over decades, is a strong selling point.

In some countries, shaking up the market resulted in higher prices. Will this happen in Japan?

Takiguchi said rates may rise: Market liberalization has started with way too many players, so prices will fall in the short term due to competition, but a lot of players will not survive and will drop out.

“The competition will become weaker, and the competition to lower . . . rates will also weaken,” he said.

He also said Japan’s push to boost costly renewable energy, such as solar and wind power, could lead to higher rates.

An accident that "should have been preventable"

04.04.2016_No65 / News in Brief

Tepco: ‘We Should Recognise The Fact That We Could Not Prevent An Accident That Should Have Been Preventable’

<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2016/04/04/tepco-we-should-recognise-the-fact-that-we-could-not-prevent-an-accident-that-should-have-been-preventable-II>

Comment & People

4 Apr (NucNet): There were three main inefficiencies – **poor safety consciousness, insufficient technical capabilities and poor communication** – that contributed to the March 2011 accident at Fukushima-Daiichi, Takafumi Ihara, nuclear power programme manager at Tepco’s London office, told NucNet in an interview.

He also said that Tepco produced a two-part nuclear safety reform plan focusing on safety at the operational and managerial levels in 2013.

The full interview is online for NucNet subscribers: <http://bit.ly/1Yaly9a>

Deregulation: First setback

April 1, 2016

Electricity reforms in Japan hit glitch on 1st day, power trading surges

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201604010051.html>

REUTERS

The biggest-ever shake-up of Japan's energy industry hit a glitch on its first day as trading was halted for eight-and-a-half hours on a new electricity product, although overall turnover on the beefed up power exchange surged 60 percent.

A communication connection between the exchange and the national electricity grid monitor set up to ensure smooth transmission and trading of power for consumers broke down late on Thursday, stopping trade in one-hour-ahead blocks of electricity, according to officials and statements.

The one-hour-ahead, or intraday, product was introduced as part of the overhaul of the industry, where regional utilities are losing their last remaining monopoly rights and the \$70 billion (8 trillion yen) retail market is opened to all competitors.

Efficient spot trading of electricity is seen as an important step for the changes to be successful.

The outage did not cause disruptions to power supplies and had little impact on the electricity market, said the Organization for Cross-regional Coordination of Transmission Operators, Japan (OCCTO).

Trading in the intraday product on the Japan Electric Power Exchange (JEPX) was stopped between 10 p.m. Thursday and 6:30 a.m. Friday Japan time, said OCCTO, which was set up last year to monitor the market and ensure stable supplies. The new product trades 24 hours a day.

Trading for day-ahead supplies for Friday on JEPX, the exchange's traditional product, surged to 47 million kilowatt hours (kWh), up 60.6 percent from the same day a year earlier, JEPX said.

Day-ahead contracts weren't affected by the glitch.

Before the changes, JEPX trading typically accounted for around 1-2 percent of overall electricity supplies in Japan, but the increase in volume will be seen as encouraging to those who argue building liquidity is crucial to ensure a competitive market.

The average price of the exchange's day-ahead DA-24 spot index was 7.43 yen per kWh for Friday, down 38 percent from 11.99 yen the same day a year earlier and up 9.9 percent from 6.76 yen on March 31, according to the JEPX website.

see also :

April 1, 2016

Video NHK

Japan's Electricity Deregulation Gets Underway

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20160401110329142/>

Utilities unite

April 5, 2016

4 utilities to form alliance over nuclear crisis management, safety measures

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160405/p2a/00m/0na/025000c>

Four power companies -- **Kansai Electric Power Co., Kyushu Electric Power Co., Chugoku Electric Power Co. and Shikoku Electric Power Co.** -- are set to **form an alliance for their nuclear crisis management and safety measures**, it has been learned.

The four utilities are aiming to improve the safety of their nuclear facilities, reduce the costs of taking safety steps and develop new technology by jointly handling work to decommission their nuclear reactors and taking safety measures necessary for restarting their idled reactors. It will be the first time for major domestic power companies to form an alliance for nuclear power-related projects.

Following the outbreak of the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March 2011, the government introduced new regulatory standards to require utilities to adopt stricter safety measures. The cost for utilities to take safety measures for each one of their nuclear reactors is ballooning to about 100 billion yen.

With the retail electricity market being fully liberalized earlier this month and competition among power suppliers intensifying, the business environment of major power companies is becoming even severer. Therefore, the four utilities will aim to reduce costs of taking safety measures and share expertise by jointly working to deal with issues of common concern, such as decommissioning work. The four utilities intend to jointly develop new technology in the future.

The four power companies are in the final stage of talks in the direction of forging an alliance pact as early as the end of this month. The four power companies have already decided to decommission a total of five nuclear reactors. They are: Kansai Electric's No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at the Mihama Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture; the No. 1 reactor at Shikoku Electric's Ikata Nuclear Power Plant in Ehime Prefecture; the No. 1 reactor at Chugoku Electric's Shimane Nuclear Power Station; and the No. 1 reactor at Kyushu Electric's Genkai Nuclear Power Plant in Saga Prefecture.

As a first step, the four utilities are likely to start sharing with each other as early as the end of fiscal 2016 the technology and personnel necessary to decommission those five reactors. As for safety measures, the four companies are also expected to share quake-resistant and fire-resistant technologies.

Objective and scientific?

April 4, 2016

Fukushima students reach out to tell truth about radiation

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201604040044.html>

By YURI OIWA/ Staff Writer

Struck by ignorance about the 2011 nuclear disaster, high school science club members in Fukushima Prefecture enlisted the help of fellow students around Japan and abroad for a comparative study on radiation doses.

The results surprised even those living in the prefecture that hosts the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

“The individual doses (of external radiation exposure in high school students) were almost equal inside and outside of Fukushima Prefecture, and in European areas,” Haruka Onodera, 18, said in English at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan (FCCJ) in Tokyo on Feb. 8.

A German correspondent asked her, “Would you declare Fukushima now safe?”

“Actually, **we didn’t measure the doses in people living in the contaminated areas**, so we can’t say all of Fukushima is safe,” Onodera answered, often pausing in thought in the middle of her words and phrases. “But I hope we will send (personal dosimeters) to contaminated areas and help do risk management for people living there in the future.”

Onodera, a third-year student of Fukushima High School and member of the physics and radiation division of the school’s Super Science Club, also showed explanatory slides at the FCCJ news conference titled, “Fukushima and radiation monitoring. The goal of the project is to show the realities of Fukushima Prefecture to the rest of the world.

The club’s physics and radiation division started the project in summer 2014. **It involved 216 high school students and teachers in Japan and abroad carrying personal dosimeters for two weeks.**

Six high schools in Fukushima Prefecture--Fukushima, Adachi, Aizu Gakuho, Iwaki, Asaka and Tamura--and another six located elsewhere in Japan--including in Gifu, Kanagawa, Nara and Hyogo prefectures--were involved in the project.

They were joined by 14 high schools from France, Poland and Belarus.

According to the measurements taken by the students, the annual radiation doses in Fukushima Prefecture ranged between 0.63 and 0.97 millisievert. For elsewhere in Japan, the range was from 0.55 to 0.87 millisievert, while in Europe, the annual doses were between 0.51 and 1.1 millisieverts.

The similar levels of external doses are believed to be partly attributable to the lower level of natural background radiation in Fukushima Prefecture compared with that in western Japan. That finding came from an analysis of a database on the radioactive content of soil in areas surrounding the different high schools across Japan.

Onodera, who was seated next to Ryugo Hayano, a professor of physics with the University of Tokyo, at the FCCJ news conference, had also presented the study results last year to a workshop of high school students in France and a conference on Fukushima foodstuffs held on the sidelines of an international food exposition in Italy.

Two second-year students of the Super Science Club--Minori Saito, 17, and Yuya Fujiwara, 17--gave a talk at a workshop organized in Date, Fukushima Prefecture, by the International Commission on Radiological Protection late last year.

First- and second-year students who are members of the club, joined by eight high school students from France, visited peach farmers and shiitake mushroom growers in Fukushima Prefecture in summer last year. It was part of a program for studying the current state of Fukushima from diverse views.

The students wanted to address global audiences after they were shocked by how little was known about the actual state of Fukushima Prefecture.

“Can humans live in Fukushima?” a French high school student asked the Fukushima students over Skype as part of an international exchange program in 2014.

That prompted the Japanese students to determine the actual situation on their own, and compare it with circumstances elsewhere in Japan and abroad. Hayano advised them to undertake the endeavor when he visited Fukushima High School to give a talk.

The findings of the study were surprising. Most of the Fukushima students expected the doses in Fukushima would be the highest, even by a large margin.

The students also studied how behavior affected the dose levels.

The Fukushima High School students were being exposed to lower radiation levels when they were at school than when they were at home. They believe the school's concrete buildings provided a more effective shield from radiation sources than the wooden houses did.

By contrast, students attending Ena High School in Gifu Prefecture were exposed to more radiation when they were at school, where granite, containing radiation sources, is used in the buildings.

Their analysis results were published in November in a British scientific journal on radiological protection. Onodera was involved in writing the research paper.

"The experience has brought home to me how important it is to address reality **objectively and scientifically**," she said.

Onodera said she was growing more interested in basic sciences and dreams of doing research on molecular biology at university.

"We hope to solicit help from people in evacuation zones within Fukushima Prefecture, and from high schools in countries we have yet to address, in further broadening our study," said Takashi Hara, a teacher and adviser to the science club's physics and radiation division.

Questions remain about courts' decisions

April 7, 2016

Editorial: Questions remain over high court decision on Sendai nuke plant

http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160407/p2a/00m/0na/006000c*

The Miyazaki branch of the Fukuoka High Court has dismissed an appeal by residents near the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant in Kagoshima Prefecture against a lower court decision that rejected their demand that operations at the power station be provisionally suspended.

- **【Related】** High court rejects residents' call to halt reactors in southwest Japan

The appeal court upheld a decision handed down by the Kagoshima District Court decision in April 2015 on the grounds that there is no irrationality in the new regulatory standards that the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) set following the March 2011 outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis, endorsing the restart of the power plant operated by Kyushu Electric Power Co.

However, questions remain over the appeal court's evaluation of evacuation plans for local residents in case of a serious nuclear accident at the plant as well as countermeasures against volcanic eruptions.

In the latest decision, the Miyazaki branch of the Fukuoka High Court stated that the safety that must be ensured at nuclear plants should be judged based on social norms, noting that it is impossible to

completely eliminate risks of accidents at such power stations. The court then evaluated the quake-resistance of the plant, measures to protect the power station from possible volcanic eruptions and local governments' evacuation plans for residents -- which were key points of contention -- and concluded that the plant poses no specific risks of causing serious damage to nearby residents.

However, the myth of the infallible safety of atomic power stations has collapsed with the crisis at the tsunami-ravaged Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Needless to say, the operators of nuclear plants must draw up and implement countermeasures on the assumption that serious accidents could occur. Therefore, evacuation plans for local residents in case of an accident are crucial. It is the responsibility of local governments that host or are situated near atomic power plants to work out evacuation plans for local residents. However, such plans are not subject to safety evaluations by the NRA under its new regulatory standards. Evacuation plans should be covered by NRA screening in order to ensure their efficacy.

However, the appeal court ruled that even if evacuation plans are to lack efficacy, it would not mean that operations at nuclear plants pose an immediate threat to the lives and health of local residents. The court stated that it is a matter of legislative policy, and therefore not irrational, that evacuation plans are not subject to the new regulatory standards.

However, serious questions should be raised over whether it is appropriate under social norms to give the green light for reactivation of nuclear plants even though evacuation plans are inadequate.

Last month, the Otsu District Court issued a provisional injunction ordering Kansai Electric Power Co. to suspend operations at the No. 3 and 4 reactors at its Takahama Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture. In its decision, the court said, "It is the national government's duty in the principle of faith and trust to work out regulatory standards that take into consideration evacuation plans." This is a more sensible idea. The high court criticized the NRA for evaluating the impact of volcanoes on nearby nuclear plants on the premise that the timing and scale of volcanic eruptions is predictable.

At the same time, however, the court concluded that it is common sense that risks of massive volcanic eruptions that local residents point out can be ignored, noting that the possibility of such disasters is not taken into account in construction and other regulations.

However, many members of the public are apparently doubtful of treating nuclear plants, which could seriously affect wide areas if an accident were to occur, in the same way as ordinary structures.

Social consensus has not been formed on risks of accidents at nuclear power stations as even courts are divided over evaluations of such dangers.

The government and electric power companies that operate atomic power plants should take public concerns about nuclear accidents seriously and hold in-depth discussions on the issue.

Court decisions divided over risk evaluations of nuclear reactors

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160407/p2a/00m/0na/009000c>

April 7, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

Japanese courts have been divided in their decisions over residents' petitions for provisional injunctions ordering the suspension of nuclear reactors filed across the country, and the fate of reactor reactivation is likely to remain in the hands of judicial rulings.

- **【Related】** Local residents decry court's ruling to not halt restart of Sendai nuclear plant
- **【Related】** News Navigator: Is Sendai Nuclear Power Plant safe under new standards?

On April 6, the Miyazaki branch of the Fukuoka High Court approved the operation of the No. 1 and 2 reactors at the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant in Kagoshima Prefecture, dismissing residents' petition for a provisional injunction ordering the suspension of the reactors.

Unlike the Otsu District Court's injunction in March ordering the No. 3 and 4 reactors at the Takahama nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture be halted, the Fukuoka High Court branch acknowledged that social norms do not call for a "zero risk" over the possibility of nuclear accidents.

After the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant meltdowns in March 2011, there were nine court decisions over injunction requests for nuclear reactors. Of them, three decisions ordered the reactors be halted -- the aforementioned Otsu District Court decision, the May 2014 Fukui District Court decision over the Oi nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture, and the same court's April 2015 decision over the Takahama plant.

In response to the April 6 decision by the Fukuoka High Court's Miyazaki branch, petitioners are set to consider whether to appeal it to seek the Supreme Court's decision. There are other pending petitions and lawsuits over nuclear reactors across the country, including the one over the No. 3 reactor at the Ikata nuclear plant in Ehime Prefecture, which operator Shikoku Electric Power Co. is seeking to restart this coming summer.

Court decisions over nuclear reactors are split over how far accident risks carried by nuclear reactors are tolerated by social norms. The Fukuoka High Court branch's decision pointed out that unpredictable risks would remain even if the scientific and technical knowledge reflected in the new regulatory standards adopted by the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) is updated, and concluded that "while risks remain, it cannot be said there is a concrete danger" -- in defiance of the Otsu District Court's decision that called for a zero nuclear accident risk.

Courts were also divided in their opinions over resident evacuation plans. The Fukuoka High Court's Miyazaki branch ruled in favor of Kyushu Electric Power Co., the operator of the Sendai plant, on the grounds that the central government has approved the utility's nuclear evacuation plans, saying, "Even if the plans lack in rationality and effectiveness, they are not recognized to immediately infringe on residents' personal rights."

With regard to the NRA's volcano risk evaluation guide premised on detecting signs of major eruptions, the high court branch raised questions by saying, "We must say eruption predictions are difficult and unreasonable." The high court branch, however, went on to state, "The danger of catastrophic eruptions can be ignored" -- again defying a zero risk theory.

At a regular press conference on April 6, NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka refuted the high court branch's decision, saying, "It is the NRA's view that elaborate observations should be made for early predictions of eruptions and prompt responses should be made," ruling out the possibility of reviewing its volcano risk evaluation guide.

Shigeyuki Suto, professor of the Faculty of Law at Waseda University, criticized the decision by the Fukuoka High Court's Miyazaki branch, saying, "The decision lacks in an attitude that questions from the public point of view whether the new regulatory standards drawn up by a group of experts are reasonable or not. The decision that the nuclear reactors (at the Sendai plant) are not subject to immediate suspension even if resident evacuation plans are insufficient was also a sheer formality."

Safety rules hamper training...

April 5, 2016

Tighter rules hamper nuclear power studies

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160405_27/

Nuclear energy academics in Japan say tighter rules introduced for all of the country's reactors after the Fukushima Daiichi disaster hamper their efforts to train students.

Members of the Atomic Energy Society of Japan visited the government's Atomic Energy Commission on Tuesday.

They say all 12 of Japan's research reactors at universities and other institutes have been offline due to the rules. Some of the reactors are small-output types.

The rules require all operators, including those with such reactors, to take stricter measures against earthquakes and tsunami.

University of Tokyo Professor Mitsuru Uesaka said about 1,700 students and researchers used research reactors before the 2011 accident. But he said some now have to go overseas to use nuclear facilities, or give up on their studies.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority is trying to speed up its screening process for restarting research reactors. But universities are delayed in preparing for screening due to staff and budget shortages.

The academics plan to propose that the government introduce different criteria for research reactors depending on their output.

Court decision ignores Fukushima lessons

April 7, 2016

EDITORIAL: Reactor ruling ignores lessons, anxiety from Fukushima crisis

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201604070026.html>

A court ruling concerning nuclear reactor operations raises serious doubts about whether the court rightly recognized the gravity of the damage and the harsh realities caused by the 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The Miyazaki branch of the Fukuoka High Court on April 6 rejected an appeal by Kyushu residents seeking an injunction to shut down the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors of the Sendai nuclear plant run by Kyushu Electric Power Co. in Satsuma-Sendai, Kagoshima Prefecture. They are the only two reactors currently operating in Japan.

The ruling in essence said the Nuclear Regulation Authority's (NRA) new safety standards, established after the disaster at the Fukushima plant, reflect the lessons learned from the triple meltdown and cannot

be described as unreasonable. It also dismissed the plaintiffs' argument that the design of the Sendai plant underestimates the safety risks posed by possible major earthquakes.

This ruling stands in sharp contrast with the Otsu District Court's decision in March that raised doubts about the NRA's safety standards and ordered the suspension of operations of two reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture.

What happened in Fukushima has created strong anxiety among Japanese about the safety of nuclear power generation. From this point of view, it is obvious which of the two rulings really echoed the public sentiment about nuclear safety.

Symptomatic of the two courts' different stances toward public concerns are their views about evacuation plans.

The new nuclear safety standards do not address issues related to evacuation plans.

The Otsu District Court raised questions about this fact and contended that the government is obliged to develop new regulatory standards based on a broader perspective that also address evacuation plans.

The Miyazaki branch acknowledged there are legitimate concerns about the existing plan for emergency evacuations.

The plaintiffs argued that the plan would be unable to deal with a situation that requires an immediate and massive evacuation. They also said the number of buses available to transport local residents during nuclear crises would be insufficient.

But the court nevertheless dismissed the plaintiffs' claim that operating the Sendai reactors violates their personal rights. The court pointed out that at least an emergency evacuation plan was in place.

Following the accident in Fukushima, many residents could not smoothly flee for their safety, leading to serious confusion.

The high court's decision did not give due consideration to this fact.

Volcanoes, including the highly active Sakurajima, are located around the Sendai nuclear plant.

The NRA has established guidelines concerning the risks to nuclear plants posed by volcanic eruptions.

The high court judged the guidelines, based on the assumption that the timing and scale of eruptions can be accurately predicted, to be "irrational."

Yet the court said the probability of an eruption triggering a catastrophic nuclear accident was so low that the risk can be ignored unless solid grounds for thinking otherwise are shown.

The court acknowledged the NRA's flawed approach to dealing with the safety risk posed by volcanic eruptions. But it said the widely accepted view in society is that the risk can be ignored because of the low probability of such eruptions actually occurring.

Can this be described as an opinion based on serious reflection on the fact that unforeseen circumstances occurred at the Fukushima plant?

The exact causes of the nuclear disaster are not yet clear, and around 100,000 people are still living as evacuees.

That explains why various opinion polls show a majority of respondents expressing negative views about plans to restart reactors.

The court ruling that endorses the NRA's new safety standards does not translate into public support of the government's policy to bring idled reactors back on stream.

The sharply different court rulings on reactor operations should be regarded as a sign that the knotty question of how to secure safety at nuclear plants remains unsolved.

TEPCO official had "personal knowledge" of standard

April 12, 2016

TEPCO official knew standard for meltdown at Fukushima

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201604120056.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A Tokyo Electric Power Co. senior official has admitted to knowing the criteria to assess reactor meltdowns during the onset of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident.

However, it took the company two months to make the declaration and another five years to "discover" its operational manual, which would have allowed it to declare a meltdown.

Until February this year, TEPCO had justified the delay in that it did not have the "basis to determine" such an occurrence. It announced Feb. 24 that it discovered a guideline in its operational manual.

TEPCO admitted that meltdowns had occurred in May 2011, two months after the disaster.

Yuichi Okamura, a senior director on nuclear power generation, said in a news conference on April 11 that he knew of the standard, although emphasizing it was only his "personal knowledge." He did not elaborate on whether he knew the existence of the operational manual, or whether he shared his "personal knowledge" with other staff members.

"I, in fact, knew it (the criteria)," said Okamura. "I learned it while working in the field of nuclear technology with the company for over 20 years."

According to Okamura, at the time of the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, he was directing the pumping of water into the cooling pool of spent nuclear fuel rods of the No. 4 reactor. He said he was not in a position to make a declaration whether a meltdown had occurred.

He made the admission in response to a question asking his personal understanding of the situation at the onset of the crisis.

Okamura declined to comment on whether he is being questioned by a third-party panel investigating the accident.

In February, TEPCO revealed that it did not realize for the past five years that there was a clear guideline in the operational manual to assess that a meltdown in a reactor had occurred. The standard requires the company to declare a meltdown when damage to a reactor core exceeds 5 percent.

TEPCO took two months to declare the triple meltdowns at the Fukushima plant, triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011. It had initially maintained that the reactors suffered "core damage" rather than meltdowns.

NRA apologises for lack of news after quake

April 18, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

Nuclear watchdog head apologizes for lack of news on plants after quake

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160418/p2a/00m/0na/017000c>

Japanese version

The head of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) apologized at a meeting on April 18 for the lack of news on the state of nuclear plants in the wake of deadly earthquakes in Kumamoto Prefecture.

- **【Kumamoto Earthquake Special】**

"We must humbly reflect on this," NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka said.

At the meeting, the NRA confirmed that none of the recent earthquakes had created shocks large enough to trigger automatic shutdowns at nearby nuclear power plants. "Currently there is no problem with safety" at the plants, Tanaka said.

The largest shocks recorded at nearby nuclear plants in gal, a unit of acceleration, were 8.6 at the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant in Kagoshima Prefecture, 20.3 at the Genkai Nuclear Power Plant in Saga Prefecture, 10 at the Ikata Nuclear Power Plant in Ehime Prefecture and 2 at the Shimane Nuclear Power Plant in Shimane Prefecture.

Power utilities have safety standards in place so that a nuclear reactor will automatically turn off when quake-related ground acceleration reaches 140 to 190 gal for sideways movement and 70 to 90 gal for vertical movement.

The risks of "normalizing" radiation



Lessons from Fukushima and Chernobyl

<http://www.beyondnuclear.org/chernobyl30-fukushima5/>

The Risks of "Normalizing" Radiation: A Special Event

Leading international experts and compelling short films will headline a May 3rd Beyond Nuclear event in Washington, DC to mark the anniversaries of the Chernobyl and Fukushima nuclear disasters. Full program.

Beyond Nuclear and the Goethe-Institut, DC will co-host an afternoon and evening program that will mark the 5th anniversary of Fukushima and the 30th anniversary of Chernobyl. The legacy of both nuclear power plant disasters has included a marked increase in radiation-induced diseases and mutations, as found by some of the world's leading researchers, several of whom will be speaking at the event. The event takes place at the Goethe-Institut, DC, 1990 K St. NW (event entrance on 20th St.) The afternoon panel presentations run from 2pm to 5pm. The evening program is 7:30pm to 9pm. All events are free and open to the public. No registration required.

Dr. Timothy Mousseau, has conducted landmark research on wildlife and plant matter around both the Chernobyl and Fukushima sites. He has found significant alterations in plant decay and radiation-induced changes in wildlife including shortened life spans, smaller brain sizes, male infertility and cataracts.

Dr. Wladimir Wertelecki, has pioneered work on the deleterious effects of disaster-related radiation on long-term child development, particularly in relation to the radiological contamination spread by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Dr Wertelecki has focused on teratogenesis – changes caused by environmental interference to a developing fetus, a fetus with with normal genes, as distinguished from gene mutations, inherited from parents.

Dr. Yuri Hiranuma, a Japanese doctor based in the U.S. has studied thyroid issues among post-Fukushima children. She has a particular focus on how affected people are coping (or not coping) with the disaster; how inefficient and dysfunctional the government agencies are at managing the problem; and the apparent systematic underestimation and dismissal of health effects. In June 2014 she co-authored a critique of the UNSCEAR 2013 report on the Fukushima disaster.

Additional speakers include: Lucas Hixson, who has taken radiation measurements at Chernobyl; and Beyond Nuclear experts Cindy Folkers, Kevin Kamps and Paul Gunter. Two short documentaries -- *Alone in the Zone*, on Fukushima, and *Champion in Chernobyl*, featuring tennis legend Maria Sharapova -- will be screened to open the evening program. Both the afternoon and evening programs will include discussion with the audience.

The event includes a special exhibition of Chernobyl and Fukushima photos by Gabriela Bulisova and Robert Knoth. For more information, email info@beyondnuclear.org

Takahama restart: Safety concerns growing

April 21, 2016

Fears grow as Takahama reactors near restart

Staff Writer

Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama No. 1 and 2 reactors are over 40 years old, but the utility has applied for a 20-year extension. On Wednesday, the Nuclear Regulation Authority officially gave the reactors the green light, signaling they meet the fundamental safety standards needed for reactivation. Although additional tests and inspections are needed before the reactors can resume operation, the potential first-ever restart of two units that are more than four decades old has neighboring communities worried.

The Sea of Japan coastal city of Maizuru, Kyoto Prefecture, parts of which lie 5 km from Takahama, would be on the front lines of any disaster response in the event of an accident, and Mayor Ryozo Tatami expressed specific concerns Wednesday.

"At present, has the safety of the plant been confirmed? We need scientific and technological explanations. The No. 1 and 2 reactors were envisioned and constructed to operate for 40 years," Tatami said. "We also need documentation from when the plant was originally built that proves it's possible to operate the reactor for 60 years, especially since the core cannot be replaced."

Caution by Tatami in particular over restarting Takahama Nos. 1 and 2 could impact the stance of other Kansai leaders.

A small part of northern Shiga Prefecture lies within 30 km of Takahama, and Gov. Taizo Mikazuki expressed concern this week about running old reactors that could leak radiation into Lake Biwa, as well as the problem of storing additional nuclear waste generated by the reactors.

While gaining approval for restarts from heavily pro-nuclear Takahama and Fukui Prefecture is expected to be relatively easy, Kepeco is certain to face calls from other Kansai-area prefectures to provide detailed explanations of why it needs to restart two aging reactors before permission for their restart is given.

It is also likely to face questions about whether the utility and NRA are cutting corners in order to make the July 7 deadline for formal permission to restart. If that deadline is missed, the reactors are supposed to be scrapped.

Quakes & nuke safety

Source : IEEE

<http://spectrum.ieee.org/energywise/energy/nuclear/kyushu-earthquake-swarm-raises-concerns-over-nuclear-plant-safety>

Kyushu Earthquake Swarm Raises Concerns Over Nuclear Plant Safety

By John Boyd

Posted 21 Apr 2016 | 14:00 GMT

The populous island of Kyushu in southwest Japan has been shaken by hundreds of earthquakes and aftershocks over the past eight days, and there is no immediate end in sight to Mother Nature's upheavals. The tremors have impacted manufacturing for some companies in the auto and electronics industries, while concerns are growing over the safety of Japan's two active nuclear reactors (the only two presently online), **which are located about 120 km south of where the main shaking is occurring.**



Image: NRA, Japan

The first major quake, 6.5 in magnitude, struck on April 14. A second more disastrous tremor measuring 7.3 hit the area at 1:25 am on Thursday, April 16, injuring thousands of people, and killing dozens. Water, electricity and gas services have been disrupted. Buildings, roads, and bridges have been destroyed, complicating search, rescue and aid efforts for emergency workers and the Japan Self-Defense Force. The quakes are occurring inland, so there are no tsunami warnings.

As the quakes continue, fears are growing over the safety of two nuclear reactors in the Sendai Nuclear Plant operated by Kyushu Electric Power Co. (Kyuden). According to the Japan Times, citizens' fears are rising, while **mayors from more than 100 cities have called on the central government "to re-evaluate the way earthquake safety standards for nuclear power plants are calculated."**

Following the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant accident in March 2011, all 50 or so nuclear plants in Japan were shut down. The two Sendai reactors were authorized by Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) to start up again this year after fulfilling strict new safety requirements, but now they face the possibility of another shutdown if the quakes continue and citizens fears increase further.

To try and head off such an outcome, Kyuden was quick to prominently display messages in Japanese and English on its website stating that "Sendai Nuclear Power Station is safely in operation. ... No abnormalities have been confirmed there."

It has also published details on seismic intensity and maximum acceleration of ground motion measured in gals [PDF] the plant experienced during the April 16 temblor—the values coming far below the figures for automatic shutdown.⁴

The NRA agrees with the operator's stance, saying in a news release [PDF] issued April 18, "To date, no issues regarding the safety of the following facility [including Sendai Nuclear Power Station] were found resulting from the earthquakes, and their operation status have not changed from before the earthquakes."

But the NRA has been criticized for not providing sufficient information on the impact of the earthquakes. In a press conference on April 18 reported by the jiji wire service, NRA chairman Shunichi Tanaka admitted they could do a better job. "We will decide whether to stop the operations of nuclear power plants based on scientific and technological standards," Tanaka told the press. "Under the current circumstances, we do not see any safety problems."

Auto and electronics manufacturers' facilities in the region also absorbed major damage and the impacts are being felt up and down the supply chain.

Toyota reports that it is suspending production of vehicles at most of its assembly plants due to parts shortages from Kyushu suppliers hit by the earthquakes, while Honda has halted work in its Kumamoto Factory, which manufactures motorbikes and general-purpose engines.

Because of damage to buildings and manufacturing lines, Sony has stopped operations at its Semiconductor Manufacturing Kumamoto Technology Center, which produces image sensors for digital cameras and micro-display devices. Two other Sony semiconductor plants in the region also suffered temporary disruptions in production.

It's an open secret that Sony supplies Apple with CMOS image sensors for its iPhones. When press reports suggested such sensor shipments might be affected, Sony quickly issued a press release stating, "Although some of the manufacturing equipment at Nagasaki Technology Center, which is Sony's main facility for smartphone image sensor production, and (at) Oita Technology Center ... had been temporarily halted, the affected equipment has been sequentially restarted from April 17, and production resumed."

NRA itself defies basic 40-year rule

April 21, 2016

Nuclear watchdog's green light for aging reactors waters down 40-year rule

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160421/p2a/00m/0na/008000c>

The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) has given approval to operating two aging reactors at the Takahama Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture beyond 40 years, defying the basic rule of limiting the service life of reactors to four decades.

The No. 1 and 2 reactors at the nuclear plant operated by Kansai Electric Power Co. passed the NRA's safety screenings on April 20, making them the first reactors aged over 40 years that have cleared the new regulatory standards introduced after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Both reactors went online back in the 1970s -- the No. 1 reactor in November 1974 and the No. 2 reactor in November 1975. The 40-year rule, which is mentioned in the revised nuclear reactor regulation law that came into force in 2013, was introduced with the understanding that the operational life of reactors 40 years of age could be extended by up to 20 years just once if the NRA granted permission, but only in exceptional cases.

Kansai Electric Power Co. needed to obtain approval by July 7 for its construction plan elaborating on designs. It also needed approval for extending the operational life of the aging reactors. The NRA, however, agreed to postpone some screening work until after that deadline.

Screenings on the quake resistance of primary cooling systems, including steam generators, are expected to take several years. The NRA's decision to push back those screenings has paved the way for the aging reactors to operate beyond their designated 40-year life.

The NRA says that even if valid data is not obtained during screenings after that deadline, the reactors will be allowed to operate beyond 40 years if the facilities are reinforced and re-examined.

After the NRA issued an initial approval in February for extending the operational life of the Takahama reactors beyond 40 years, it received such public comments as, "Anything could be allowed if screenings can come later." However, the NRA argues that there will be no legal problems with its green light to extend operation of the Takahama reactors.

Meanwhile, Kansai Electric Power Co. has replaced 60 percent of a total of 1,300 kilometers of cables at the No. 1 and 2 reactors with flameproof cables. For the parts where it is difficult to replace cables, the utility has presented measures to prevent the spread of fire, such as wrapping cables with fireproof material. The NRA has approved this alternative solution.

There are four other aging reactors in the country, where the same types of cables as those at the Takahama plant are in place. **These old cables were said to be posing "the biggest obstacle in extending the service life of reactors,"** according to a senior power company official. However, the NRA's latest decision may likely set a precedent for watering down the 40-year rule, which was introduced by the former administration led by the Democratic Party of Japan.

Quake-prone country must remain on guard

April 28, 2016

Editorial: Quake-prone Japan must remain on guard against nuclear accident
<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160428/p2a/00m/0na/019000c>

In earthquake-prone Japan, a major temblor could strike anywhere, at any time. Moreover, such a quake is impossible to predict -- a fact that was thrust upon us by the recent Kumamoto Earthquake.

- **【Kumamoto Earthquake Special】**
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【Related】 Regulator says fault below central Japan reactor may be active
Following two deadly earthquakes measuring a maximum 7 on the Japanese intensity scale with a widening focal region, many people no doubt felt concerned about the safety of the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant in Kagoshima Prefecture operated by Kyushu Electric Power Co. Concern has been also raised over Shikoku Electric Power Co.'s Ikata Nuclear Power Plant, across the ocean from Oita Prefecture. Of course, these are not the only places at risk of quakes. Yet the government is moving ahead with plans to restore nuclear power in Japan. Can Japan coexist with nuclear power plants? The recent earthquakes provide a chance for us to consider this matter.

The magnitude-6.5 quake that hit Kumamoto Prefecture on the evening of April 14, which was focused in the Hinagu fault zone, registered a maximum 7 on the Japanese intensity scale. Another magnitude-7.3 quake focused in the Futagawa fault zone to the north, which occurred in the predawn hours of April 16, also registered a 7 on the intensity scale. After these quakes, seismic activity spread to the Aso district and to the northeast, and strong shaking has been felt over a wide area, from Kumamoto Prefecture to Oita Prefecture.

When will this seismic activity subside? Could it get worse? Will it affect the Mount Aso volcano? The limitations of seismology and volcanology prevent us from answering these questions with certainty. The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) decided at a special meeting on April 18 not to halt operation of the Sendai Nuclear Power Plant. The effects of shaking on nuclear power plants are measured in gal, a unit of acceleration defined as one centimeter per second squared. The maximum acceleration measured at the plant during the recent quakes was 8.6 gal. In a safety assessment, the plant was deemed able to withstand up to 620 gal. At the time of screening, officials judged that even if a magnitude 8.1 quake were to occur in the Futagawa and Hinagu fault zones, ground acceleration would not exceed 150 gal.

Considering these figures alone, there seems to be no problem with safety. But the projected scenario is only applicable for earthquakes whose scales fall within what has been envisioned.

Responding to the latest quakes, the Japan Meteorological Agency and experts repeatedly expressed their views that that was no precedent of a magnitude-6.5 level inland quake being followed by an even bigger quake, and that they could think of no other cases wherein seismic activity had occurred in three separate locations at the same time. The government's Earthquake Research Committee also expressed the view that the Futagawa fault was longer than originally thought.

There are 2,000 known active faults in Japan. The latest quakes occurred along active faults that were previously known to scientists, but there have been past cases wherein quakes exceeding magnitude 7 have occurred along unknown active faults, including the 2000 Tottori earthquake and the 2008 Iwate-Miyagi inland earthquake.

Hokuriku Electric Power Co.'s Shika nuclear plant is said to have active faults lying beneath it, and decisions regarding this plant -- as well as others in similar situations -- must be made from the viewpoint of safety. This does not apply only to inland quakes, moreover. The massive earthquake that occurred five years ago on a plate boundary in the Pacific Ocean off Japan's Tohoku region greatly exceeded experts' predictions. We cannot imagine, therefore, that all earthquakes will remain within the scales envisioned by nuclear power companies and the NRA.

Furthermore, just because a nuclear power plant has passed the regulatory authority's screening does not necessarily mean it is safe -- and other threats exist in addition to earthquakes. The NRA itself acknowledges this, and such dangers must be considered as realistic possibilities. In this sense, preparation for an accident is indispensable -- but we cannot say that presently existing measures are adequate.

The latest earthquakes caused a bridge to collapse, triggered mudslides, and sank roads -- thereby cutting off transportation routes in various areas. A bullet train also derailed. If a nuclear accident occurs at the same time as such a natural disaster, will plans to evacuate residents proceed as planned? Concerns remain. Such damage would likely also hamper efforts to bring a nuclear accident under control, while continuing aftershocks would additionally hinder the accident response.

Kyushu Electric has withdrawn plans to build a seismically-isolated emergency response center at the Sendai nuclear plant. We would like power company officials to consider whether they have let their guard down over the threat of earthquakes.

April 26 marked 30 years since the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in the former Soviet Union. At the time, Japan judged that the accident had occurred due to unique circumstances there, and that a similar accident would not occur in Japan. Consequently, countermeasures were neglected to be implemented here. When the Fukushima nuclear disaster occurred 25 years later, insufficiencies in Japan's safety countermeasures were blatant.

Five years have now passed since the outbreak of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, and the government has indicated that it will proceed to reactivate nuclear reactors. It has also in effect accepted the reactivation of aging reactors -- originally envisaged as an extremely rare exception to a new rule setting the life of nuclear reactors at 40 years, after which they were to be decommissioned. We fear that there is a re-emergence of a safety myth stating that an accident like the one in Fukushima will never happen again. We cannot approve of a gradual slip back to nuclear power.

Thirty years after the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe, the disaster is still a long way from being brought under control. The concrete sarcophagus that was built at the time of the accident to contain radioactive materials has deteriorated significantly, and construction of a new shelter is proceeding. In Fukushima, meanwhile, nearly 100,000 people remain evacuated from their hometowns. There is no clear outlook for decommissioning of the reactors, which is expected to take 40 to 50 years. And people suffer from anxiety about the effects of radiation.

Though the chance of a disaster may be small, nuclear accidents are different from other types of calamities in that they can rob people of a future. Meanwhile, risks such as terrorist acts targeting nuclear power plants have come into the global spotlight.

As a country prone to earthquakes and one that has suffered a severe nuclear disaster, Japan must not forget to remain on guard.

Kepeco says Sendai plant is safe

April 29, 2016

Kyushu Electric assures public that nuclear plant is safe

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201604290059.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Kyushu Electric Power Co. brushed aside safety concerns expressed in thousands of phone calls and e-mails, saying its Sendai nuclear plant in Kagoshima Prefecture faces no danger from the quakes rattling the southern main island.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority also supports the utility's stance that there is no need to shut down the nuclear plant, even as a safety precaution during the seismic activity.

"Nuclear power is energy defined as necessary in the nation's basic energy plan," Kyushu Electric President Michiaki Uryu said at a news conference in Fukuoka on April 28. "We are operating (the Sendai plant) after confirming its safety and concluding that there is no problem with continuing to operate it." The news conference was held to announce the utility's earnings for fiscal 2015, which included its first net profit in five years.

Two reactors at the Sendai plant in Satsuma-Sendai—the only ones running in the nation—cleared tougher nuclear safety regulations set after the 2011 Fukushima disaster.

Kagoshima Prefecture lies immediately south of Kumamoto Prefecture, where most of the earthquake activity has occurred since April 14.

The reactors at the Sendai plant must be shut down when ground acceleration in a horizontal direction of 160 gal is registered on the basement floor of the reactor auxiliary building.

When the largest quake in the series, a magnitude-7.3 temblor that struck Kumamoto Prefecture on April 16, ground acceleration of up to 8.6 gal was recorded at the Sendai plant. No irregularities have been detected at the nuclear plant, according to Kyushu Electric.

Although the figure is well below the level that requires an emergency shutdown, concerned citizens maintain that the utility should suspend operations as an extra precaution for an event unforeseen by authorities.

Over a week from April 15, the day after a magnitude-6.5 earthquake struck Kumamoto Prefecture, Fukuoka-based Kyushu Electric was flooded with about 5,000 e-mails and phone calls seeking a halt to operations at the Sendai plant.

Kyushu Electric officials acknowledge that without the Sendai nuclear plant, the company would still have enough electricity to supply Kyushu this summer, even if it proves to be one of the hottest in recent years. But the utility is eager to keep the Sendai plant online because running a nuclear power plant is cheaper than buying the fuel needed to operate a thermal power plant.

Kyushu Electric had relied on nuclear energy for 40 percent of its electricity supply before the Fukushima disaster, one of the highest ratios among the regional power companies.

Kyushu Electric's bottom line was hit hard after all reactors in Japan were shut down as a precaution following the meltdowns at the Fukushima plant.

But since the restart of the Sendai plant, which a Kyushu Electric senior official called a "powerful card," the company has been saving 10 billion yen (\$92.6 million) to 13 billion yen a month in operating expenses.

Uryu is already pushing plans for the company's Genkai nuclear plant in Saga Prefecture.

"We are striving to achieve a restart of the Genkai plant as early as possible," he told the news conference.

The NRA stands firm on its decision that the Sendai plant is safe amid the series of the quakes and that it does not need to order a suspension of operations.

"There are no compelling scientific grounds," NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka said after an emergency meeting about the plant's operations on April 18. "We are not going to shut down the plant just because of calls from the public or politicians. What has been going on is within our expectations."

According to Kyushu Electric, the Sendai plant is designed to withstand a maximum ground acceleration of 620 gal. This figure was determined after experts studied various scenarios based on geological features at the plant and surrounding areas.

The company also studied the possible impact from a magnitude-8.1 earthquake that strikes in connection with the Futagawa and Hinagu fault lines. Seismologists say those two fault lines slipped in Kumamoto Prefecture, triggering the ongoing seismic activity.

For an earthquake of that size, Kyushu Electric projected a maximum ground acceleration of about 160 gal.

Even if the Sendai plant loses its ability to cool the reactors after powerful earthquakes, the operator is believed to be prepared to prevent a severe accident involving the release of radioactive substances by cooling the reactors using fire engines, power supply vehicles and other sources under the new regulations.

But those erring on the side of caution note that the magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, spawned a tsunami that Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Fukushima No. 1 plant, was clearly unprepared for.

And two earthquakes 28 hours apart in the recent series of temblors both measured a maximum intensity of 7 on the Japanese seismic scale in Kumamoto Prefecture, an event unprecedented in Japan.

In the heavily damaged town of Mashiki in Kumamoto Prefecture, power supply vehicles, which were operating in recovery efforts after the April 14 earthquake, were toppled in the more powerful earthquake two days later. **Roads were severed, and a railway network was paralyzed over a wide area.**

Residents sought refuge outdoors and in their cars, fearing the strong aftershocks could collapse buildings used as evacuation centers.

Critics questioned whether workers trying to prevent a possible quake-induced crisis at the Sendai plant would be able to continue with their efforts if another powerful earthquake struck the plant. They also voiced concerns about government evacuation guidelines in the event of a nuclear accident, namely instructions to residents living within a 5-30 kilometer radius of a damaged plant to remain indoors.

NRA chief Tanaka said such a situation was unlikely to occur at the Sendai plant.

“There is no active geological fault beneath the Sendai plant,” he said at a news conference on April 27.

“The plant is also designed to be quake-proof, so people do not need to worry about those things.”

(This article was compiled from reports by Shuhei Shibata, Masanobu Higashiyama and

More damages for TEPCO

April 28, 2016

TEPCO must pay 31 million yen damages over evacuee deaths

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201604280048.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

April 28, 2016 at 15:55 JST

A court ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. to pay 31 million yen (\$279,279) in damages to be split among the families of two elderly men who died after being evacuated from a hospital following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The plaintiffs had demanded a total of 66.4 million yen in compensation, but Presiding Judge Tetsuro Nakayoshi at the Tokyo District Court agreed with TEPCO in an April 27 ruling that factors other than the nuclear accident also contributed to the untimely deaths.

Tadashi Abe, 98, and Yoshio Henmi, 73, were hospitalized at Futaba Hospital in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, which is 4.6 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant where disaster struck following a blackout triggered by the powerful quake and tsunami of March 11, 2011.

Abe was rescued from the hospital March 14 by Self-Defense Forces members, but he died two days later at a makeshift evacuation center in the prefecture.

Henmi was evacuated from the hospital March 16 to be moved to another hospital. He died that day. “(The two) died from the burden of being forced to travel for a long distance and for an extended period of time after the nuclear accident,” said a lawyer representing the plaintiffs.

Abe had to travel about 230 kilometers in eight hours while Henmi was ferried about 80 kilometers, according to court documents.

But the court ruled less damages should be awarded as the deaths were partly caused by hypothermia that was contracted due to the lack of heating after the power outage caused by the quake and tsunami. About 50 people who were left behind at the hospital and affiliated nursing facility had died by the end of April because their evacuation was delayed.

The court's ruling was the first in connection with lawsuits filed against TEPCO by relatives of seven people who died or went missing in the aftermath of the disaster.

A 73-year-old sister-in-law of Henmi voiced relief after the court decision.

“I finally got something that was bothering me off my chest,” she said. “I regret letting him die such a lonely death.”

Fumio Shinkai, a lawyer representing the plaintiffs, however, expressed frustration over the ruling.

“It is regrettable that the ruling did not take into account peculiarities of a nuclear accident,” he said at a news conference.

The lawyers argued that the court should give consideration to damages stemming from a nuclear power plant, which was believed to be safe prior to the accident, and the sufferings they went through while evacuating.

Shinkai noted that the ruling did not refer to those points they had argued in court and that the amount of damages the district court ordered is similar to that of a fatal traffic accident.

TEPCO said in a statement: “We offer heart-felt prayers to those who died after they were forced to evacuate in the wake of the nuclear accident. After studying the court decision, we will continue to respond sincerely.”

When the nuclear accident unfolded, there were 338 patients at the hospital. On March 12, when a hydrogen explosion occurred at the nuclear facility, 209 patients who were able to walk on their own were transported by bus to evacuation centers and other facilities.

(This article was compiled from reports by Odaka Chiba and Mana Nagano.)

IAEA Mission Report

27.04.2016_No82 / News in Brief

Japan's Regulator Releases IAEA Mission Report

<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2016/04/27/japan-s-regulator-releases-iaea-mission-report>

Security & Safety

27 Apr (NucNet): Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) **needs to attract competent and experienced staff, and develop skills relevant to nuclear and radiation safety through education, training, research and**

increased international cooperation, according to the text of an International Atomic Energy Agency report released by the NRA.

The Integrated Regulatory Review Service (IRRS) mission report says **Japan must amend relevant legislation with the aim of allowing the NRA to improve the effectiveness of its inspections.**

The report says authorities **should continue and strengthen the promotion of safety culture including "a questioning attitude".**

The NRA has demonstrated independence and transparency since it was set up in 2012, but **needs to further strengthen its technical competence** in light of the planned restart of nuclear reactors following the March 2011 Fukushima-Daiichi accident, the report says.

Greater priority needs to be given to the oversight of the implementation of radiation protection measures, and requirements and guidance need to be developed for emergency preparedness and response.

In January 2016 the IRRS team carried out a 12-day mission to assess Japan's regulatory framework for nuclear and radiation safety, which was modified following the Fukushima-Daiichi accident.

The modifications included the establishment of the NRA.

The report is online: <http://bit.ly/21f60TX>

Conceal information to avoid causing panic?

May 2, 2016

NHK president rapped over remarks on nuclear power reporting

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160502/p2a/00m/0na/014000c>

NHK President Katsuto Momii has come under fire from journalism experts and from within his organization over his recent remarks on how the public broadcaster should report on nuclear power after the Kumamoto earthquakes, in which he was quoted as saying that reports "should be based on official announcements so as not to unnecessarily stir up residents' anxiety."

Momii reportedly made the controversial remarks during an April 20 meeting of the public broadcaster's disaster policy headquarters following the powerful earthquakes in Kumamoto Prefecture.

Asked about the authenticity of his comment during a House of Representatives Internal Affairs and Communications Committee session on April 26, Momii said what he meant by "official announcements" was "basically about figures," explaining that NHK would report figures measured by radiation monitoring devices set around nuclear plants as well as views presented by the Nuclear Regulation Authority. He added, "It seems a little strange to spread (information that would trigger) concern and anxiety among locals without grounds in terms of avoiding unnecessary confusion."

In response to Momii's comment, former Kyodo News reporter and Doshiha University journalism professor Jun Oguro pointed out that official announcements failed to provide information necessary for evacuation to local residents at the time of the Fukushima nuclear disaster following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

"It is odd to conceal information just because some believe that it could cause panic. Broadcasters should offer various types of information, making clear the sources of their information," Oguro argued, adding,

"Viewers who are on the receiving end of information will sort out what they need. If broadcasters concealed information they had, their journalistic responsibility would be called into question." He further criticized the NHK president, saying, "His attitude is almost as if he doesn't trust NHK reporters or viewers."

In response to the president's controversial remarks, Masatoshi Nakamura, chairman of NHK's largest union, the Japan Broadcasting Labor Union, released a comment on the organization's website on April 25, saying, "As a public broadcaster, its reporting is based on facts uncovered through interviews and research." He went on to say, "The confirmation of 'facts' does not come upon announcements or acknowledgment by administrative bodies. The 'facts' are unveiled through NHK's independent research efforts."

A middle-ranking NHK employee working on the ground told the Mainichi Shimbun, "We have been told by our seniors that those in power do not reveal things that are inconvenient to them. We should deliver objective facts learned from public entities, scientists, private organizations and other sources that we believe are necessary." The employee added, "It is extremely dangerous to put restrictions on sources at one's own discretion and depend solely on information provided by the authorities. The NHK president should think about the role of news reporting."

A NHK producer appeared appalled at Momii's remarks, saying, "He really doesn't get what a news organization is." At the same time, the producer said, "This (kind of situation) is to be expected as long as the system allows NHK's governors, who are appointed by the prime minister, to pick its president. Unless changes are made to the Broadcast Act (that sets regulations regarding operation of NHK), there will be no fundamental improvement." The producer stressed the importance of constructive criticism from outside NHK since it is difficult for its employees who are the subject of regulation under the Broadcast Act to voice criticism about the organization.

Do not change war-renouncing Constitution

May 3, 2016

52% opposed to amending Japan Constitution's pacifist Article 9: Mainichi poll

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160503/p2a/00m/0na/003000c>

Some 52 percent of Japanese citizens are opposed to changing the Constitution's war-renouncing Article 9, against 27 percent answering in favor, a recent Mainichi Shimbun poll suggested.

Meanwhile, an about equal number of respondents said they supported or were opposed to amending the Constitution in general, at 42 percent each.

With the enactment of new security laws that allow Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defense, resistance to changing Article 9 remains strongly rooted. In a Mainichi Shimbun poll taken in April last year, 55 percent of respondents said they didn't think that Article 9 should be amended, while 27 percent said they thought it should be.

Among supporters of the current Cabinet, 59 percent were in favor of amending the Constitution, while 27 percent were opposed. Forty-two percent were in support of amending Article 9 while 38 percent were

opposed. Among those not supporting the Cabinet, 26 percent supported amending the Constitution in general and 61 percent opposed. Twelve percent of this group supported amending Article 9, while 71 percent opposed doing so.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe hopes to build a two-thirds majority of lawmakers in favor of amendments in both houses of the Diet -- the ration required by Article 96 to submit a motion to alter the Constitution. Forty-seven percent of respondents to the Mainichi poll said they did not hope constitutional reformers would get a two-thirds majority in the House of Councillors in the upcoming election, while 34 percent said they did.

The poll was conducted on April 16 and April 17. May 3 is Constitution Day, the 69th anniversary of the enactment of Japan's Constitution.

Ex-fishermen (Bikini atoll) sue Govt.

May 9, 2016

Ex-fishers sailing near Bikini Atoll file suit

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160509_23/

Former Japanese fishermen and their family members have filed a lawsuit against the government of Japan.

The men were on fishing boats near the site of a US hydrogen bomb test more than 60 years ago and say they may have been exposed to radiation.

The United States conducted the test on Bikini Atoll in 1954. 23 crewmembers from Fukuryu Maru No.5 were found to have been exposed to fallout from the test. One of them died 6 months later.

Supporters of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit say about 1,000 Japanese fishing boats were operating in nearby waters at the time.

45 plaintiffs filed the suit on Monday at the Kochi district court.

They are demanding the Japanese government pay about 18,000 dollars in compensation for each former crewmember. They say the government failed to monitor their radiation levels even after it learned about the case of the Fukuryu Maru No.5.

83-year-old Yutaka Kuwano is one of the plaintiffs. He was 21 years old at the time of the test, and was fishing for tuna near the atoll.

He was diagnosed with stomach cancer 12 years ago after developing symptoms such as nose bleeds and

an abnormally high number of white blood cells.

The health ministry released records on the incident two years ago. They show crews on several boats other than Fukuryu Maru No.5 had higher than usual levels of radiation.

Decommissioning suspended to avoid risks during G7 meeting

May 13, 2016

Tepco to put some Fukushima decommissioning work on hold during G-7 summit

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/05/13/national/tepcos-put-fukushima-decommissioning-work-hold-g-7-summit/#.VzYtwORdeot>

by Reiji Yoshida

Staff Writer

The majority of decommissioning work at the damaged Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant will be put on hold while **the Group of Seven summit takes place in Shima, Mie Prefecture, on May 26 to 27**, according to Tokyo Electric Power Co.

Satoshi Togawa, a spokesman for Tepco, told The Japan Times on Friday that the planned suspension was **a precaution to reduce "risks" that could disturb the meeting** of leaders from the seven major advanced nations.

Such risks could include **unexpected leaks of contaminated water from tanks or airborne radioactive material monitoring alarms being triggered**, Togawa said.

Tepco will continue other essential operations, such as injecting water to keep melted nuclear fuel cool and processing contaminated water, Togawa said.

The spokesman said the suspension was not designed to reduce the risk of terrorism.

"We have made the decision without any request from the government," he said.

A 2011 massive earthquake and ensuing tsunami knocked out critical cooling functions for three of six reactors at the plant, triggering a triple meltdown.

The decommissioning effort, which involves some 7,000 workers, is expected to take more than 40 years.

Questions raised about Japanese emergency handling

U.S. expert questions if Japan applying 2011 lessons at Kumamoto

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160514/p2g/00m/0dm/067000c>

May 14, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

NEW YORK (Kyodo) -- A former U.S. government expert on emergency management has questioned whether Japan is applying the lessons from the 2011 massive earthquake and tsunami in its northeast to its response to the recent temblors in Kumamoto Prefecture.

- **【Related】** Over 10,000 people still in shelters 1 month after Kumamoto quakes

Leo Bosner, 69, who worked for the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency for 29 years, is concerned that an integrated response may not have been in place in Japan for the quakes that jolted the southwestern prefecture a month ago.

"I discovered many problems" when studying "Japan's disastrous response" to the 2011 calamity and "I have not really heard of any major improvements," he told Kyodo News in a recent interview. "So I am a little concerned that these problems may be continuing."

"It is too early to make a definitive evaluation of the response to the Kumamoto disaster, but recent news headlines have indicated possible problem areas," he said, identifying such areas as questions about the use of the U.S. military's Osprey aircraft to language barriers for foreigners.

Bosner said the existence of no unified system for major disaster response in Japan could cause even the best-intended efforts to bog down.

"For example, various towns, prefectures and organizations may send food and other supplies to a disaster area, but if there is a shortage of people at the disaster site to sort out and distribute the supplies, the supplies don't get distributed to those in need in a timely manner," he said.

He also cited Japan's lack of full-time, permanent, professional disaster management staff and of a strong connection between the governmental and nongovernmental response to disasters as other big problems.

"One thing to me that is a major barrier is that in the Japan government offices, people change the job every two years...so there is no time to build up an expertise," he said.

"I really think that if the Japanese government wants to do a strong job in disasters, they need to somehow establish a permanent staff who will stay involved over the years," he said.

"In Japan, because everything is so spread out in the government and not working together, in my view, it is very inefficient," he said. "I think if Japan could centralize this function more, it would be cheaper."

Bosner also proposed transferring officials in or between the central and regional governments while always working as disaster management specialists.

"My thought was, 'What if some worked in the Japan national government in Tokyo for two years as a disaster planner?' But then let's say when he rotated he would go to some other industry but would still be a disaster planner in that industry and then maybe if he rotated to a prefecture to a city, he would be a disaster planner in that prefecture or that city."

"If they did this, in about five or 10 years, Japan would have a real network of experienced disaster planners who understood the system and could work together. But right now they don't have this."

He said the United States integrated all the functions to respond to disasters into FEMA and turned a weak agency into one that properly works.

The administration of President Bill Clinton turned FEMA around, but that of George W. Bush downsized it, which backfired later when Hurricane Katrina hit the southern part of the United States in 2005.

"Under the Bush administration, very honestly, he just appointed political friends to be in charge of FEMA who did not know anything about disasters."

"So when Katrina came, they could not give the orders, they could not make the decisions, they did not know what to do. It was terrible. For those of us who worked at FEMA, it was so disappointing because we were helpless."

Bosner said that if there is "a political will" rather than increased budgets, Japan will be able to have a better system to respond to disasters just as the United States did.

"In Japan, there are plenty of people, in my view, who would be excellent for running a Japan FEMA or managing it...if the ministers of the Cabinet of the prime minister agree and say, 'We must do this'," he said. "But until they make that decision, nothing can happen."

Bosner served as an emergency management expert at FEMA from 1979 to 2008. He stayed in Japan from 2000 to 2001 studying that country's emergency management system. His current job includes being an adjunct lecturer in the Emergency Medical Systems Graduate School of Tokyo's Kokushikan University.

More questions about Japanese disaster preparedness

May 8, 2016

Media show Kumamoto was woefully ill-prepared for disabled evacuees

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2016/05/08/voices/media-show-kumamoto-woefully-ill-prepared-disabled-evacuees/#.VzgtNuRdeot>

by Michael Gillan Peckitt

As someone who scours the media in Japan for mentions of issues surrounding disability, I have been impressed by the reporting of the Kumamoto earthquakes. In the Japanese media, the issue of disability often gets overlooked, so it was heartening to see that a number of newspapers had focused on the difficulties disabled people face when disaster strikes.

However, far less heartening was the story that subsequently unfolded about Kumamoto Prefecture's pre-quake planning — or lack thereof — and post-quake measures for disabled evacuees. The Mainichi Shimbun, reporting the day after the biggest quake on the night on April 16, highlighted the situation of two people with disabilities who had to evacuate their homes and take refuge in a shelter: Kiyofumi Sakamoto, aged 66, paralyzed down the left side of his body since a brain hemorrhage, and Tomiko Baba, aged 84, who has Parkinson's.

Sakamoto, a resident of Mashiki, had to evacuate to a local elementary school. Since his adapted nursing-care bed could not be moved inside the emergency shelter, he had been sleeping on cardboard. His wife, 63-year-old Kikuko, had been changing his diapers and helping him bathe, a task made all the more difficult by the loss of electricity.

Baba had difficulty using the toilet at the shelter, since she uses a wheelchair. Baba's daughter said of her mother, "She's unstable emotionally, and seems to be unable to relax and get to sleep." The pair had to spend at least one night in a car, risking economy-class syndrome.

Sakamoto's and Baba's ordeals, it is easy to imagine, must be similar to those suffered by many of the elderly and disabled affected by the earthquake, and I applaud the Mainichi for raising awareness of this. However, even in those early stages, there were signs that things could have been planned better.

"The Kumamoto municipal government opened 10 shelters on April 16 that would be easier for individuals with disabilities to navigate, but as of April 17, only 13 people were utilizing them," the Mainichi reported. "The reason appears to be a lack of knowledge about their existence, so municipal officials are going around regular emergency shelters to inform disabled evacuees."

In an article published by The Japan Times on April 20, Tatsue Yamazaki, an associate professor of disaster nursing at Tokyo Medical University, expressed her concern about the lack of awareness on the ground in Kumamoto about the specific needs of certain groups of evacuees.

“Governments should create shelters for people with special needs, including the sick, the disabled and pregnant women,” Yamasaki said, referring to so-called welfare evacuation centers — centers that local governments are required by law to designate for use by the more vulnerable members of society in the event of a disaster.

“The need for such shelters was intensively discussed after the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, but local government officials I talked with in Kumamoto had no idea that such shelters were needed,” she said.

Almost a week later, on April 26, The Japan News reported: “In Kumamoto, where the number of evacuees is highest, only 37, or 20 percent, of the 176 facilities designated as welfare evacuation centers by the city government have actually admitted these types of evacuees.”

So what happened? It appears that these specially designated centers were unable to adequately serve the people they were supposed to partly, of course, due to damage caused by the quakes, but more worryingly, also because they were, prior to the quakes, already working at full capacity or lacked the staff required to offer a basic level of care.

Asked why none of its five welfare evacuation centers had taken in any elderly or disabled evacuees, a Mashiki town government worker said: “Every evacuation center is filled with general evacuees. We can’t even dispatch caretakers, and no facility is serving as a welfare evacuation center.”

As a disabled person living in Japan (who, coincidentally, is also married to a woman with a disability), I find the situation facing people with disabilities in the Kumamoto quake zone disturbing. I understand that before earthquakes occur, there is only so much you can do to prepare for them, and that it will always be a difficult task to attend to the needs of disabled people in a disaster zone. However, the scale of the apparent lack of resources to accommodate disabled people after the quakes is shocking.

Being a resident with a particular severity of disability here, I am in possession of a “physical disability certificate” — a certificate obtained by registering my disability status at my local ward welfare office. By registering, I have the right to receive certain benefits, and the first time I applied for this, I had to submit a report from a physician that confirmed my status as a disabled person — a perfectly reasonable request. I had assumed that such a rigorous process meant that the local city ward would at least have some knowledge of my needs as a disabled person, as the local welfare office has my address and information about my disability. Is it not then reasonable to expect that in the event of a major disaster, local government would at least know of the whereabouts and the specific needs of disabled people to whom local disaster relief services may have to attend — and would have prepared accordingly?

Josh Gridale of Accessible Japan (www.accessible-japan.com) contributed to this article. Michael Gillan Peckitt is an academic living in Kobe. His e-book “Gaijin Story: Tales of a British Disabled Man in Japan” is available on Amazon. Foreign Agenda offers a forum for opinion on issues related to life in Japan. Your comments and story ideas: community@japantimes.co.jp

Has Japan learnt any lessons from 3/11?

May 17, 2016

U.S. disaster expert sees 3/11 weaknesses laid bare in Kyushu

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/05/17/national/u-s-disaster-expert-sees-311-weaknesses-laid-bare-kyushu/#.Vztck-Rdeov>

Kyodo

A former U.S. government expert on emergency management has questioned whether Japan is applying lessons learned the hard way after the 2011 tsunami to its response to the Kyushu quakes.

Leo Bosner, 69, who worked for the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency for 29 years, says an integrated response may not have been in place for the disaster last month.

He said he identified multiple problems when studying Japan's "disastrous" response to the 2011 disaster and believes there have been no major improvements. "I am a little concerned that these problems may be continuing," he said.

"It is too early to make a definitive evaluation of the response to the Kumamoto disaster, but recent news headlines have indicated possible problem areas," he said, adding that these range from resorting to the U.S. military for airlift of supplies to the language barrier for foreigners.

Bosner said the lack of a unified system for disaster response in Japan could cause even the best-intended efforts to become bogged down.

"For example, various towns, prefectures and organizations may send food and other supplies to a disaster area, but if there is a shortage of people at the disaster site to sort out and distribute the supplies, the supplies don't get distributed to those in need in a timely manner," he said.

Other problems, he said, include Japan's lack of full-time, permanent, professional disaster management staff and of a strong connection between the governmental and nongovernmental response to disasters.

"One thing to me that is a major barrier is that in the Japan government offices, people change the job every two years . . . so there is no time to build up an expertise," Bosner said.

"I really think that if the Japanese government wants to do a strong job in disasters, they need to somehow establish a permanent staff who will stay involved over the years," he said.

"In Japan, because everything is so spread out in the government and not working together, in my view, it is very inefficient," he said. "I think if Japan could centralize this function more, it would be cheaper."

Bosner also proposed transferring officials in or between the central and regional governments while always working as disaster management specialists.

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"If they did this, in about five or 10 years, Japan would have a real network of experienced disaster planners who understood the system and could work together. But right now they don't have this."

Bosner said the United States integrated all the functions to respond to disasters into FEMA and turned a weak agency into one that works properly.

The administration of President Bill Clinton turned FEMA around, but that of George W. Bush downsized it, which backfired when Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005.

Bush "just appointed political friends to be in charge of FEMA who did not know anything about disasters," he said.

“So when Katrina came, they could not give the orders, they could not make the decisions, they did not know what to do. It was terrible. For those of us who worked at FEMA, it was so disappointing because we were helpless.”

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Bosner served as an emergency management expert at FEMA from 1979 to 2008. He stayed in Japan from 2000 to 2001 studying its emergency management system. His current job includes being an adjunct lecturer in the Emergency Medical Systems Graduate School of Tokyo’s Kokushikan University.

Koizumi in California in support of US sailors

May 19, 2016

Former Prime Minister Koizumi backs U.S. sailors suing over Fukushima radiation

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/05/18/national/former-prime-minister-koizumi-backs-u-s-sailors-suing-over-fukushima-radiation/#.Vz10GuRdeot>



Former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi speaks at a news conference Tuesday in Carlsbad, California. | KYODO

Kyodo

CARLSBAD, CALIFORNIA – Former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said Tuesday he stands behind a group of former U.S. sailors suing the operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, who claim health problems they now suffer were caused by exposure to radiation after three reactors melted down in the days after a devastating earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

– Former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said Tuesday he stands behind a group of former U.S. sailors suing the operator of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, who claim health problems they now suffer were caused by exposure to radiation after three reactors melted down in the days after a devastating earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

Koizumi made the remarks at a news conference in Carlsbad, California, with some of the plaintiffs in a lawsuit brought in the United States in 2012 against plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co., which has renamed itself Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.

The plaintiffs include crew members of the U.S. aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan, which provided humanitarian relief along the tsunami-battered coastline in a mission dubbed Operation Tomodachi. “Those who gave their all to assist Japan are now suffering from serious illness. I can’t overlook them,” Koizumi said.

The former prime minister spent Sunday through Tuesday meeting with roughly 10 of the plaintiffs, asking about the nature of the disaster relief they undertook and about their symptoms.

“I learned that **the number of sick people is still increasing, and their symptoms are worsening,**” he told the news conference.

Koizumi called on those in Japan, both for and against nuclear power, to come together to think of ways to help the ailing U.S. servicemen.

The group of about 400 former U.S. Navy sailors and Marines alleges the utility, known until recently as Tepco, did not provide accurate information about the dangers of radioactive material being emitted from the disaster-struck plant.

This led the U.S. military to judge the area as being safe to operate in, resulting in the radiation exposure, the group claims.

One of the plaintiffs at the news conference, Daniel Hair, said Koizumi’s involvement made him feel for the first time that Japan is paying serious attention to their plight.

According to lawyers for the group, seven of its members have died so far, including some from leukemia.

Koizumi, who served as prime minister between 2001 and 2006, came out in opposition to nuclear power in the wake of the 2011 disaster. He has repeatedly urged the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to halt its efforts to restart dormant reactors across Japan.

Bid-rigging...again

May 17, 2016

Oi Electric face fines over bid-rigging for Tepco equipment

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/05/17/business/fujitsu-oi-electric-face-fines-bid-rigging-tepco-equipment/#.VztcPORdeot>

JJI

The Fair Trade Commission plans to order Fujitsu Ltd. and Oi Electric Co. to pay a total of ¥400 million in fines for repeated bid-rigging in selling communications equipment to Tokyo Electric Power Co., according to informed sources.

The FTC also plans to issue a cease-and-desist order to the two electronics makers to prevent future misconduct, the sources said Tuesday.

In May last year, the FTC raided Fujitsu, Oi Electric, NEC Corp. and two other companies over the alleged bid-rigging.

Of the five companies, NEC is expected to escape the fines because it voluntarily reported its violation. The sources said the companies have been engaged for years in bid-rigging for Tepco contracts.

In February, Fujitsu, Oi Electric and NEC were raided by the FTC over similar suspicious contracts with Chubu Electric Power Co.

Interview with Koide Hiroaki (1)

“The Fukushima Nuclear Disaster is a Serious Crime”: Interview with Koide Hiroaki 福島核災害は明らかに深刻な犯罪である—小出裕章氏に聞く

Katsuya Hirano and Hirotaka Kasai

The Asia-Pacific Journal

3/11 and Japanese Resilience Five Years Later

March 15, 2016

Volume 14 | Issue 6 | Number 2

<http://apjpf.org/2016/06/Hirano.html>

Translation by Robert Stolz

Transcription by Akiko Anson

Introduction

Koide Hiroaki (66) has emerged as an influential voice and a central figure in the anti-nuclear movement since the nuclear meltdown at Fukushima Daiichi of March 11, 2011. He spent his entire career as a nuclear engineer working towards the abolition of nuclear power plants. His powerful critique of the "nuclear village" and active involvement in anti-nuclear movements "earned him an honorable form of purgatory as a permanent assistant professor at Kyoto University."¹ Koide retired from Kyoto University in the spring of 2015, but continues to write and act as an important voice of conscience for many who share his vision of the future free from nuclear energy and weapons. He has authored 20 books on the subject. Professor Kasai Hirotaka and I visited his office at Kyoto University's Research Reactor Institute in Kumatori, Osaka, on December 26th, 2014 for this interview. We believe that the contents of the interview, which offer new information about the degree of radioactive contamination and invaluable insight into Koide's ethical and political stance as a scientist, remain crucial for our critical reflection on ecological destruction, the violation of human rights, and individual responsibility. Professor Robert Stolz, the translator of this interview and the author of *Bad Water* (Duke University Press, 2015), provides a historical perspective on the interview in a separate article. KH

Interview

The Fukushima Disaster and Government and Corporate Response

Hirano: How does the Fukushima accident compare with the bombing of Hiroshima or Chernobyl in its scale? What are the possible effects of this yet unknown exposure?

Koide: Let's start with the scale of the accident: It was a core meltdown involving the release of various kinds of radioactive material. Radioactive noble gas isotopes were also released, as were iodine, cesium, strontium, and other radioactive material. The noble gas isotopes have a short half-life and so at this stage they are all gone. Iodine, too, is gone. So now four years since the accident the materials that are still a problem are cesium-137, strontium-90, and tritium; really, it's these three.²

Now, as for the scale of the accident, I think it would be best to compare these three radionuclides. Today the main contamination of Japanese soil is the radionuclide cesium-137 [Cs-137 or ¹³⁷Cs]. The ocean is largely contaminated

with strontium-90 [Sr-90 or ^{90}Sr] and tritium [T or ^3H]. Right now the main culprit adding to the exposure of the people in Japan is Cs-137, so I think it's best to use Cs-137 as a standard for measuring the scale of the accident. But we simply don't know with any precision how much Cs-137 was released. That's because **all the measuring equipment was destroyed at the time of the accident**. How much Cs-137 was released into the air? How much was spilled in the sea? We just don't know.

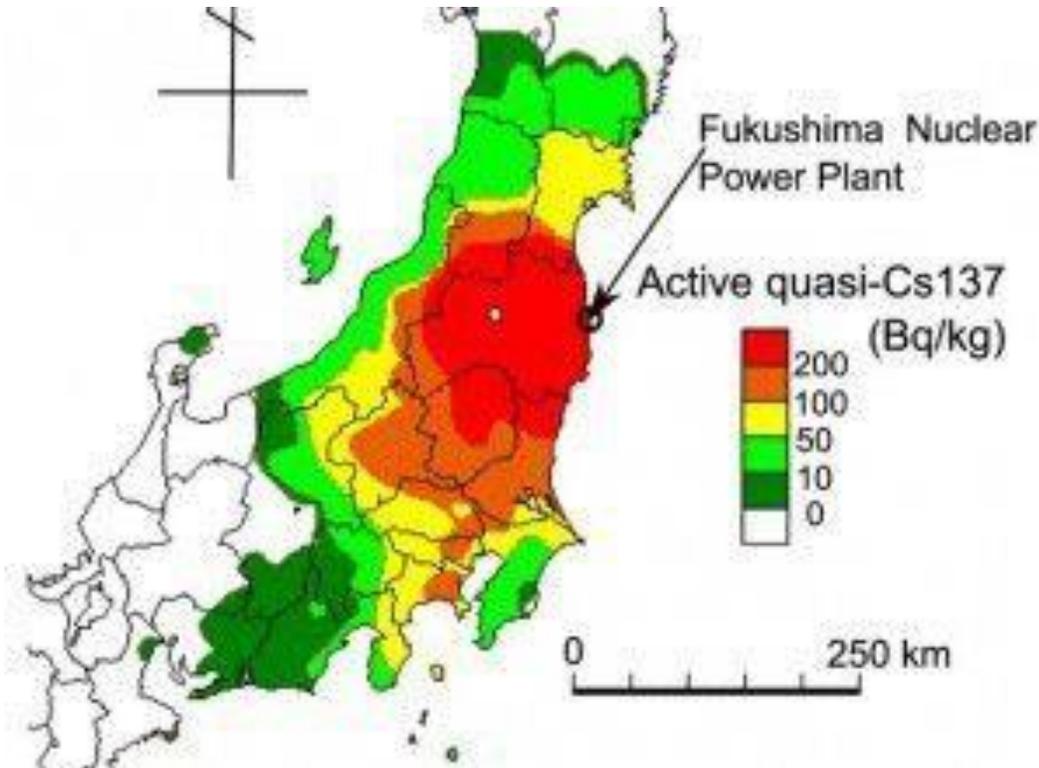
Still, the Japanese government has reported estimates to the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency]. According to those estimated levels, reactors 1, 2, and 3 had been in operation on March 11, 2011, and all three suffered meltdowns. Those three reactors released 1.5×10^{16} Becquerels of Cs-137, which would make it a release of 168 times more radioactive material than the Hiroshima bombing. And this is only material released into the atmosphere—at least according to Japanese government estimates.

But I myself think the government's numbers are an underestimate. Various experts and institutes from around the world have offered several of their own estimates. There are those that are lower than the Japanese government's numbers and those that are higher, some two or three times higher than the government's numbers. According to these other estimates I think that the release of Cs-137 into the atmosphere could be around 500 times the Hiroshima bombing.

Now for what has been washed into the sea. That number is likely not much different from the levels released into the atmosphere. Even today we are unable to prevent this release. And so if we combine the amount of Cs-137 released in the air and the ocean together, we get an estimate several hundred times the Hiroshima levels. And some estimates suggest the Fukushima accident could be as much as one-thousand Hiroshimas.

Now to compare this with other accidents: The amount released into the atmosphere from the explosion during the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear plant was 800 to 1000 times the Hiroshima levels. Put simply, these estimates place Fukushima on par with Chernobyl.

Worse than any of these, however, is atmospheric testing. From the 1950s to the 1960s atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons had already released Cs-137 into the air more than sixty times the numbers released even by the Japanese government for Fukushima. Of course Fukushima is an incredible tragedy, but considered from the earth as a whole it is a rather small accident.



Hirano: I want to ask in more detail about the effect of Cs-137 on the human body and the environment.

Koide: Cesium is an alkaline metal. From the human body's perspective, cesium closely resembles potassium. The body contains enormous amounts of potassium. It is essential for humans. It's everywhere in our bodies. Especially our flesh and muscles are full of potassium. And because of this, when cesium is released into the environment, the body deals with cesium as it does with the alkaline metal potassium, which is to say that it is taken into the body and accumulates there.

Strontium is an earth metal. The body treats it like calcium. As you know calcium is a human body building block that accumulates in our bones. Strontium, too, is taken into and collects in the bones. Just as cesium is taken in and is transported to the flesh and muscle.

Hirano: Comparing the releases from nuclear tests by the US and the USSR during the Cold War period, you said that the Fukushima accident was small. So in what way should we think about Fukushima: is it best to consider it a Japanese problem, or to consider it from a global perspective?

Koide: The amount of products of nuclear fission released during atmospheric testing was enormous, and these particles continue to expose humans to radiation. I'm a bit older than you and I recall in my childhood being told not to let the rain fall on me at the time of the testing. In this way everyone on earth has been exposed (*hibaku*/ 被曝). And because of this testing, historically speaking, cancer rates have slowly risen; I believe this increase in cancer is due to the exposure suffered during the atmospheric testing. Now the radioactive material released from Fukushima has been dispersed across the globe and so once again everyone on earth has been exposed to additional radiation. I think we can expect cancer rates to rise once again.

Atmospheric nuclear testing released all of the radioactive material in the explosions, which entered the stratosphere. Between the stratosphere and the troposphere there is the tropopause, and every year come spring all that material dispersed in the stratosphere breaks through the tropopause and falls to earth. So that material, though initially dispersed in the stratosphere, eventually falls to earth evenly, everywhere. Actually, it might not be accurate to say that it falls evenly on the earth. The majority of the testing was done in the temperate regions of the northern hemisphere, such as Nevada and the Semipalatinsk test site [in Kazakhstan], so that the northern hemisphere—as the site of most of the testing—is heavily contaminated, and within that the temperate region is heavily contaminated. Still, I can say the atmospheric testing overall has caused global contamination.

My focus now is to figure out how to deal with the acute and heavy contamination from Fukushima. I know something needs to be done right there in that specific place. That contamination will disperse and be diffused across the globe. Once dispersed, the amount of radioactive material from Fukushima will be small when compared with the atmospheric testing. Which is not to say it is not harmful. An increase in cancer will be the result. I mention that for humanity as a whole; the atmospheric tests were worse.

Now, strontium-90 [Sr-90] has been leaking from Fukushima into the ocean, so it will eventually reach the United States, especially the west coast. This much we are sure of. But to answer your question, the amount of dispersed cesium and strontium released by the atmospheric tests is tens of times greater than the Fukushima levels. Because the west coast of the US is already contaminated from the atmospheric testing, though the dispersed contamination from Fukushima will reach US shores, for people living on the US west coast, the Fukushima accident—and this is perhaps awful to say—contamination from Fukushima is hardly worth considering. Historically a much greater event has already taken place.

Hirano: To put that another way, the current Fukushima accident gives us a chance to reconsider the enormity of the past contamination from US and Soviet atmospheric tests, which has not been openly discussed.

Koide: Yes, that's exactly right. In fact, it is the masses of people who need to realize the impact of the contamination on them. In the case of the Fukushima disaster, for example, they need to be aware that some radioactive material is reaching the North American coast, and the prevailing westerly winds will carry anything released into the atmosphere to the US. Those earlier numbers from the Japanese government indicate that the levels for Cs-137 in the atmosphere are 168 times those of the Hiroshima bombing. I've been told that level is 1.5×10^{16} Becquerels [Bq]. These exponents can be a pain to process, so if we think of it in peta-units—which is 10^{15} —we get essentially 15 petabecquerels [PBq].

That said, while we are not really sure this is the number, we do know that a portion of this material will ride the prevailing winds across the Pacific Ocean. On the other hand, closer to the ground, the winds will be east, south, and

north, and therefore this other portion will fall on Japan—and we can investigate the actual levels here: how much fell on this town, on this prefecture? Adding these up, it seems to be only 2.4 PBq. Which is to say of the total fifteen PBq, 2.4, or roughly only 16%, fell on Japanese soil. If the totals are higher, still a smaller share of the total contamination will have fallen on Japan compared with the Pacific, with the largest portion falling on the west coast of the United States.

So why don't we hear complaints from the US? Why are there no calls for compensation? Whenever someone asks me this, I simply say that there just aren't any such complaints. Why is this so? Well the levels released by the US during the atmospheric testing were tens of times greater than Fukushima. They are the criminals, so they cannot ask for compensation from Japan. The U.S. government does not want to have to reflect on its own past, and I think they are eager to completely avoid bringing up anything like that conversation. That is why I believe it is so important that those who have been exposed to radioactive contamination realize what atmospheric testing has done to them.

Kasai: I'd like to get back to the moment of the accident in some detail. On March 11, 2011 we had the East Japan Disaster (meaning the earthquake and tsunami off Tohoku). You've already talked about the string of accidents at the nuclear plant. At the moment the accident was taking place, you were following the response by the Japanese government and the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) in real time. What did you see in those initial moments?



Koide: It was truly a disastrous response. On the 11th I was in the laboratory in Kyoto as March was my month to work in the radiation-controlled area.³ It was normal workday hours and various tasks kept me busy working within the controlled area. Of course there is no TV or anything like that in the work space. That night there was a meeting so I came out to attend and that's when I saw the images of the Sendai airport being swept away by the tsunami. The report said that there had been a devastating earthquake and tsunami. Then I wondered about the safety of the nuclear plants.

Right then, there really was no more information. We had scheduled a nuclear safety issues seminar for the 18th. I've participated in hundreds of these seminars. Participants from the Ukraine had just arrived on the 11th. We promised to go out drinking after they arrived and so that night I went out. There was no more TV, and while there was a vague unease among us, that's how we spent the time.

The next day I learned that all power at Fukushima had been lost and I knew things were not going to be simple. Then at noon on the 12th the roof of reactor one was blown off; at that point any expert must have known there had

been a reactor meltdown. So I was certain of a core meltdown and because once it has gone this far, there is no going back, it was time to call for anyone who could evacuate to do so. I thought we were at that stage on the 12th. Yet neither the government nor TEPCO said a single word about a core meltdown; they announced that the incident merited a 3 or 4 on the International Nuclear Event Scale. I remember thinking "You've got to be kidding! There's already been a meltdown. This is at least a level 6 or 7." But neither the government nor TEPCO gave any indication of this and there was no word of it in the media either.

One by one there were explosions at reactors 3, 4, and 2. As an expert in nuclear power, I understood there was absolutely nothing that could be done. I thought people needed to be evacuating, but still the Japanese government didn't make the call. Government officials had set up at an off-site center near a power plant in Fukushima—at first they announced evacuation inside two kilometers, then that expanded to three, five, ten, and finally twenty km. After that nothing was done. The offsite center was supposed to coordinate the emergency response in the event of an accident, but it turned out that every one of the officials fled. They left the employees behind and fled. The Japanese government's response was indescribably cruel.

Kasai: It seems the very words "meltdown" (メルtdown) and "core meltdown" (*roshin yōyū*/炉心熔融) were strictly forbidden.

Koide: Exactly.

Kasai: I was in Japan watching on TV. What shocked me was all the nuclear power experts explaining the incident in the studio. I suppose it was a satellite relay, but when reactor number three exploded on our screens they were giving their analyses of the explosion in real time. There were experts on TV saying that the reactor had a blast valve that was used successfully. Even hearing that, an average viewer might think something was amiss. But having physicists, experts on radiation, on TV saying these things, well, even the average viewer wouldn't buy that explanation. In a broad sense, nuclear experts like yourself played several roles in the media and government.

Koide: Yes, that's clearly true for pronuclear experts. They all tended to tell a story that underestimated the accident. Immediately after the accident public announcements and information were restricted. As a result individual opinions or statements were strictly forbidden and nearly all experts remained silent, so even basic information was not broadcast. Though I'd made statements from the nuclear lab beginning on the 12th, it is likely there were instructions from the Ministry of Science and Education to silence me. The head of the lab convened several meetings where he told each of us not to make any statement, that the lab would toe the official line when dealing with the mass media. I thought this was wrong and said that anyone who was asked a question by the media should answer it, further saying that if I were asked a question, I had a responsibility to answer. Since then I've continued to make statements in the media. Still the large majority of nuclear researchers were not able to do this.

As a result it was the pronuclear researchers who monopolized the interpretations - exactly. So as they went to the TV studios I think each was told: "Today, it's your turn to go to the studio." I think that's how they played their part and handled the media.

Kasai: With respect to controlling information, would you say your experience with the head of the nuclear lab shows how the professional organizations exert pressure on the universities?

Koide: Yes, I would. The head of the lab opened a conference with all the other laboratories—even I went. There he said that any statements to the media should be on message and come only from the information office.

Kasai: So pressure came from academic conferences.

Koide: Yes, there was pressure coming from the academic conference side as well. Take for example something like a conference on nuclear power. From the very start it was never a real discussion; it was a meeting of powerful and vocal spokesmen for the nuclear community or village (*genshiryoku kyōdōtai*/原子力共同体 or *genshiryoku mura*/原子力村), which is to say the group of pronuclear government officials and private companies mainly centered around the LDP and Toshiba, Hitachi, Mitsubishi, and other pronuclear manufacturers of power plants—and of course their supporters in the media. Thus as an organization the conference was predisposed to underestimate the accident and to then promote that underestimation.

Hirano: Immediately after the accident you testified in the Diet presenting data indicating the seriousness of the disaster and demanding that the government terminate the operation of all the power plants.⁴

Koide: I did.

Hirano: After that it seems you weren't again asked to speak publicly, or given the opportunity to offer more detailed thoughts on the situation.

Koide: By "speak publicly" you mean in the Diet or in some other official government setting?

Hirano: Yes, and also in the media.

Koide: With respect to the media, I've never really had any confidence in them. Since the accident, I've been overwhelmingly busy and haven't accepted a single invitation from TV stations.

Hirano: I see. So there were invitations.

Koide: There have been many calls saying, "come down to the studio." But I always tell them that I am too busy for this sort of thing. I'd say, if you come to my office, we could meet. Many did come by, even back then. But as everyone knows, in television you might talk for an hour and none of it makes it on air, or if it does, it's maybe thirty seconds.

Hirano: Right, and only the convenient parts.

Koide: That's it and there's really nothing that can be done about it. There was, however, one outlet for which I was extremely grateful: the daily radio program called Tanemaki Journal (種まきジャーナル).⁵ There I could go on every day and offer my thoughts live. I wish it could have continued, but it was completely and totally smashed. What a world we live.

Kasai: So, on the subject of standards used for assessing the danger posed by radiation for the human body and the environment: What are your thoughts on how the government deals with this issue?

Koide: They are absolutely not dealing with it at all. I think you already know this but in Japan the average person is not supposed to be exposed to more than one milliSievert per year—that's set by law. Why is that the level decided on? Because exposure to radiation is dangerous. If exposure weren't dangerous, if low levels of exposure were safe, there'd be no problem even without that legal limit. But exposure to radiation is dangerous—this is the conclusion of all research. So every nation in the world has set legal limits for exposure.

For people like me who get paid to work with radiation, it's not really possible to observe the 1mSv/yr limit [1mSv/yr]. We're told that in exchange for our salaries, we accept exposure to twenty milliSieverts a year. That's the standard I work under in my job. But the current Japanese government has now stated that if contamination is under 20mSv/yr somewhere, that place is safe to return to—safe to return to even for children. This is way beyond common sense.

Hirano: What is the basis of this claim? Why would the government announce these numbers and forcefully declare these areas safe to return to? What's the basis for the government's numbers?

Koide: The basis for those numbers...for example the government says that organizations like the IAEA or the ICRP [International Commission on Radiological Protection] suggest that in emergencies during which the 1mSv/yr standard cannot be maintained standards should be set between twenty and 100mSv/yr. The government seizes on this and declares that since the IAEA and the ICRP have said this, that 20mSv/yr is therefore a safe level—usually adding that membership in both the IAEA and the ICRP is voluntary anyway. But because these organizations have said this is no reason to break Japanese law. If Japan is a nation governed by the rule of law at all, surely this means that the very people who make the laws should also follow them—that should be obvious. But these guys have declared 20mSv/yr safe even for children. There is absolutely no way I can consent to this.

Hirano: So there is no scientific basis for these levels.

Koide: Well... the danger corresponds to the amount of exposure—you probably know this—so for a country that has declared its intention to maintain the 1mSv/yr standard to then turn around and ask people to endure twenty times that level, there is no scientific basis for that declaration. That's a social decision.

But if you want to inquire as to why, as I've mentioned to you, some 2.4 petaBecquerels of radioactive material have fallen on Japan, that material has been dispersed, contaminating Tohoku, Kanto, and western Japan. So in addition to the law setting the legal limit for exposure at 1mSv/yr, there is another law that states that absolutely nothing may be removed from a radioactive management area in which the levels exceed 40,000 Becquerels per square meter. So the question becomes how many places or how much area has been contaminated beyond 40,000 Bq/m²? And according to the investigations, that answer is 140,000 km². The entirety of Fukushima prefecture has been contaminated to where all of it must be declared a radioactivity management area. Indeed, while centered on

Fukushima, parts of Chiba and Tokyo have also been contaminated. The number of people living in what must be called a radiation-controlled area is in the millions, and could exceed ten million.

For me, if Japan is in fact a nation governed by the rule of law, I believe the government has the responsibility to evacuate these entire communities. Instead of taking a proper action to secure people's livelihood, the government decided to leave them exposed to the real danger of radiation. In my view, Fukushima should be declared uninhabitable and the government and TEPCO should bear a legal responsibility for the people displaced and dispossessed by the nuclear disaster. That's what I think, but if that were to be done, it would likely bankrupt the country. I think that even though it could bankrupt Japan, the government should have carried out the evacuation to set an example of what the government is supposed to do. But obviously those in and around the LDP certainly didn't agree. They've decided to sacrifice people and get by taking on as little burden as possible. So they've made the social decision to force people to endure their exposure. In my view, this is a serious crime committed by Japan's ruling elite.

I would like people to know just how many thousands of people live in this abnormal situation where even nuclear scientists like me are not allowed to enter, not to mention, drink the water. It is strange that this issue has been left out of all debate over the effects of the radioactive exposure. We must be aware that contemporary Japan continues to operate outside the law in abandoning these people to their fate by saying it's an extraordinary situation. Under such circumstances, I think, there are a multitude of symptoms of illnesses in contaminated areas. But if we're talking about any given symptom, it's hard to say since we just don't have any good epidemiological studies, or even any good data. But there will surely be symptoms, namely cancer and leukemia.

However little exposure to radiation is, it causes cancer and leukemia—this is the conclusion of all current science. These symptoms are said to become visible 5 years after the initial exposure. But because radiation is not the sole cause of cancer or leukemia establishing a direct causal relationship is extremely difficult. For this very reason we need to continue to investigate the state of exposure by conducting rigorous epidemiological studies. But this government wishes instead to hide the damage so I'm afraid no such study is on the horizon. In addition, I have heard about many cases of nose bleeding, severe headaches, and extreme exhaustion. And I am truly concerned about small children and young people living in Fukushima as they are most vulnerable to exposure.

Hirano: So what is your view of the actual damages of radiation exposure on human health?

Koide: On the evening of the Fukushima dai-ichi reactor accident of March 11, 2011, a Radiation Emergency Declaration was announced. The Declaration suspended existing Japanese law concerning exposure to radiation. Though Japanese law sets the limit for exposure for the general population at one milliSievert a year [1mSv/yr], the new permissible level would be 20 mSv/yr. That Emergency Declaration is still in effect. It is common knowledge that even low levels of exposure are dangerous. Including even infants in this newly imposed 20mSv/yr standard will obviously lead to various diseases. Further, because the monitoring equipment was destroyed at the time of the accident we do not have accurate data on the exposure levels of the residents. Numerous cases of thyroid cancer have been found. The prevalence of thyroid cancer is dozens of times that of normal incidence. Pro-nuclear groups say those numbers are the result of the screening process itself, not the effect of radiation exposure. Which is to say that this was the first major screening of that population and so it was natural that many cases of thyroid cancer would be found. Put differently, what they are saying is that they have never conducted a thorough study of radiation exposure and its impact on human health. Science should acknowledge what it already knows and what it does not. If it is true that there is no established scientific data, a properly scientific approach would be to carry out a thorough investigation. To deny the damage to health by exposure to radiation without such an investigation is absolutely at odds with the scientific spirit. Prof. Tsuda at Okayama University has already conducted a detailed study on the outbreak of thyroid cancer, showing an epidemiological-like outbreak. Just as happened at Chernobyl, as time passes it is clear there will be more and more instances of all kinds of illnesses.

Hirano: In your books you've often stated that there is no uncontaminated food. But for most Japanese, such basic knowledge seems limited to food from Fukushima, and nearby parts of Ibaraki, Gumma, Chiba, Miyagi. For food produced outside these areas, do you think it's necessary to have strict testing of food that is sold and consumed? What is to be done? Do you think food from outside these areas should also be subject to strict testing before being sent to market and consumed?

Koide: Right, as we discussed earlier, before the Fukushima accident the entire globe was already contaminated with radiation. This means that Tohoku or Kanto or Kansai food, all of it, has been contaminated with radiation—radiation from atmospheric tests. Beyond this, contamination from the 1986 Chernobyl accident reached Japan on the prevailing westerly winds, meaning that all Japanese food was contaminated. And on top of all this, with the Fukushima disaster, as I mentioned, it is not that a thick layer of contamination has dispersed to every corner of the globe from Fukushima, but that this thick layer of contamination is right now centered on Fukushima.

So if we were to carefully measure the levels of food contamination, we'd more or less find moving out from the highest levels in Fukushima to say western Japan or Kyushu, that the numbers would gradually decline to the lower levels received from the atmospheric tests. Right now the people of Fukushima have been abandoned in the areas of the highest levels of radiation. And abandoned people have to find a way to live. Farmers produce agricultural goods, dairy farmers produce dairy products, and ranchers produce meat; these people must do so in order to live. They are not the ones to be blamed at all.

As the Japanese state is absolutely unreliable in this matter, these people have no choice but to go on producing food in that place, all the while suffering further exposure. So I don't think we can throw out the food they produce there under those conditions. Inevitably someone has to consume that food—I suggest it be fed to the pronuclear lobby (laughs). We should serve all of the most heavily contaminated food at say the employee cafeteria at TEPCO or in the cafeteria for Diet members in the Diet building. But that isn't nearly enough. We must carefully inspect the food, and once we've determined what foods have what levels of contamination, once that is fully measured and delineated, then those who have the corresponding levels of responsibility should eat it, should be given it.

Now of course strict levels of responsibility cannot really be allotted one by one to individuals that way, so when it comes to this food, I would propose devising a "60 and over" system. The most contaminated foods could only be eaten by those 60 years old and older, and from there also have food for "50 and over," "40 and over," "30 and over" - giving the best food to children. For example, school lunches would get the most uncontaminated food available—there'd still be contamination from the atmospheric tests—but food with only those levels would be given to children and only adults would receive the contaminated food. That would be my proposal.

My proposal would first be a precise measurement, starting from Fukushima and then of course including western Japan and Kyushu, to sort out the levels and then determine the relative burdens. I am aware that this is a controversial proposal, but each one of us, especially those who built postwar Japan, bears responsibility for allowing our society to be heavily dependent on nuclear energy without carefully reflecting on the risks and consequences of it. And more importantly, we have the responsibility for protecting children.

Kasai: Recently, that idea has been suggested in Nishio Masamichi's *Radioactive Archipelago* (*Hibaku retto*/ 『被ばく列島』). You've just stressed that though the first step must be a rigorous measurement, right now that is simply impossible.

Koide: Right, completely impossible.

Kasai: So, that's true of water as well. First I don't think most people know how to measure the levels in water. You've already said how the current minimum standards are worthless, that below a certain threshold it would be displayed as "ND" (Not Detectable). For example, for tap water, up to 20 Becquerels would be posted as "ND," exactly as if there was no radiation detected at all. Yet even with all these doubts on measurement, we must start with it, though it's a dizzyingly long road ahead. But what do you think can be done to change this situation for the better?

Koide: Right now Japan has a standard of 100Bq/kg for general foodstuffs. Before the Fukushima disaster, Japanese foodstuffs were contaminated—by the atmospheric tests—at a level of 0.1Bq/kg. Of course there were some foods with less contamination and some with more. Still, roughly speaking it was 0.1Bq/kg. So when you're talking 100 Bq/kg that's allowing 1,000 times the [pre-Fukushima] levels.

As I said before, any exposure is absolutely dangerous. And the dangers increase corresponding to an increase in levels of exposure; this is the conclusion of all research. 100 Bq/kg is dangerous, 99 is dangerous, as is 90, and 50, and 10—they are all dangerous. 10 Bq/kg is 100 times the pre-Fukushima levels.

So I think it's necessary to precisely measure the levels of contamination. As many people are living in a state of anxiety, groups like consumers' cooperatives and other sorts of organizations are trying to measure the contamination on their own. But the measuring devices that these groups are able to get, such as the ones called NAI,

these devices can only measure levels above 20Bq/kg. While this means that they can measure levels as little as one-fifth of the national thresholds, from my perspective even this lower level is far too high.

And the worst thing that could happen is thinking that any contamination below the detectable limits of these machines, meaning below 20Bq/kg, would be misunderstood as being free of contamination, and then having the Fukushima prefectural government actively using this data as good news: "measurements below the detectable limits of the device must be clean; we can even serve this food in school cafeterias," or PR campaigns announcing "Fukushima produce is safe." Of course it would be totally outrageous and unthinkable and yes I think every effort should be made to serve the least contaminated food in school cafeterias—but the reality is that any food tested below detectable levels is distributed to schools as safe produce.

I think we need to stop this situation, and technically speaking, I think several germanium semiconductor detectors must be deployed instead. But a germanium detector would cost from \$100,000 to \$200,000. And in order to use it, the detector needs to be kept at 150 degree below zero Celsius. So these are not devices that the average citizen is going to be able to use.

So no matter how dedicated any individual citizen may be, there are real limitations when it comes to measuring radiation levels. If you ask me what should be done, for example when faced with Cs-137 or Sr-90, what should be done about these contaminants? Well these contaminants were produced in a nuclear reactor at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi plant and it means that they are unmistakably TEPCO's property. And if their private property is found to have contaminated other areas they have undeniable responsibility for it. So I think this is something that is required of TEPCO. I think it is TEPCO's responsibility to precisely measure which foods have been contaminated, and to what extent, and then to report the results to the public. I think this is something the public should demand. After TEPCO the government also has responsibility—they gave their seal of approval to TEPCO after all. So the public should also demand that the government precisely measure the levels and publish the results.

Because there are limits to what one can do on one's own, I think we need a movement that forces the government and TEPCO to take responsibility for the precise measurement of the contamination.

Hirano: Some have raised doubts over precisely this kind of rigorous measurement citing possible damage caused by rumors or misinformation (*fūhyōhigai*/風評被害), but to me this sort of criticism is tainted with a sort of "national morality" discourse (*kokumin dōtokuron*/国民道徳論).

Koide: Yes, I think so.

Hirano: There seems to be a very strong sense of dividing people into those who are seen as patriotic and those who are seen as un-Japanese (*hikokumin*/非国民).

Koide: For me, I've been making statements on the Fukushima contamination. These statements have been denounced and even made some angry with me. But the contamination is real. For a long time now I've been the kind of person who would rather hear the truth, no matter how awful, than to remain ignorant. I am absolutely not going to hide the truth; no matter how much criticism I have to take I am going to diligently report the truth. Yeah, a lot of people get angry with me. (Laughs).

Kasai: On this point, this year saw the publishing of Kariya Tetsu's manga series *Oi shinbo: Fukushima no shinjitsu* (『美味しんぼ – 福島の実』).⁶ It would seem a kind of political campaign was developed to attack it. What is your take on this?

Koide: The editors sent me a copy and I've read it. It's an awesome manga. In this day and age we just don't have this kind of detailed manga on this problem and I am grateful for it. And more, *Oi shinbo* talks about the nosebleeds [caused by radiation]. The nosebleeds are real. Lots of Fukushima residents are said to be suffering from nosebleeds. Itokawa, the mayor of Futaba machi, has shown us proof. One of my acquaintances often talks about the nosebleeds. It was true at Chernobyl, too. But nosebleeds have not been definitively and scientifically linked to exposure to radiation.⁷ Still there is no denying that it is real and happening. So even if current science is unable to explain it, it's for science to ask just what is going on? Science has a duty to explain this, to tell the truth without obfuscation. No matter the reasons, we should be allowed to tell the truth. So for me I don't think there is anything wrong with this part of *Oi shinbo*.

Kasai: I think *Oi shinbo* clearly exposed the politically constructed narratives "damage from rumor or misinformation" and "emotional bonds" (*kizuna*/絆) as fictions, and so for this reason it appears it had to be crushed.

Koide: Exactly. But Kariya, the author of *Oi shinbo*, is not one of the criminals responsible for the Fukushima disaster. Rather the government officials who caused the Fukushima disaster are the criminals. Yet it is these same government bureaucrats who now come out and complain that this manga is out of order. I say, "No, it's you who are out of order. We need to send you to prison right now."

But isn't it always the case that a criminal who has committed a crime remains unquestioned and so starts bashing those who are telling the truth? When that happens I think the problem is precisely this word you just used "emotional bonds." Since Fukushima, I have come to hate this word. (Laughs).

Hirano: "Bonds" seems to be the new nationalism, doesn't it?

Koide: Yes, yes it does.

Hirano: You've often said that the Japanese economy and the people's lifestyle would be fine even without a single nuclear power plant. In fact, since the government shut all the nuclear reactors down, the people have experienced no real trouble at all. In addition, considered in light of world standards we still have material riches and a lifestyle of surplus. Given this, what are your thoughts on the call to restart the reactors? For what purpose, what reason do you think the government has?⁸

Koide: First of all, the power companies don't want to go bankrupt. In other words, the heads of the power companies do not want to take personal responsibility. For example, if the reactors are restarted and there's an accident, are the heads of the power companies going to be punished? We already know that they will not be. Even after the Fukushima disaster neither the chairman, nor the CEO, nor anyone below—not a single person—was punished.⁹ It certainly looks as if the reactors are restarted and there's an accident, the heads of the power companies would not be required to take any responsibility. The heads of the power companies, from Kyushu Electric to Kansai Electric, have received this message loud and clear.

What's more, if the nuclear power plants are idled and not allowed to restart, then all the capital they represent becomes a non-performing asset. And of course this is anathema to anyone in management.

Hirano: If we could return to a technical discussion specifically how to decommission a reactor. As have others in your field you've already stated that a full end game cannot be envisioned yet. Still could you talk about what makes this issue so difficult?

Koide: By decommissioning you mean the endpoint of the Fukushima reactors?

Hirano: Yes, what does it mean for Fukushima dai-ichi?

Koide: When we say decommission we basically mean: How do we fully contain the radiation? At least I think that's the main point. Now this is impossible if we don't know the status of the melted core. Though it's been four years since the disaster we simply do not know where the core is or in what state it is.

This is a situation that only happens in nuclear accidents. However large a chemical plant explosion may be there'd probably be an initial fire, but usually after several days, perhaps weeks you'd still be able to go on site and investigate. You'd be able to see just how things broke down. And in some situations might even be able to fix them. But with an accident at a nuclear plant you cannot even go on site four years later—probably not even ten years later.

Hirano: Because the contamination is so severe that no one can come close to it.

Koide: Yes. For humans going there means instant death, so the only way at all is to use robots. But robots are extremely vulnerable to radiation. Consider, robots receive their instructions through series of 1s and 0s, so should the radiation switch a 0 to a 1 you'd end up with completely different instructions. Essentially robots are useless. Even if you are able to send them in they can never return. Because this has been the case up to now, the only way left in the end might be to use robots that try to avoid exposure or that are built as much as possible to withstand exposure, but that is no simple thing.

So it means until we figure out what to do it would still take many years. Once you understand this fact you can start thinking about what can be done. And at the very least the "road map" devised by the government and TEPCO is the most absolutely optimistic road map that there could be. They are convinced that the melted core fell through the bottom of the pressure vessel and now lie at the bottom of the containment vessel—basically piling up like nuggets of the melted core. There's no way this would be the case. (Laughs).

As the severity of the disaster became clear, water was repeatedly thrown on the reactors. This water would evaporate and dissipate continuously. That was the actual situation. There is no way that the melted core would have stayed as slimy liquid and then piled up like so many little nuggets. It should have been scattered all over the place.

This is how the government and TEPCO's roadmap goes: The buns would stay at the bottom of the containment vessel, above which is the reactor pressure vessel—a steel pressure furnace. With the furnace floor broken open, there is a hollow at the bottom through which the melted core must have leaked.

So at some point both the containment vessel and the pressure vessel would be filled with water and they'll be able to see the nuggets of melted core by looking from above down into the water. They say the nuggets (the fallen material), yes, that they sit some thirty to forty meters below the water's surface, that they'll eventually be able to grab and remove them. This is all it takes, according to the government and TEPCO's roadmap. Not a chance. This simply cannot be done.

Hirano: Obviously we can't confirm or really say anything definitive about the situation in the reactors, but what do you think has happened?

Koide: I simply don't know. But as I have mentioned, this whole "nugget" scenario is just not the case, and so I think the materials are scattered all over the place. Though the containment vessel is made of steel, if the melted core has come in contact with that steel, just as it ate through the floor of the pressure vessel, it could possibly have melted through the containment vessel. Depending on how things developed this, too, is a possibility. Unfortunately, I simply do not know.

Hirano: If that is in fact the situation, what steps are necessary?

Koide: First, as we talked about earlier, radiation must be prevented from being released into the environment. As I consider this task as "decommissioning" or the final containment of the accident, I think in order to prevent the release into the environment you must do whatever you can starting from the worst-case scenario.

There are situations in which the containment vessel can suffer a melt-through. I think this likely has already happened. And if it has happened what should be done? Outside the reactor there flows ground water. If the melted core were to come in contact with the ground water, the whole situation would be unmanageable. While this may have already have happened, in order to get any kind of control over the situation, some sort of barrier must be built to prevent the melted core from reaching the ground water. I've been saying this since May 2011—and they have not done a thing.

Kasai: This barrier would be an ice dam, a wall of super-chilled soil.

Koide: That's the most recent idea. But it simply cannot be done successfully. It would cost billions of dollars. And it would fail. And when it did fail they'd say there's nothing to be done but build a concrete wall. No matter how foolish an idea may be, they'll just keep moving from failure to failure.

But really, for the construction companies that's a good thing. I think Kashima would be the ones to build the super-chilled earth wall, for some billions of dollars. And if it doesn't work—they wouldn't have to take responsibility. Next they'd build an impermeable concrete wall. Several huge construction firms (*zenekon*/ゼネコン) would be contracted and would all make billions.

But considered from the perspective of actually ending the disaster, it would be a series of failures. Personally, I think an underground, impermeable wall needs to be built immediately. They are not going to be able to remove the material. All that can be done is to contain it. Underground the wall needs to be strengthened; above ground the only choice is some sort of sarcophagus like the one they built over Chernobyl. But even this would take dozens of years—I'll probably be dead by then.

Kasai: There are temporary tanks sitting on land for this water, but they are starting to leak. What should be done about this contaminated water? There's not enough space for all of it on land; it cannot be controlled; and every year the volume grows larger.

Koide: The radioactive water has penetrated the coastline around the Fukushima Daiichi. Underground water in the large area of Fukushima has been seriously contaminated. And at some point those contaminated water tanks will fail. I thought we must do everything that we possibly could. Already in March of 2011 there was some 100,000 tons of contaminated water. Even then I proposed moving it but didn't get anywhere with it. Now there's up-to 400,000 tons. In the near—meaning not too distant—future there will be nothing left but to release it into the sea.¹⁰ The water contains plutonium 239 and its release into the Ocean has both local and global impacts. A microgram of plutonium can cause death if inhaled.

Interview with Koide Hiroaki (2)



Kasai: It appears that they are already moving toward that direction a little at a time aren't they.

Koide: The Nuclear Regulatory Committee has been hinting at the possibility of releasing it into the ocean.

Kasai: They have been trying to persuade the fishing cooperatives and others to allow the release.

Koide: Yes, they have.

Kasai: Something that has not been much of a topic of discussion today is decontamination. It has become a rather large industry, in other words, "the exposure industry" (*hibaku sangyō*/被曝産業). Do you think decontamination is really meaningful and effective?

Koide: Yes, I do. And we must do it. But, to say that because we've decontaminated some area that the whole issue is resolved, or that people may safely live in a decontaminated place—I think that is a real problem.

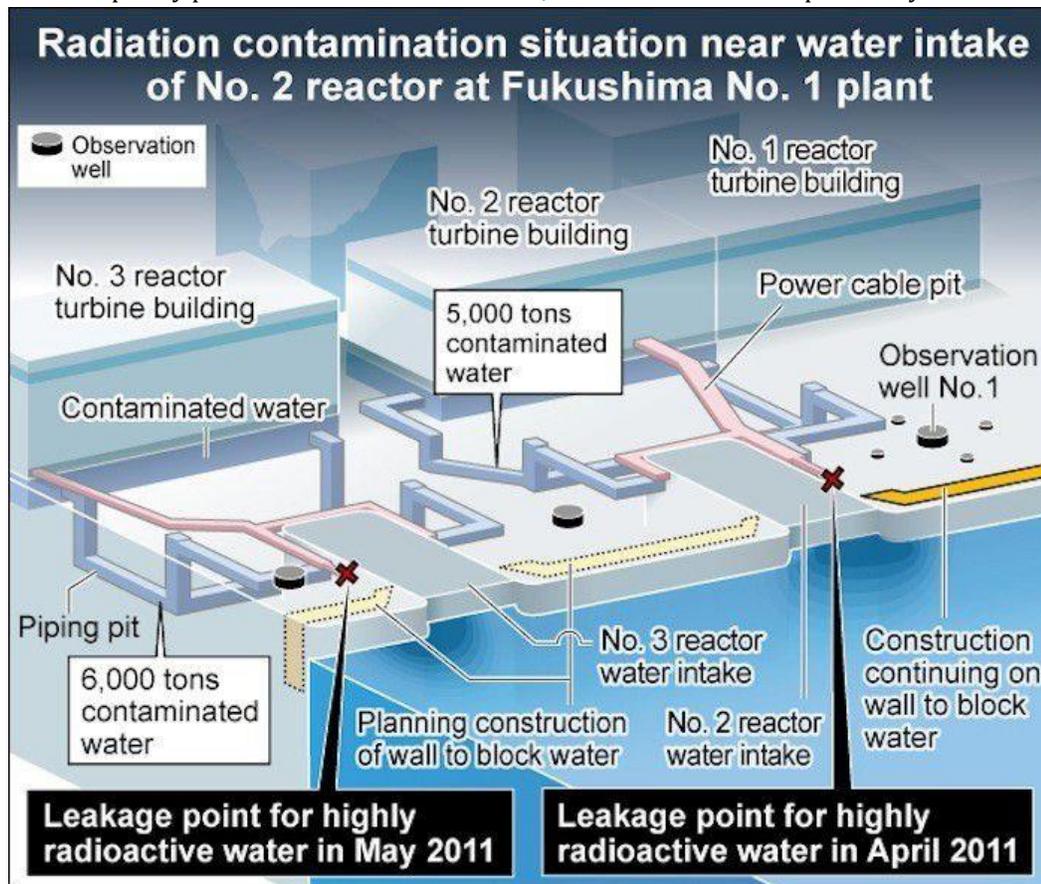
First, fundamentally, people must not be forced to live in contaminated areas that must be decontaminated. First must come complete evacuation. The state must take on the responsibility to allow whole communities to evacuate. Of course, they did not do this.

Briefly, I use the word "decontamination" (*josen*/除染), which is a compound word written with the characters for "remove" and "stain." But this is something that cannot be completed when it comes to radiation, so the original sense of the word "removal of contaminants" is impossible. But as long as people are abandoned in the contaminated areas, I believe all possible actions should be taken to lessen their exposure. It is essential that the contamination be removed as far away as possible, to be transported far from where people live. For this reason I prefer to call it "[toxic] relocation" (*isen*/移染).

But even if this is done, that does not mean that the radiation has been erased. This stuff contaminates everything from mountains to what have you, it gets into the space of people's lives. When that happens it must be removed. But removal merely means moving it around—it does not mean eliminating it. It means another job is waiting to handle the contaminated materials that get moved around.

Right now the authorities say they want various prefectures and other local governments to build a temporary storage and bury the accumulated contamination there.

We talked about this before, but the contaminants themselves were clearly formerly in the reactor at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi plant and are therefore also clearly TEPCO's property. So while it is residents who are doing the hard work of collecting all these contaminants, I think it would be right and just for these contaminants to be returned to TEPCO. Earlier prof. Kasai told us the contaminants were being called "no-one's property" (*mushubutsu*/無主物), but I say in all seriousness, the conclusion of my logic here is to say to TEPCO: "Hey, this is your crap" and return it to them. That way the residents are not forced to accept the stuff, TEPCO is. The best solution is to return all of the material back to the Fukushima Daiichi plant, but that is not possible. Right now that place is a battlefield between poorly paid workers and the radiation, so I don't see this as a possibility.



What I would most like to do is have TEPCO's headquarters buried under all the radiation, but whenever I say this people just laugh. (laughs)

I do have a second proposal. Fifteen kilometers south of Fukushima Daiichi [Fukushima 1] is the Fukushima dai-ni [Fukushima 2] nuclear plant. There is a lot of wide open space there. So first off we would return the Fukushima 1

contamination to TEPCO there. I think there would be enough space, but if there were not, the rest could be taken to TEPCO's Kashiwazaki Kariya nuclear plant. It's the world's largest nuclear plant and so there is a lot of space. I think turning that place into a nuclear waste site is a good idea.

Lately I've been invited to Kashiwazaki¹¹ and talked about it. I think I've become a hated man there. (Laughs). But I think taking full responsibility for various actions is the most important thing. And when it comes to this particular disaster no one has greater responsibility than TEPCO. As I think it important for one to take full responsibility, if Fukushima 2 doesn't work out, then Kashiwazaki Kariya is the only other option.

Hirano: State expenditures for decontamination have supposedly reached one trillion yen.

Koide: It's more than that.

Hirano: This summer I spent some time in Iitate village. Of course at the time the place was crawling with decontamination workers. It was a truly bizarre scene. I had the feeling of running around on a moonscape. Of course there were no residents there—just decontamination workers in strange gear, trucks running all over the place.

Looking at that scene, being shown the actual work of decontamination, it seemed to be an excruciatingly slow—even endless—endeavor. I mean they were scrubbing everything with small brushes. I was able to ask the workers a few questions—off the record. Many were people from Hokkaido, Okinawa, and Fukushima who had lost their homes. It was a collection of modern day migrant workers and victims of disaster. They said that they work for just 15,000 yen a day.

I asked them if they thought their work was doing any good. They said they needed the money and honestly had no way of knowing if this sort of minute and delicate work would remove the contamination.

Was this a mistake? Is scrubbing everything by hand and then dumping it all in the ground really the only way to decontaminate an area?



Koide: Well I think both that it is and it isn't effective. For example, when they first started the decontamination work, what they did was blasting everything with high-pressure water hoses. That's bad. All that does is get all the contamination moving around. It's really just dispersing it.

Some of my colleagues have said that is a bad method. Be it a roof or a wall, you shouldn't just douse it with water. To really remove the contamination, you would first cover it with something that could prevent the escape of radioactivity then knock down the radiated structure, tear it all off, and then fold it up and collect it all. I think that's probably true. But it takes a long time.

I think there are effective ways of doing it and I think there are ineffective ways. Still it is fundamentally impossible to erase the contamination and so it must be moved. The only thing we should be doing is thinking about the easiest way to relocate it all.

Hirano: That's the meaning of "effective" in this situation isn't it.

Koide: Right. So the current method may be rather small in scale. But for me even small-scale methods are necessary. As long as people are living there everything is necessary.

Of course, there's legitimate criticism over the fact that this is a decontamination business and that the large construction companies are getting rich, but again, for me, as long as there are abandoned people still living there it all must be done.

Hirano: It was really a shock going there and seeing it. To see those workers and, honestly, their lack of conviction for the work. It was a really weird scene. No real enthusiasm, but rather one day after the other, contingent labor. The media has reported that the workers come from a few particular prefectures, but actually being there and talking to them, I could really get a true sense of the structure of economic inequality in Japan, that this sort of work found this kind of person, a person coming from economically precarious and socially marginalized backgrounds. In fact, you come to understand that decontamination work depends on these people.

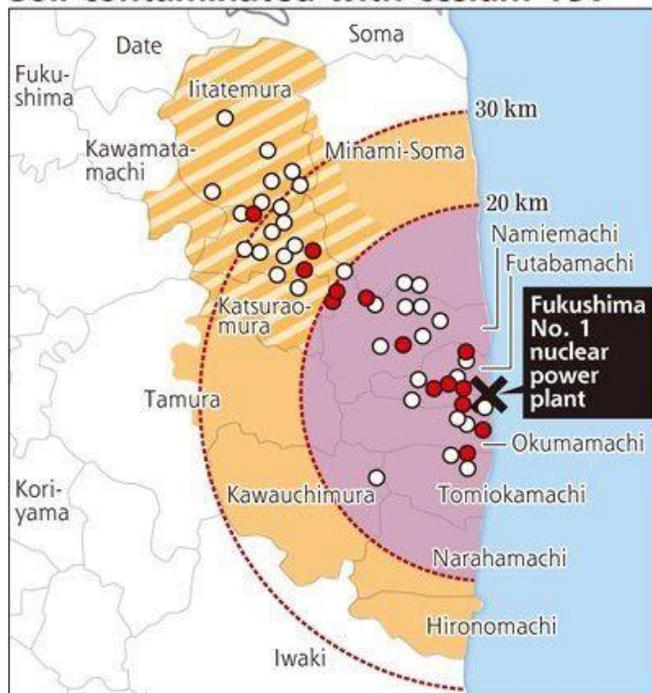
For example, decontamination, or your preferred "relocation," couldn't those jobs be made more equitable—say by requiring TEPCO office workers, especially executives, to do it?

Koide: I've said that.

Hirano: You have? (Laughs).

Kasai: So...about the airborne radiation dosage and the soil contamination, there is a public entity that measures and publishes the airborne levels. But the soil contamination is not measured. I remember reading about Chernobyl that the soil contamination levels are the standard by which one gets the right to evacuation and refuge. But Japan only measures the air. And there are those who doubt the accuracy of the levels recorded. I thought the soil contamination had not been measured yet, but from what you mentioned earlier, we do know the extent of the contamination, don't we?

Soil contaminated with cesium-137



● more than 3 million becquerels per square meter
○ 1 million to 3 million becquerels per square meter
■ no-entry zone ■ expanded evacuation zone
■ emergency evacuation preparation zone

Koide: Yes, we do.

Kasai: The actual levels?

Koide: With respect to soil contamination we more or less know the extent of it. We largely know which prefectures, which towns, and which villages—as well as how badly—have been contaminated. Four years after the disaster it has moved around. Radiation moves through the environment; it has a material existence and also does die out. I'm sure much has changed since immediately following the accident.

We have the data necessary to draw a map of the situation immediately following the accident, but we don't have the data necessary to draw a map of the contamination today. That said, we basically know the extent of the soil contamination.

Kasai: Who is it that is making these measurements?

Koide: It is basically the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Some local governments took part as well. Some independent groups, as well as some local governments, took part in taking measurements back then. But for us the number one data source is the US military.

Hirano: I see; how is that?

Koide: They worked at truly amazing speed-and accuracy.

Hirano: Sorry if this next thought seems a bit of a tangent, but right after the accident both the US and Japan were looking at the same data. But their interpretations of it were extremely far apart. The US ordered all of its personnel to evacuate an area 80 km from Fukushima. While Japan's largest evacuation zone was 20 km. Where does this disparity in evacuation zones come from? They are both looking at the same data. How do they arrive at such definitive and divergent judgments?

Koide: Well...and this was true for me, too, any nuclear specialist would have known on March 11th-March 12th at the latest-that there had been a meltdown. And this means, quite simply, that control had been lost. And once control is lost you simply don't know what is going to happen next-or that's what you must think at the time. Disaster preparedness must always imagine the worst-case scenario. If you don't plan for the worst-case scenario it will be too late. What the US did was believe there had been a worst-case scenario-a meltdown-and so moved to take care of its people. That's why they ordered an 80 km evacuation. I think this was the correct strategy. Japan didn't do this. Japan was always thinking of the ideal, the best case scenario. They had to be thinking they could still get control and based their policy on that optimistic assumption. So they only declared a 20 km evacuation zone. I would say that from this conclusion two things may unfold: one is their desire to see this as a best-case scenario and the other is their inability to deal with it.

Hirano: What do you mean by their inability?



Koide: In a word, the Japanese state is incapable of functioning adequately when dealing with a disaster. That's why they evacuated those within 20 km by bus but when it came to the 30 km zone they told those who could easily evacuate to do so and for all others to merely close their doors and windows.

Hirano: So there was no emergency management.

Koide: None. There simply is not a single person in the Japanese government who had thought an accident like this was possible. They all immediately fled the off-site center and so there was absolutely no emergency management—there couldn't be. And because management was now impossible, there were no announcements. Even if they had declared an 80 km evacuation zone there were no emergency shelters. They had made no preparations, so there was nothing to be done.

Hirano: Last summer I interviewed Murakami Tetsuya 12 Just as the accident was happening he reached out to the government. But he got no response. He went to the prefecture. No response from them either. In the end he just used his own judgment. So really there was essentially zero emergency management in place. His thoughts at the time were to get the whole village to emigrate; that really there was nothing to do but to buy land and move to Hokkaido. He said these were his actual plans at the time. In fact, it would seem that the myth of safety has so totally permeated the bureaucracy that there really is no one who thinks about these things—wouldn't you say?

Koide: That's right. Not a single nuclear expert or policy maker ever seriously considered the possibility of an accident like this. I knew accidents were possible, and that when they happened the damage would be enormous; I had been commenting on the possibility, referring to some results of simulations. But still I would have thought the kind of disaster that happened at Fukushima was some kind of impossible nightmare—yet it actually happened. It was like the worse nightmare becoming a reality. And if even I thought this then all those pronuclear people surely never gave it a moment's thought. And so when it actually happened, no one had thought about, let alone built a system to deal with it.

II The Responsibility of the Scientist and the Citizen

Kasai: In your books and lectures you often express strong respect for Tanaka Shōzō.¹³ Can you connect what you've just said to this as well?

Koide: Sure. I first became aware of Shōzō when I was in the student movement during the 1970s This was a time when there was close attention paid to Japan's many pollution incidents, such as at Minamata. Personally I was working on nuclear power, but it was a time when, like it or not, we learned of all the harm that came along with building Japan into a modern nation. What I got from Shōzō was this epiphany that just like the Minamata disease right there before our eyes these sorts of pollution incidents went way back in Japanese history. With Japan's decision to cast off Asia and follow the West after the Meiji Ishin of 1868 came these sorts of incidents, and the question within that was just how should one live? I learned the way Shōzō lived his life. I thought: Wow, it is possible to live that way; I must do it. Unfortunately I am completely unable to do so, but I never stop thinking that Shōzō's was a wonderful way to live a life.

Hirano: Going back to an earlier discussion. You've repeatedly talked about the government's responsibility, scientists' responsibility, and individual responsibility. It would seem that this word "responsibility" is an extremely important keyword for you. You often emphasize it in your writing, too. What I want to ask concerns the issue of scientists' special responsibility, a particular social responsibility. Scientists are often thought of as technicians, but this is not really the case. As a result, I feel you've pursued an intense interrogation of yourself as a scientist. As you've said you are not going to enter politics, could you connect this discussion of scientific responsibility to your earlier discussion of doing all that has fallen to you personally to do? How should we think about these two things?

Koide: I am in science and as such I have to take on the responsibility of a scientist—Just as a politician must take political responsibility. I think I mentioned this to you the last time, but I am an absolute individualist (*tetteiteki na kojinhugisha*/徹底的な個人主義者). I don't want to be constrained by anyone. I want to be able to decide my own life for myself. But because I've made this choice by myself I must also take full responsibility for that choice.

It's two sides of the same coin. I don't take orders from anyone. And this means that I alone bear the responsibility.

It's really as simple as saying: I'm a scientist and so I have the responsibility of a scientist.

Hirano: On this way of thinking about responsibility: "Who is the subject responsible?"—this way of thinking about it seems to be quite absent in contemporary Japan.

Koide: Right. People living in Japan today have not made decisions as individuals. They just "go with the flow;" as long as they follow the "authorities" whom they believe will guarantee the happiness of their individual selves. This seems true of education, too. Go to a slightly better school; get into a slightly better company; grow a bit more rich, a bit more grand. I think everyone is swept up in this current, and it's really senseless.

I think it is extremely important that each and every individual live out their individuality. The absolute worst thing is for everyone to become blindly obedient to the "authorities," yet this is the Japan we find ourselves in today. And so no one takes any responsibility. Living in such a society it is too easy to say, "It can't be helped." Everyone is thus able to blame the society as a whole; "It can't be helped." And so no one takes any individual responsibility.

The most extreme and obvious example was the war. Everyone would say: "It's not my fault; I was deceived. The military were the culprits." Saying this allows people to remain at a distance, indifferent. It is bad news for a nation when its citizens have only this view of responsibility.

Hirano: You've declared, "I am an absolute individualist." Personally I am very interested in that statement. So could you speak a bit more concretely about the meaning of your individualism for how one lives a life? In other words, could you explain just what you mean by this "individualism?"

That is, in Japan being individualistic is more often a way to say egotistical; a sort of disregard of others. One should pursue one's own interests—in English the word is "selfish" — egocentric — pursue your own egotistic advantage. Now this seems completely different from the way you use the term. Could you speak directly to this difference?

Koide: I think you've just done so.

Hirano: Did I? (Laughs). So that's it then, just as I said? Still it's clearly not selfishness.

Koide: No, I don't think it's about interests.

Hirano: It's about values isn't it?

Koide: Yes, it's about personal values. You and I are different people. I am different again from Mr. Kasai. Why? Well our genetic information is different. I received a bundle of information from my parents. You and Mr. Kasai, too, are influenced by your genetic information. Every one of the over one hundred million Japanese is a unique human being; and every one of the over 7.3 billion people on earth are unique individuals.

History may keep moving on, and there is a big, wide world here on this planet earth. That said, right now, at this moment, and right now, in this place, I exist as an irreplaceable being. It is nothing but an absolute truth. You normally live in Los Angeles, but right now at this moment you are a person who is here. Mr. Kasai has come down from Tokyo. While acknowledging all the implications of being within the flow of history, we are all right here, right now.

In other words, every single individual human being has a different way of living a life; they are each unique. They have each lived a life that absolutely no one else could have lived. It is a real loss if they don't live up to their full potential. Those are my thoughts.

So for my own unique self, and so for your own unique self, and Mr. Kasai's own unique self, none of us should be compelled by someone else to do something (*meirei o sarete*/命令されて). If we don't live our lives according to the will coming from deep within ourselves, that's a real loss; we must all live with our values coming from within ourselves.

I am going to retire next March, but though I am the lowest ranked employee here— above me are assistant professors and professors — because of the peculiar arrangements of working where I do, I am not compelled to take orders from anyone. I am the lowest ranked so of course there is also no one below me to order around. So I am in a position where I never take nor give orders. For me this is the ideal position to be in.

And so I can live out my own life according to my own values; I'm allowed to live a life that suits me. Now I found myself in this position largely by accident, and then chose to continue to live my life this way. Related to this, I am a human being and so will make mistakes, but these mistakes will be things that I have chosen, things that I have personally done so there is nothing to do but to take responsibility for them. This is what I mean when I say that responsibility is an extremely important word.

Hirano: Well, you've exhaustively criticized this competitive society. You've said that this competitive society has ruined Japan and destroyed life based on what you call responsibility.

Koide: Yes. Everyone is running towards the exact same goal. It's ludicrous. You want to go that way; I want to go this way. I think this would be the ideal society. Full mutual recognition is a good thing.

Hirano: Does your view come from your personal experience? In your books you state that you were a really conscientious student when you were younger (laughs).

Koide: (laughs) Well, yes.

Hirano: You studied extremely hard. Did everything extremely hard. You continued this in your nuclear research in college believing that a new energy source was cheap and good for everyone. You must have thought this was a great thing.

Koide: That's right.

Hirano: But you eventually noticed that it was all wrong. So on this, from deep in your own experience, it's an individual history, an individual experience, in one sense it's connected to your current individualism, to how you live your life focused on the important things to you.

Koide: I think that's right. So, well, when I was young, in my late teens, I was consumed by the dream of nuclear power. I devoted my life to it. That was all a mistake—it did not take me too long to realize that.

Hirano: When did it happen? In graduate school?

Koide: My third year in university.

Hirano: Third year—so as an undergraduate.

Koide: Yes, I came to this realization in the latter half of my undergraduate studies. It was foolish and I curse myself for it, but I didn't quit. To this day I've lived my life as someone who made that wrong choice, and there is nothing to do but make amends for that choice.

At a minimum I wanted to get rid of nuclear power before there was a bad accident. I guess I've lived with this wish for over forty years—but that wish stayed out of reach. And here we have had the accident so my life has been for nothing. You could say that thing I wanted most to do has been denied. Really, what have I lived for? I think about that from time to time.

As this was my choice I have to accept it. So while the meaning of my life may have been lost, still I was able to live my own life as I pleased, without submitting to the orders of others and without ordering others around—for this I am grateful. My hopes were never realized. History is full of that kind of thing. Likely very few people see their hopes fulfilled. And while in my case they were rejected, I was able to live the life I wanted and that is a life to be grateful for.

Hirano: In a way, it's just how Tanaka Shōzō lived his life isn't it?

Koide: Yes it is. That is what I like about Shōzō.

Hirano: On that point. His life, too, was a defeat.

Koide: Complete and total defeat.

Hirano: Still, he used all sorts of means, and followed all the way through on his beliefs.

Hirano: So getting back to Fukushima, it seems when it comes to the life choices of the so-called Japanese elites, they seem caught in a system in which they will succeed and become famous by crushing their individuality and subsuming it under some organization in order to get ahead in a society and achieve fame and status. And the education system seems to be promoting this lifestyle where these sorts of people are created through intense competition. I think the very end result of this social and educational system was revealed, and it exploded in an explicit and ugly manner through various problems the Fukushima disaster has posed.

Koide: Yes, I think so. You said it.

Hirano: I see. In one sense it would have been possible even for these Japanese elites to make their personal responsibility clear and take appropriate actions only if they had lived a life based on individualism as you suggested.

Koide: Yes I think such a possibility exists, but unfortunately in Japan today that possibility has been completely crushed. It was abundantly clear from the Fukushima disaster that no one in this country is going to take responsibility.

Hirano: You've already talked about how TEPCO and the government made huge mistakes in dealing with the problem immediately after the accident. What do you see as the definitive mistake that led to this disaster?

Koide: There's a ton of them. Any specialist would have known right away there had been a meltdown, and that everyone needed to be evacuated immediately. And evacuating to 20 km away is totally inadequate. Iitate village some 40-50 km away received an enormous amount of contamination and was neglected for over a month. Soma residents evacuated to Iitate, this kind of stupidity cannot stand, the government's criminal mistakes.



“The Fukushima Nuclear Disaster is a Serious Crime”: Interview with Koide Hiroaki
福島核災害は明らかに深刻な犯罪である—小出裕章氏に聞く
Katsuya Hirano **and** Hirotaka Kasai

<http://apjff.org/2016/06/Hirano.html>

Translation by Robert Stolz
Transcription by Akiko Anson

Introduction

Koide Hiroaki (66) has emerged as an influential voice and a central figure in the anti-nuclear movement since the nuclear meltdown at Fukushima Daiichi of March 11, 2011. He spent his entire career as a nuclear engineer working towards the abolition of nuclear power plants. His powerful critique of the "nuclear village" and active involvement in anti-nuclear movements "earned him an honorable form of purgatory as a permanent assistant professor at Kyoto University."¹ Koide retired from Kyoto University in the spring of 2015, but continues to write and act as an important voice of conscience for many who share his vision of the future free from nuclear energy and weapons. He has authored 20 books on the subject. Professor Kasai Hirotaka and I visited his office at Kyoto University's Research Reactor Institute in Kumatori, Osaka, on December 26th, 2014 for this interview. We believe that the contents of the interview, which offer new information about the degree of radioactive contamination and invaluable insight into

Koide's ethical and political stance as a scientist, remain crucial for our critical reflection on ecological destruction, the violation of human rights, and individual responsibility. Professor Robert Stolz, the translator of this interview and the author of *Bad Water* (Duke University Press, 2015), provides a historical perspective on the interview in a separate article. KH

Interview

The Fukushima Disaster and Government and Corporate Response

Hirano: How does the Fukushima accident compare with the bombing of Hiroshima or Chernobyl in its scale? What are the possible effects of this yet unknown exposure?

Koide: Let's start with the scale of the accident: It was a core meltdown involving the release of various kinds of radioactive material. Radioactive noble gas isotopes were also released, as were iodine, cesium, strontium, and other radioactive material. The noble gas isotopes have a short half-life and so at this stage they are all gone. Iodine, too, is gone. So now four years since the accident the materials that are still a problem are cesium-137, strontium-90, and tritium; really, it's these three.²

Now, as for the scale of the accident, I think it would be best to compare these three radionuclides. Today the main contamination of Japanese soil is the radionuclide cesium-137 [Cs-137 or ¹³⁷Cs]. The ocean is largely contaminated with strontium-90 [Sr-90 or ⁹⁰Sr] and tritium [T or ³H]. Right now the main culprit adding to the exposure of the people in Japan is Cs-137, so I think it's best to use Cs-137 as a standard for measuring the scale of the accident.

But we simply don't know with any precision how much Cs-137 was released. That's because **all the measuring equipment was destroyed at the time of the accident.**

How much Cs-137 was released into the air? How much was spilled in the sea? We just don't know.

Still, the Japanese government has reported estimates to the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency]. According to those estimated levels, reactors 1, 2, and 3 had been in operation on March 11, 2011, and all three suffered meltdowns. Those three reactors released 1.5×10^{16} Becquerels of Cs-137, which would make it a release of 168 times more radioactive material than the Hiroshima bombing. And this is only material released into the atmosphere—at least according to Japanese government estimates.

But I myself think the government's numbers are an underestimate. Various experts and institutes from around the world have offered several of their own estimates. There are those that are lower than the Japanese government's numbers and those that are higher, some two or three times higher than the government's numbers. According to these other estimates I think that the release of Cs-137 into the atmosphere could be around 500 times the Hiroshima bombing.

Now for what has been washed into the sea. That number is likely not much different from the levels released into the atmosphere. Even today we are unable to prevent this release. And so if we combine the amount of Cs-137 released in the air and the ocean together, we get an estimate several hundred times the Hiroshima levels. And some estimates suggest the Fukushima accident could be as much as one-thousand Hiroshimas. Now to compare this with other accidents: The amount released into the atmosphere from the explosion during the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear plant was 800 to 1000 times the Hiroshima levels. Put simply, these estimates place Fukushima on par with

Chernobyl.

Worse than any of these, however, is atmospheric testing. From the 1950s to the 1960s atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons had already released Cs-137 into the air more than sixty times the numbers released even by the Japanese government for Fukushima. Of course Fukushima is an incredible tragedy, but considered from the earth as a whole it is a rather small accident.

Hirano: I want to ask in more detail about the effect of Cs-137 on the human body and the environment.

Koide: Cesium is an alkaline metal. From the human body's perspective, cesium closely resembles potassium. The body contains enormous amounts of potassium. It is essential for humans. It's everywhere in our bodies. Especially our flesh and muscles are full of potassium. And because of this, when cesium is released into the environment, the body deals with cesium as it does with the alkaline metal potassium, which is to say that it is taken into the body and accumulates there.

Strontium is an earth metal. The body treats it like calcium. As you know calcium is a human body building block that accumulates in our bones. Strontium, too, is taken into and collects in the bones. Just as cesium is taken in and is transported to the flesh and muscle.

Hirano: Comparing the releases from nuclear tests by the US and the USSR during the Cold War period, you said that the Fukushima accident was small. So in what way should we think about Fukushima: is it best to consider it a Japanese problem, or to consider it from a global perspective?

Koide: The amount of products of nuclear fission released during atmospheric testing was enormous, and these particles continue to expose humans to radiation. I'm a bit older than you and I recall in my childhood being told not to let the rain fall on me at the time of the testing. In this way everyone on earth has been exposed (*hibaku*/ 被曝). And because of this testing, historically speaking, cancer rates have slowly risen; I believe this increase in cancer is due to the exposure suffered during the atmospheric testing. Now the radioactive material released from Fukushima has been dispersed across the globe and so once again everyone on earth has been exposed to additional radiation. I think we can expect cancer rates to rise once again.

Atmospheric nuclear testing released all of the radioactive material in the explosions, which entered the stratosphere. Between the stratosphere and the troposphere there is the tropopause, and every year come spring all that material dispersed in the stratosphere breaks through the tropopause and falls to earth. So that material, though initially dispersed in the stratosphere, eventually falls to earth evenly, everywhere. Actually, it might not be accurate to say that it falls evenly on the earth. The majority of the testing was done in the temperate regions of the northern hemisphere, such as Nevada and the Semipalatinsk test site [in Kazakhstan], so that the northern hemisphere-as the site of most of the testing-is heavily contaminated, and within that the temperate region is heavily contaminated. Still, I can say the atmospheric testing overall

has caused global contamination.

My focus now is to figure out how to deal with the acute and heavy contamination from Fukushima. I know something needs to be done right there in that specific place. That contamination will disperse and be diffused across the globe. Once dispersed, the amount of radioactive material from Fukushima will be small when compared with the atmospheric testing. Which is not to say it is not harmful. An increase in cancer will be the result. I mention that for humanity as a whole; the atmospheric tests were worse. Now, strontium-90 [Sr-90] has been leaking from Fukushima into the ocean, so it will eventually reach the United States, especially the west coast. This much we are sure of. But to answer your question, the amount of dispersed cesium and strontium released by the atmospheric tests is tens of times greater than the Fukushima levels. Because the west coast of the US is already contaminated from the atmospheric testing, though the dispersed contamination from Fukushima will reach US shores, for people living on the US west coast, the Fukushima accident—and this is perhaps awful to say—contamination from Fukushima is hardly worth considering. Historically a much greater event has already taken place.

Hirano: To put that another way, the current Fukushima accident gives us a chance to reconsider the enormity of the past contamination from US and Soviet atmospheric tests, which has not been openly discussed.

Koide: Yes, that's exactly right. In fact, it is the masses of people who need to realize the impact of the contamination on them. In the case of the Fukushima disaster, for example, they need to be aware that some radioactive material is reaching the North American coast, and the prevailing westerly winds will carry anything released into the atmosphere to the US. Those earlier numbers from the Japanese government indicate that the levels for Cs-137 in the atmosphere are 168 times those of the Hiroshima bombing. I've been told that level is 1.5×10^{16} Becquerels [Bq]. These exponents can be a pain to process, so if we think of it in peta-units—which is 10^{15} —we get essentially 15 petabecquerels [PBq]. That said, while we are not really sure this is the number, we do know that a portion of this material will ride the prevailing winds across the Pacific Ocean. On the other hand, closer to the ground, the winds will be east, south, and north, and therefore this other portion will fall on Japan—and we can investigate the actual levels here: how much fell on this town, on this prefecture? Adding these up, it seems to be only 2.4 PBq. Which is to say of the total fifteen PBq, 2.4, or roughly only 16%, fell on Japanese soil. If the totals are higher, still a smaller share of the total contamination will have fallen on Japan compared with the Pacific, with the largest portion falling on the west coast of the United States. So why don't we hear complaints from the US? Why are there no calls for compensation? Whenever someone asks me this, I simply say that there just aren't any such complaints. Why is this so? Well the levels released by the US during the atmospheric testing were tens of times greater than Fukushima. They are the criminals, so they cannot ask for compensation from Japan. The U.S. government does not want to have to reflect on its own past, and I think they are eager to completely avoid bringing up anything like that conversation. That is why I believe it is so important that those who have been exposed to radioactive contamination realize what atmospheric testing has done to them.

Kasai: I'd like to get back to the moment of the accident in some detail. On March 11, 2011 we had the East Japan Disaster (meaning the earthquake and tsunami off Tohoku). You've

already talked about the string of accidents at the nuclear plant. At the moment the accident was taking place, you were following the response by the Japanese government and the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) in real time. What did you see in those initial moments?

Japan's Nuclear Map and Epicenter of the Earthquakes of 3.11

Koide: It was truly a disastrous response. On the 11th I was in the laboratory in Kyoto as March was my month to work in the radiation-controlled area.³ It was normal workday hours and various tasks kept me busy working within the controlled area. Of course there is no TV or anything like that in the work space. That night there was a meeting so I came out to attend and that's when I saw the images of the Sendai airport being swept away by the tsunami. The report said that there had been a devastating earthquake and tsunami. Then I wondered about the safety of the nuclear plants.

Right then, there really was no more information. We had scheduled a nuclear safety issues seminar for the 18th. I've participated in hundreds of these seminars. Participants from the Ukraine had just arrived on the 11th. We promised to go out drinking after they arrived and so that night I went out. There was no more TV, and while there was a vague unease among us, that's how we spent the time.

The next day I learned that all power at Fukushima had been lost and I knew things were not going to be simple. Then at noon on the 12th the roof of reactor one was blown off; at that point any expert must have known there had been a reactor meltdown. So I was certain of a core meltdown and because once it has gone this far, there is no going back, it was time to call for anyone who could evacuate to do so. I thought we were at that stage on the 12th.

Yet neither the government nor TEPCO said a single word about a core meltdown; they announced that the incident merited a 3 or 4 on the International Nuclear Event Scale. I remember thinking "You've got to be kidding! There's already been a meltdown. This is at least a level 6 or 7." But neither the government nor TEPCO gave any indication of this and there was no word of it in the media either.

One by one there were explosions at reactors 3, 4, and 2. As an expert in nuclear power, I understood there was absolutely nothing that could be done. I thought people needed to be evacuating, but still the Japanese government didn't make the call. Government officials had set up at an off-site center near a power plant in Fukushima—at first they announced evacuation inside two kilometers, then that expanded to three, five, ten, and finally twenty km. After that nothing was done. The offsite center was supposed to coordinate the emergency response in the event of an accident, but it turned out that every one of the officials fled. They left the employees behind and fled. The Japanese government's response was indescribably cruel.

Kasai: It seems the very words "meltdown" (メルtdown) and "core meltdown" (*roshin yōyū*/炉心熔融) were strictly forbidden.

Koide: Exactly.

Kasai: I was in Japan watching on TV. What shocked me was all the nuclear power experts explaining the incident in the studio. I suppose it was a satellite relay, but when reactor number three exploded on our screens they were giving their analyses of the explosion in real time. There were experts on TV saying that the reactor had a blast valve that was used successfully. Even hearing that, an average viewer might think something was amiss. But having physicists, experts on radiation, on TV saying these things, well, even the average viewer wouldn't buy that explanation. In a broad sense, nuclear experts like yourself played several roles in the media and government.

Koide: Yes, that's clearly true for pronuclear experts. They all tended to tell a story that underestimated the accident. Immediately after the accident public announcements and information were restricted. As a result individual opinions or statements were strictly forbidden and nearly all experts remained silent, so even basic information was not broadcast. Though I'd made statements from the nuclear lab beginning on the 12th, it is likely there were instructions from the Ministry of Science and Education to silence me. The head of the lab convened several meetings where he told each of us not to make any statement, that the lab would toe the official line when dealing with the mass media. I thought this was wrong and said that anyone who was asked a question by the media should answer it, further saying that if I were asked a question, I had a responsibility to answer. Since then I've continued to make statements in the media. Still the large majority of nuclear researchers were not able to do this.

As a result it was the pronuclear researchers who monopolized the interpretations - exactly. So as they went to the TV studios I think each was told: "Today, it's your turn to go to the studio." I think that's how they played their part and handled the media.

Kasai: With respect to controlling information, would you say your experience with the head of the nuclear lab shows how the professional organizations exert pressure on the universities?

Koide: Yes, I would. The head of the lab opened a conference with all the other laboratories—even I went. There he said that any statements to the media should be on message and come only from the information office.

Kasai: So pressure came from academic conferences.

Koide: Yes, there was pressure coming from the academic conference side as well. Take for example something like a conference on nuclear power. From the very start it was never a real discussion; it was a meeting of powerful and vocal spokesmen for the nuclear community or village (*genshiryoku kyōdōtai*/原子力共同体 or *genshiryoku mura*/原子力村), which is to say the group of pronuclear government officials and private companies mainly centered around the LDP and Toshiba, Hitachi, Mitsubishi, and other pronuclear manufacturers of power plants—and of course their supporters in the media. Thus as an organization the conference was predisposed to underestimate the accident and to then promote that underestimation.

Hirano: Immediately after the accident you testified in the Diet presenting data indicating the seriousness of the disaster and demanding that the government terminate the operation of all the power plants.⁴

Koide: I did.

Hirano: After that it seems you weren't again asked to speak publicly, or given the opportunity to offer more detailed thoughts on the situation.

Koide: By "speak publicly" you mean in the Diet or in some other official government setting?

Hirano: Yes, and also in the media.

Koide: With respect to the media, I've never really had any confidence in them. Since the accident, I've been overwhelmingly busy and haven't accepted a single invitation from TV stations.

Hirano: I see. So there were invitations.

Koide: There have been many calls saying, "come down to the studio." But I always tell them that I am too busy for this sort of thing. I'd say, if you come to my office, we could meet. Many did come by, even back then. But as everyone knows, in television you might talk for an hour and none of it makes it on air, or if it does, it's maybe thirty seconds.

Hirano: Right, and only the convenient parts.

Koide: That's it and there's really nothing that can be done about it. There was, however, one outlet for which I was extremely grateful: the daily radio program called Tanemaki Journal (種まきジャーナル).⁵ There I could go on every day and offer my thoughts live. I wish it could have continued, but it was completely and totally smashed. What a world we live.

Kasai: So, on the subject of standards used for assessing the danger posed by radiation for the human body and the environment: What are your thoughts on how the government deals with this issue?

Koide: They are absolutely not dealing with it at all. I think you already know this but in Japan the average person is not supposed to be exposed to more than one milliSievert per year—that's set by law. Why is that the level decided on? Because exposure to radiation is dangerous. If exposure weren't dangerous, if low levels of exposure were safe, there'd be no problem even without that legal limit. But exposure to radiation is dangerous—this is the conclusion of all research. So every nation in the world has set legal limits for exposure.

For people like me who get paid to work with radiation, it's not really possible to observe the 1mSv/yr limit [1mSv/yr]. We're told that in exchange for our salaries, we accept exposure to twenty milliSieverts a year. That's the standard I work under in my job. But the current Japanese government has now stated that if contamination is under 20mSv/yr somewhere, that place is safe to return to—safe to return to even for children. This is way beyond common sense.

Hirano: What is the basis of this claim? Why would the government announce these numbers and forcefully declare these areas safe to return to? What's the basis for the government's numbers?

Koide: The basis for those numbers...for example the government says that organizations like the IAEA or the ICRP [International Commission on Radiological Protection] suggest that in emergencies during which the 1mSv/yr standard cannot be maintained standards should be set between twenty and 100mSv/yr. The government seizes on this and declares that since the IAEA and the ICRP have said this, that 20mSv/yr is therefore a safe level—usually adding that membership in both the IAEA and the ICRP is voluntary anyway. But because these organizations have said this is no reason to break Japanese law. If Japan is a nation governed by the rule of law at all, surely this means that the very people who make the laws should also follow them—that should be obvious. But these guys have

declared 20mSv/yr safe even for children. There is absolutely no way I can consent to this.

Hirano: So there is no scientific basis for these levels.

Koide: Well... the danger corresponds to the amount of exposure—you probably know this—so for a country that has declared its intention to maintain the 1mSv/yr standard to then turn around and ask people to endure twenty times that level, there is no scientific basis for that declaration. That's a social decision.

But if you want to inquire as to why, as I've mentioned to you, some 2.4 petaBecquerels of radioactive material have fallen on Japan, that material has been dispersed, contaminating Tohoku, Kanto, and western Japan. So in addition to the law setting the legal limit for exposure at 1mSv/yr, there is another law that states that absolutely nothing may be removed from a radioactive management area in which the levels exceed 40,000 Becquerels per square meter.

So the question becomes how many places or how much area has been contaminated beyond 40,000 Bq/m²? And according to the investigations, that answer is 140,000 km². The entirety of Fukushima prefecture has been contaminated to where all of it must be declared a radioactivity management area. Indeed, while centered on Fukushima, parts of Chiba and Tokyo have also been contaminated. The number of people living in what must be called a radiation-controlled area is in the millions, and could exceed ten million.

For me, if Japan is in fact a nation governed by the rule of law, I believe the government has the responsibility to evacuate these entire communities. Instead of taking a proper action to secure people's livelihood, the government decided to leave them exposed to the real danger of radiation. In my view, Fukushima should be declared uninhabitable and the government and TEPCO should bear a legal responsibility for the people displaced and dispossessed by the nuclear disaster. That's what I think, but if that were to be done, it would likely bankrupt the country. I think that even though it could bankrupt Japan, the government should have carried out the evacuation to set an example of what the government is supposed to do. But obviously those in and around the LDP certainly didn't agree. They've decided to sacrifice people and get by taking on as little burden as possible. So they've made the social decision to force people to endure their exposure. In my view, this is a serious crime committed by Japan's ruling elite.

I would like people to know just how many thousands of people live in this abnormal situation where even nuclear scientists like me are not allowed to enter, not to mention, drink the water. It is strange that this issue has been left out of all debate over the effects of the radioactive exposure. We must be aware that contemporary Japan continues to operate outside the law in abandoning these people to their fate by saying it's an extraordinary situation. Under such circumstances, I think, there are a multitude of symptoms of illnesses in contaminated areas. But if we're talking about any given symptom, it's hard to say since we just don't have any good epidemiological studies, or even any good data. But there will surely be symptoms, namely cancer and leukemia. However little exposure to radiation is, it causes cancer and leukemia—this is the conclusion of all current science. These symptoms are said to become visible 5 years after the initial exposure. But because radiation is not the sole cause of cancer or leukemia establishing a direct causal relationship is extremely difficult. For this very reason we need to continue to investigate the state of exposure by conducting rigorous

epidemiological studies. But this government wishes instead to hide the damage so I'm afraid no such study is on the horizon. In addition, I have heard about many cases of nose bleeding, severe headaches, and extreme exhaustion. And I am truly concerned about small children and young people living in Fukushima as they are most vulnerable to exposure.

Hirano: So what is your view of the actual damages of radiation exposure on human health?

Koide: On the evening of the Fukushima dai-ichi reactor accident of March 11, 2011, a Radiation Emergency Declaration was announced. The Declaration suspended existing Japanese law concerning exposure to radiation. Though Japanese law sets the limit for exposure for the general population at one milliSievert a year [1mSv/yr], the new permissible level would be 20 mSv/yr. That Emergency Declaration is still in effect. It is common knowledge that even low levels of exposure are dangerous. Including even infants in this newly imposed 20mSv/yr standard will obviously lead to various diseases. Further, because the monitoring equipment was destroyed at the time of the accident we do not have accurate data on the exposure levels of the residents. Numerous cases of thyroid cancer have been found. The prevalence of thyroid cancer is dozens of times that of normal incidence. Pro-nuclear groups say those numbers are the result of the screening process itself, not the effect of radiation exposure. Which is to say that this was the first major screening of that population and so it was natural that many cases of thyroid cancer would be found. Put differently, what they are saying is that they have never conducted a thorough study of radiation exposure and its impact on human health. Science should acknowledge what it already knows and what it does not. If it is true that there is no established scientific data, a properly scientific approach would be to carry out a thorough investigation. To deny the damage to health by exposure to radiation without such an investigation is absolutely at odds with the scientific spirit. Prof. Tsuda at Okayama University has already conducted a detailed study on the outbreak of thyroid cancer, showing an epidemiological-like outbreak. Just as happened at Chernobyl, as time passes it is clear there will be more and more instances of all kinds of illnesses.

Hirano: In your books you've often stated that there is no uncontaminated food. But for most Japanese, such basic knowledge seems limited to food from Fukushima, and nearby parts of Ibaraki, Gumma, Chiba, Miyagi. For food produced outside these areas, do you think it's necessary to have strict testing of food that is sold and consumed? What is to be done? Do you think food from outside these areas should also be subject to strict testing before being sent to market and consumed?

Koide: Right, as we discussed earlier, before the Fukushima accident the entire globe was already contaminated with radiation. This means that Tohoku or Kanto or Kansai food, all of it, has been contaminated with radiation—radiation from atmospheric tests. Beyond this, contamination from the 1986 Chernobyl accident reached Japan on the prevailing westerly winds, meaning that all Japanese food was contaminated. And on top of all this, with the Fukushima disaster, as I mentioned, it is not that a thick layer of contamination has dispersed to every corner of the globe from Fukushima, but that this thick layer of contamination is right now centered on Fukushima.

So if we were to carefully measure the levels of food contamination, we'd more or less find moving out from the highest levels in Fukushima to say western Japan or Kyushu,

that the numbers would gradually decline to the lower levels received from the atmospheric tests. Right now the people of Fukushima have been abandoned in the areas of the highest levels of radiation. And abandoned people have to find a way to live. Farmers produce agricultural goods, dairy farmers produce dairy products, and ranchers produce meat; these people must do so in order to live. They are not the ones to be blamed at all.

As the Japanese state is absolutely unreliable in this matter, these people have no choice but to go on producing food in that place, all the while suffering further exposure. So I don't think we can throw out the food they produce there under those conditions. Inevitably someone has to consume that food—I suggest it be fed to the pronuclear lobby (laughs). We should serve all of the most heavily contaminated food at say the employee cafeteria at TEPCO or in the cafeteria for Diet members in the Diet building. But that isn't nearly enough. We must carefully inspect the food, and once we've determined what foods have what levels of contamination, once that is fully measured and delineated, then those who have the corresponding levels of responsibility should eat it, should be given it. Now of course strict levels of responsibility cannot really be allotted one by one to individuals that way, so when it comes to this food, I would propose devising a "60 and over" system. The most contaminated foods could only be eaten by those 60 years old and older, and from there also have food for "50 and over," "40 and over," "30 and over" - giving the best food to children. For example, school lunches would get the most uncontaminated food available—there'd still be contamination from the atmospheric tests—but food with only those levels would be given to children and only adults would receive the contaminated food. That would be my proposal.

My proposal would first be a precise measurement, starting from Fukushima and then of course including western Japan and Kyushu, to sort out the levels and then determine the relative burdens. I am aware that this is a controversial proposal, but each one of us, especially those who built postwar Japan, bears responsibility for allowing our society to be heavily dependent on nuclear energy without carefully reflecting on the risks and consequences of it. And more importantly, we have the responsibility for protecting children.

Kasai: Recently, that idea has been suggested in Nishio Masamichi's *Radioactive Archipelago* (*Hibaku retto*/ 『被ばく列島』). You've just stressed that though the first step must be a rigorous measurement, right now that is simply impossible.

Koide: Right, completely impossible.

Kasai: So, that's true of water as well. First I don't think most people know how to measure the levels in water. You've already said how the current minimum standards are worthless, that below a certain threshold it would be displayed as "ND" (Not Detectable). For example, for tap water, up to 20 Becquerels would be posted as "ND," exactly as if there was no radiation detected at all. Yet even with all these doubts on measurement, we must start with it, though it's a dizzyingly long road ahead. But what do you think can be done to change this situation for the better?

Koide: Right now Japan has a standard of 100Bq/kg for general foodstuffs. Before the Fukushima disaster, Japanese foodstuffs were contaminated—by the atmospheric tests—at a level of 0.1Bq/kg. Of course there were some foods with less contamination and some with more. Still, roughly speaking it was 0.1Bq/kg. So when you're talking 100

Bq/kg that's allowing 1,000 times the [pre-Fukushima] levels.

As I said before, any exposure is absolutely dangerous. And the dangers increase corresponding to an increase in levels of exposure; this is the conclusion of all research. 100 Bq/kg is dangerous, 99 is dangerous, as is 90, and 50, and 10—they are all dangerous. 10 Bq/kg is 100 times the pre-Fukushima levels.

So I think it's necessary to precisely measure the levels of contamination. As many people are living in a state of anxiety, groups like consumers' cooperatives and other sorts of organizations are trying to measure the contamination on their own. But the measuring devices that these groups are able to get, such as the ones called NAI, these devices can only measure levels above 20Bq/kg. While this means that they can measure levels as little as one-fifth of the national thresholds, from my perspective even this lower level is far too high.

And the worst thing that could happen is thinking that any contamination below the detectable limits of these machines, meaning below 20Bq/kg, would be misunderstood as being free of contamination, and then having the Fukushima prefectural government actively using this data as good news: "measurements below the detectable limits of the device must be clean; we can even serve this food in school cafeterias," or PR campaigns announcing "Fukushima produce is safe." Of course it would be totally outrageous and unthinkable and yes I think every effort should be made to serve the least contaminated food in school cafeterias—but the reality is that any food tested below detectable levels is distributed to schools as safe produce.

I think we need to stop this situation, and technically speaking, I think several germanium semiconductor detectors must be deployed instead. But a germanium detector would cost from \$100,000 to \$200,000. And in order to use it, the detector needs to be kept at 150 degree below zero Celsius. So these are not devices that the average citizen is going to be able to use.

So no matter how dedicated any individual citizen may be, there are real limitations when it comes to measuring radiation levels. If you ask me what should be done, for example when faced with Cs-137 or Sr-90, what should be done about these contaminants? Well these contaminants were produced in a nuclear reactor at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi plant and it means that they are unmistakably TEPCO's property. And if their private property is found to have contaminated other areas they have undeniable responsibility for it. So I think this is something that is required of TEPCO. I think it is TEPCO's responsibility to precisely measure which foods have been contaminated, and to what extent, and then to report the results to the public. I think this is something the public should demand. After TEPCO the government also has responsibility—they gave their seal of approval to TEPCO after all. So the public should also demand that the government precisely measure the levels and publish the results.

Because there are limits to what one can do on one's own, I think we need a movement that forces the government and TEPCO to take responsibility for the precise measurement of the contamination.

Hirano: Some have raised doubts over precisely this kind of rigorous measurement citing possible damage caused by rumors or misinformation (*fūhyōhigai*/風評被害), but to me this sort of criticism is tainted with a sort of "national morality" discourse (*kokumin dōtokuron*/国民道徳論).

Koide: Yes, I think so.

Hirano: There seems to be a very strong sense of dividing people into those who are seen as patriotic and those who are seen as un-Japanese (*hikokumin*/非国民).

Koide: For me, I've been making statements on the Fukushima contamination. These statements have been denounced and even made some angry with me. But the contamination is real. For a long time now I've been the kind of person who would rather hear the truth, no matter how awful, than to remain ignorant. I am absolutely not going to hide the truth; no matter how much criticism I have to take I am going to diligently report the truth. Yeah, a lot of people get angry with me. (Laughs).

Kasai: On this point, this year saw the publishing of Kariya Tetsu's manga series *Oi shinbo: Fukushima no shinjitsu* (『美味しんぼ – 福島の実』).⁶ It would seem a kind of political campaign was developed to attack it. What is your take on this?

Koide: The editors sent me a copy and I've read it. It's an awesome manga. In this day and age we just don't have this kind of detailed manga on this problem and I am grateful for it. And more, *Oi shinbo* talks about the nosebleeds [caused by radiation]. The nosebleeds are real. Lots of Fukushima residents are said to be suffering from nosebleeds. Itokawa, the mayor of Futaba machi, has shown us proof. One of my acquaintances often talks about the nosebleeds.

It was true at Chernobyl, too. But nosebleeds have not been definitively and scientifically linked to exposure to radiation.⁷ Still there is no denying that it is real and happening. So even if current science is unable to explain it, it's for science to ask just what is going on? Science has a duty to explain this, to tell the truth without obfuscation. No matter the reasons, we should be allowed to tell the truth. So for me I don't think there is anything wrong with this part of *Oi shinbo*.

Kasai: I think *Oi shinbo* clearly exposed the politically constructed narratives "damage from rumor or misinformation" and "emotional bonds" (*kizuna*/絆) as fictions, and so for this reason it appears it had to be crushed.

Koide: Exactly. But Kariya, the author of *Oi shinbo*, is not one of the criminals responsible for the Fukushima disaster. Rather the government officials who caused the Fukushima disaster are the criminals. Yet it is these same government bureaucrats who now come out and complain that this manga is out of order. I say, "No, it's you who are out of order. We need to send you to prison right now."

But isn't it always the case that a criminal who has committed a crime remains unquestioned and so starts bashing those who are telling the truth? When that happens I think the problem is precisely this word you just used "emotional bonds." Since Fukushima, I have come to hate this word. (Laughs).

Hirano: "Bonds" seems to be the new nationalism, doesn't it?

Koide: Yes, yes it does.

Hirano: You've often said that the Japanese economy and the people's lifestyle would be fine even without a single nuclear power plant. In fact, since the government shut all the nuclear reactors down, the people have experienced no real trouble at all. In addition, considered in light of world standards we still have material riches and a lifestyle of surplus. Given this, what are your thoughts on the call to restart the reactors? For what purpose, what reason do you think the government has?⁸

Koide: First of all, the power companies don't want to go bankrupt. In other words, the

heads of the power companies do not want to take personal responsibility. For example, if the reactors are restarted and there's an accident, are the heads of the power companies going to be punished? We already know that they will not be. Even after the Fukushima disaster neither the chairman, nor the CEO, nor anyone below—not a single person—was punished.⁹ It certainly looks as if the reactors are restarted and there's an accident, the heads of the power companies would not be required to take any responsibility. The heads of the power companies, from Kyushu Electric to Kansai Electric, have received this message loud and clear.

What's more, if the nuclear power plants are idled and not allowed to restart, then all the capital they represent becomes a non-performing asset. And of course this is anathema to anyone in management.

Hirano: If we could return to a technical discussion specifically how to decommission a reactor. As have others in your field you've already stated that a full end game cannot be envisioned yet. Still could you talk about what makes this issue so difficult?

Koide: By decommissioning you mean the endpoint of the Fukushima reactors?

Hirano: Yes, what does it mean for Fukushima dai-ichi?

Koide: When we say decommission we basically mean: How do we fully contain the radiation? At least I think that's the main point. Now this is impossible if we don't know the status of the melted core. Though it's been four years since the disaster we simply do not know where the core is or in what state it is.

This is a situation that only happens in nuclear accidents. However large a chemical plant explosion may be there'd probably be an initial fire, but usually after several days, perhaps weeks you'd still be able to go on site and investigate. You'd be able to see just how things broke down. And in some situations might even be able to fix them. But with an accident at a nuclear plant you cannot even go on site four years later—probably not even ten years later.

Hirano: Because the contamination is so severe that no one can come close to it.

Koide: Yes. For humans going there means instant death, so the only way at all is to use robots. But robots are extremely vulnerable to radiation. Consider, robots receive their instructions through series of 1s and 0s, so should the radiation switch a 0 to a 1 you'd end up with completely different instructions. Essentially robots are useless. Even if you are able to send them in they can never return. Because this has been the case up to now, the only way left in the end might be to use robots that try to avoid exposure or that are built as much as possible to withstand exposure, but that is no simple thing.

So it means until we figure out what to do it would still take many years. Once you understand this fact you can start thinking about what can be done. And at the very least the "road map" devised by the government and TEPCO is the most absolutely optimistic road map that there could be. They are convinced that the melted core fell through the bottom of the pressure vessel and now lie at the bottom of the containment vessel—basically piling up like nuggets of the melted core. There's no way this would be the case. (Laughs).

As the severity of the disaster became clear, water was repeatedly thrown on the reactors. This water would evaporate and dissipate continuously. That was the actual situation. There is no way that the melted core would have stayed as slimy liquid and then piled up like so many little nuggets. It should have been scattered all over the place.

This is how the government and TEPCO's roadmap goes: The buns would stay at the bottom of the containment vessel, above which is the reactor pressure vessel—a steel pressure furnace. With the furnace floor broken open, there is a hollow at the bottom through which the melted core must have leaked.

So at some point both the containment vessel and the pressure vessel would be filled with water and they'll be able to see the nuggets of melted core by looking from above down into the water. They say the nuggets (the fallen material), yes, that they sit some thirty to forty meters below the water's surface, that they'll eventually be able to grab and remove them. This is all it takes, according to the government and TEPCO's roadmap. Not a chance. This simply cannot be done.

Hirano: Obviously we can't confirm or really say anything definitive about the situation in the reactors, but what do you think has happened?

Koide: I simply don't know. But as I have mentioned, this whole "nugget" scenario is just not the case, and so I think the materials are scattered all over the place. Though the containment vessel is made of steel, if the melted core has come in contact with that steel, just as it ate through the floor of the pressure vessel, it could possibly have melted through the containment vessel. Depending on how things developed this, too, is a possibility. Unfortunately, I simply do not know.

Hirano: If that is in fact the situation, what steps are necessary?

Koide: First, as we talked about earlier, radiation must be prevented from being released into the environment. As I consider this task as "decommissioning" or the final containment of the accident, I think in order to prevent the release into the environment you must do whatever you can starting from the worst-case scenario.

There are situations in which the containment vessel can suffer a melt-through. I think this likely has already happened. And if it has happened what should be done? Outside the reactor there flows ground water. If the melted core were to come in contact with the ground water, the whole situation would be unmanageable. While this may have already have happened, in order to get any kind of control over the situation, some sort of barrier must be built to prevent the melted core from reaching the ground water. I've been saying this since May 2011—and they have not done a thing.

Kasai: This barrier would be an ice dam, a wall of super-chilled soil.

Koide: That's the most recent idea. But it simply cannot be done successfully. It would cost billions of dollars. And it would fail. And when it did fail they'd say there's nothing to be done but build a concrete wall. No matter how foolish an idea may be, they'll just keep moving from failure to failure.

But really, for the construction companies that's a good thing. I think Kashima would be the ones to build the super-chilled earth wall, for some billions of dollars. And if it doesn't work—they wouldn't have to take responsibility. Next they'd build an impermeable concrete wall. Several huge construction firms (*zenekon*/ゼネコン) would be contracted and would all make billions.

But considered from the perspective of actually ending the disaster, it would be a series of failures. Personally, I think an underground, impermeable wall needs to be built immediately. They are not going to be able to remove the material. All that can be done is to contain it. Underground the wall needs to be strengthened; above ground the only choice is some sort of sarcophagus like the one they built over Chernobyl. But even this

would take dozens of years—I'll probably be dead by then.

Kasai: There are temporary tanks sitting on land for this water, but they are starting to leak. What should be done about this contaminated water? There's not enough space for all of it on land; it cannot be controlled; and every year the volume grows larger.

Koide: The radioactive water has penetrated the coastline around the Fukushima Daiichi. Underground water in the large area of Fukushima has been seriously contaminated. And at some point those contaminated water tanks will fail. I thought we must do everything that we possibly could. Already in March of 2011 there was some 100,000 tons of contaminated water. Even then I proposed moving it but didn't get anywhere with it. Now there's up-to 400,000 tons. In the near—meaning not too distant—future there will be nothing left but to release it into the sea.¹⁰ The water contains plutonium 239 and its release into the Ocean has both local and global impacts. A microgram of plutonium can cause death if inhaled.

Contaminated Water Tanks

Kasai: It appears that they are already moving toward that direction a little at a time aren't they.

Koide: The Nuclear Regulatory Committee has been hinting at the possibility of releasing it into the ocean.

Kasai: They have been trying to persuade the fishing cooperatives and others to allow the release.

Koide: Yes, they have.

Kasai: Something that has not been much of a topic of discussion today is decontamination. It has become a rather large industry, in other words, "the exposure industry" (*hibaku sangyō*/被曝産業). Do you think decontamination is really meaningful and effective?

Koide: Yes, I do. And we must do it. But, to say that because we've decontaminated some area that the whole issue is resolved, or that people may safely live in a decontaminated place—I think that is a real problem.

First, fundamentally, people must not be forced to live in contaminated areas that must be decontaminated. First must come complete evacuation. The state must take on the responsibility to allow whole communities to evacuate. Of course, they did not do this.

Briefly, I use the word "decontamination" (*josen*/除染), which is a compound word written with the characters for "remove" and "stain." But this is something that cannot be completed when it comes to radiation, so the original sense of the word "removal of contaminants" is impossible. But as long as people are abandoned in the contaminated areas, I believe all possible actions should be taken to lessen their exposure. It is essential that the contamination be removed as far away as possible, to be transported far from where people live. For this reason I prefer to call it "[toxic] relocation" (*isen*/移染).

But even if this is done, that does not mean that the radiation has been erased. This stuff contaminates everything from mountains to what have you, it gets into the space of people's lives. When that happens it must be removed. But removal merely means

moving it around—it does not mean eliminating it. It means another job is waiting to handle the contaminated materials that get moved around.

Right now the authorities say they want various prefectures and other local governments to build a temporary storage and bury the accumulated contamination there.

We talked about this before, but the contaminants themselves were clearly formerly in the reactor at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi plant and are therefore also clearly TEPCO's property. So while it is residents who are doing the hard work of collecting all these contaminants, I think it would be right and just for these contaminants to be returned to TEPCO. Earlier prof. Kasai told us the contaminants were being called "no-one's property" (*mushubutsu*/無主物), but I say in all seriousness, the conclusion of my logic here is to say to TEPCO: "Hey, this is your crap" and return it to them. That way the residents are not forced to accept the stuff, TEPCO is. The best solution is to return all of the material back to the Fukushima Daiichi plant, but that is not possible. Right now that place is a battlefield between poorly paid workers and the radiation, so I don't see this as a possibility.

What I would most like to do is have TEPCO's headquarters buried under all the radiation, but whenever I say this people just laugh. (laughs)

I do have a second proposal. Fifteen kilometers south of Fukushima Daiichi [Fukushima 1] is the Fukushima dai-ni [Fukushima 2] nuclear plant. There is a lot of wide open space there. So first off we would return the Fukushima 1 contamination to TEPCO there. I think there would be enough space, but if there were not, the rest could be taken to TEPCO's Kashiwazaki Kariya nuclear plant. It's the world's largest nuclear plant and so there is a lot of space. I think turning that place into a nuclear waste site is a good idea.

Lately I've been invited to Kashiwazaki¹¹ and talked about it. I think I've become a hated man there. (Laughs). But I think taking full responsibility for various actions is the most important thing. And when it comes to this particular disaster no one has greater responsibility than TEPCO. As I think it important for one to take full responsibility, if Fukushima 2 doesn't work out, then Kashiwazaki Kariya is the only other option.

Hirano: State expenditures for decontamination have supposedly reached one trillion yen.

Koide: It's more than that.

Hirano: This summer I spent some time in Iitate village. Of course at the time the place was crawling with decontamination workers. It was a truly bizarre scene. I had the feeling of running around on a moonscape. Of course there were no residents there—just decontamination workers in strange gear, trucks running all over the place. Looking at that scene, being shown the actual work of decontamination, it seemed to be an excruciatingly slow—even endless—endeavor. I mean they were scrubbing everything with small brushes. I was able to ask the workers a few questions—off the record. Many were people from Hokkaido, Okinawa, and Fukushima who had lost their homes. It was a collection of modern day migrant workers and victims of disaster. They said that they work for just 15,000 yen a day.

I asked them if they thought their work was doing any good. They said they needed the money and honestly had no way of knowing if this sort of minute and delicate work would remove the contamination.

Was this a mistake? Is scrubbing everything by hand and then dumping it all in the ground really the only way to decontaminate an area?

Decontamination Workers

Koide: Well I think both that it is and it isn't effective. For example, when they first started the decontamination work, what they did was blasting everything with high-pressure water hoses. That's bad. All that does is get all the contamination moving around. It's really just dispersing it.

Some of my colleagues have said that is a bad method. Be it a roof or a wall, you shouldn't just douse it with water. To really remove the contamination, you would first cover it with something that could prevent the escape of radioactivity then knock down the radiated structure, tear it all off, and then fold it up and collect it all. I think that's probably true. But it takes a long time.

I think there are effective ways of doing it and I think there are ineffective ways. Still it is fundamentally impossible to erase the contamination and so it must be moved. The only thing we should be doing is thinking about the easiest way to relocate it all.

Hirano: That's the meaning of "effective" in this situation isn't it.

Koide: Right. So the current method may be rather small in scale. But for me even small-scale methods are necessary. As long as people are living there everything is necessary. Of course, there's legitimate criticism over the fact that this is a decontamination business and that the large construction companies are getting rich, but again, for me, as long as there are abandoned people still living there it all must be done.

Hirano: It was really a shock going there and seeing it. To see those workers and, honestly, their lack of conviction for the work. It was a really weird scene. No real enthusiasm, but rather one day after the other, contingent labor. The media has reported that the workers come from a few particular prefectures, but actually being there and talking to them, I could really get a true sense of the structure of economic inequality in Japan, that this sort of work found this kind of person, a person coming from economically precarious and socially marginalized backgrounds. In fact, you come to understand that decontamination work depends on these people.

For example, decontamination, or your preferred "relocation," couldn't those jobs be made more equitable—say by requiring TEPCO office workers, especially executives, to do it?

Koide: I've said that.

Hirano: You have? (Laughs).

Kasai: So...about the airborne radiation dosage and the soil contamination, there is a public entity that measures and publishes the airborne levels. But the soil contamination is not measured. I remember reading about Chernobyl that the soil contamination levels are the standard by which one gets the right to evacuation and refuge. But Japan only

measures the air. And there are those who doubt the accuracy of the levels recorded. I thought the soil contamination had not been measured yet, but from what you mentioned earlier, we do know the extent of the contamination, don't we?

Koide: Yes, we do.

Kasai: The actual levels?

Koide: With respect to soil contamination we more or less know the extent of it. We largely know which prefectures, which towns, and which villages—as well as how badly—have been contaminated. Four years after the disaster it has moved around. Radiation moves through the environment; it has a material existence and also does die out. I'm sure much has changed since immediately following the accident. We have the data necessary to draw a map of the situation immediately following the accident, but we don't have the data necessary to draw a map of the contamination today. That said, we basically know the extent of the soil contamination.

Kasai: Who is it that is making these measurements?

Koide: It is basically the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Some local governments took part as well. Some independent groups, as well as some local governments, took part in taking measurements back then. But for us the number one data source is the US military.

Hirano: I see; how is that?

Koide: They worked at truly amazing speed-and accuracy.

Hirano: Sorry if this next thought seems a bit of a tangent, but right after the accident both the US and Japan were looking at the same data. But their interpretations of it were extremely far apart. The US ordered all of its personnel to evacuate an area 80 km from Fukushima. While Japan's largest evacuation zone was 20 km. Where does this disparity in evacuation zones come from? They are both looking at the same data. How do they arrive at such definitive and divergent judgments?

Koide: Well...and this was true for me, too, any nuclear specialist would have known on March 11th-March 12th at the latest-that there had been a meltdown. And this means, quite simply, that control had been lost. And once control is lost you simply don't know what is going to happen next-or that's what you must think at the time. Disaster preparedness must always imagine the worst-case scenario. If you don't plan for the worst-case scenario it will be too late. What the US did was believe there had been a worst-case scenario-a meltdown-and so moved to take care of its people. That's why they ordered an 80 km evacuation. I think this was the correct strategy. Japan didn't do this. Japan was always thinking of the ideal, the best case scenario. They had to be thinking they could still get control and based their policy on that optimistic assumption. So they only declared a 20 km evacuation zone. I would say that from this conclusion two things may unfold: one is their desire to see this as a best-case scenario and the other is their inability to deal with it.

Hirano: What do you mean by their inability?

Bags containing contaminated soil. This apocalyptic scene extends infinitely in the villages near the Fukushima dai-ichi

Koide: In a word, the Japanese state is incapable of functioning adequately when dealing with a disaster. That's why they evacuated those within 20 km by bus but when it came to the 30 km zone they told those who could easily evacuate to do so and for all others to merely close their doors and windows.

Hirano: So there was no emergency management.

Koide: None. There simply is not a single person in the Japanese government who had thought an accident like this was possible. They all immediately fled the off-site center and so there was absolutely no emergency management—there couldn't be. And because management was now impossible, there were no announcements. Even if they had declared an 80 km evacuation zone there were no emergency shelters. They had made no preparations, so there was nothing to be done.

Hirano: Last summer I interviewed Murakami Tetsuya¹² Just as the accident was happening he reached out to the government. But he got no response. He went to the prefecture. No response from them either. In the end he just used his own judgment. So really there was essentially zero emergency management in place. His thoughts at the time were to get the whole village to emigrate; that really there was nothing to do but to buy land and move to Hokkaido. He said these were his actual plans at the time. In fact, it would seem that the myth of safety has so totally permeated the bureaucracy that there really is no one who thinks about these things—wouldn't you say?

Koide: That's right. Not a single nuclear expert or policy maker ever seriously considered the possibility of an accident like this. I knew accidents were possible, and that when they happened the damage would be enormous; I had been commenting on the possibility, referring to some results of simulations. But still I would have thought the kind of disaster that happened at Fukushima was some kind of impossible nightmare—yet it actually happened. It was like the worse nightmare becoming a reality. And if even I thought this then all those pronuclear people surely never gave it a moment's thought. And so when it actually happened, no one had thought about, let alone built a system to deal with it.

II The Responsibility of the Scientist and the Citizen

Kasai: In your books and lectures you often express strong respect for Tanaka Shōzō.¹³ Can you connect what you've just said to this as well?

Koide: Sure. I first became aware of Shōzō when I was in the student movement during the 1970s This was a time when there was close attention paid to Japan's many pollution incidents, such as at Minamata. Personally I was working on nuclear power, but it was a time when, like it or not, we learned of all the harm that came along with building Japan into a modern nation. What I got from Shōzō was this epiphany that just like the Minamata disease right there before our eyes these sorts of pollution incidents went way back in Japanese history. With Japan's decision to cast off Asia and follow the West after the Meiji Ishin of 1868 came these sorts of incidents, and the question within that was just how should one live? I learned the way Shōzō lived his life. I thought: Wow, it is possible to live that way; I must do it. Unfortunately I am completely unable to do so, but I

never stop thinking that Shōzō's was a wonderful way to live a life.

Hirano: Going back to an earlier discussion. You've repeatedly talked about the government's responsibility, scientists' responsibility, and individual responsibility. It would seem that this word "responsibility" is an extremely important keyword for you. You often emphasize it in your writing, too. What I want to ask concerns the issue of scientists' special responsibility, a particular social responsibility. Scientists are often thought of as technicians, but this is not really the case. As a result, I feel you've pursued an intense interrogation of yourself as a scientist. As you've said you are not going to enter politics, could you connect this discussion of scientific responsibility to your earlier discussion of doing all that has fallen to you personally to do? How should we think about these two things?

Koide: I am in science and as such I have to take on the responsibility of a scientist—Just as a politician must take political responsibility. I think I mentioned this to you the last time, but I am an absolute individualist (*tetteiteki na kojinhugisha*/徹底的な個人主義者). I don't want to be constrained by anyone. I want to be able to decide my own life for myself. But because I've made this choice by myself I must also take full responsibility for that choice.

It's two sides of the same coin. I don't take orders from anyone. And this means that I alone bear the responsibility. It's really as simple as saying: I'm a scientist and so I have the responsibility of a scientist.

Hirano: On this way of thinking about responsibility: "Who is the subject responsible?"—this way of thinking about it seems to be quite absent in contemporary Japan.

Koide: Right. People living in Japan today have not made decisions as individuals. They just "go with the flow;" as long as they follow the "authorities" whom they believe will guarantee the happiness of their individual selves. This seems true of education, too. Go to a slightly better school; get into a slightly better company; grow a bit more rich, a bit more grand. I think everyone is swept up in this current, and it's really senseless.

I think it is extremely important that each and every individual live out their individuality. The absolute worst thing is for everyone to become blindly obedient to the "authorities," yet this is the Japan we find ourselves in today. And so no one takes any responsibility. Living in such a society it is too easy to say, "It can't be helped." Everyone is thus able to blame the society as a whole; "It can't be helped." And so no one takes any individual responsibility.

The most extreme and obvious example was the war. Everyone would say: "It's not my fault; I was deceived. The military were the culprits." Saying this allows people to remain at a distance, indifferent. It is bad news for a nation when its citizens have only this view of responsibility.

Hirano: You've declared, "I am an absolute individualist." Personally I am very interested in that statement. So could you speak a bit more concretely about the meaning of your individualism for how one lives a life? In other words, could you explain just what you mean by this "individualism?"

That is, in Japan being individualistic is more often a way to say egotistical; a sort of disregard of others. One should pursue one's own interests—in English the word is "selfish" — egocentric — pursue your own egotistic advantage. Now this seems completely

different from the way you use the term. Could you speak directly to this difference?

Koide: I think you've just done so.

Hirano: Did I? (Laughs). So that's it then, just as I said? Still it's clearly not selfishness.

Koide: No, I don't think it's about interests.

Hirano: It's about values isn't it?

Koide: Yes, it's about personal values. You and I are different people. I am different again from Mr. Kasai. Why? Well our genetic information is different. I received a bundle of information from my parents. You and Mr. Kasai, too, are influenced by your genetic information. Every one of the over one hundred million Japanese is a unique human being; and every one of the over 7.3 billion people on earth are unique individuals. History may keep moving on, and there is a big, wide world here on this planet earth. That said, right now, at this moment, and right now, in this place, I exist as an irreplaceable being. It is nothing but an absolute truth. You normally live in Los Angeles, but right now at this moment you are a person who is here. Mr. Kasai has come down from Tokyo. While acknowledging all the implications of being within the flow of history, we are all right here, right now.

In other words, every single individual human being has a different way of living a life; they are each unique. They have each lived a life that absolutely no one else could have lived. It is a real loss if they don't live up to their full potential. Those are my thoughts. So for my own unique self, and so for your own unique self, and Mr. Kasai's own unique self, none of us should be compelled by someone else to do something (*meirei o sarete*/命令されて). If we don't live our lives according to the will coming from deep within ourselves, that's a real loss; we must all live with our values coming from within ourselves.

I am going to retire next March, but though I am the lowest ranked employee here—above me are assistant professors and professors — because of the peculiar arrangements of working where I do, I am not compelled to take orders from anyone. I am the lowest ranked so of course there is also no one below me to order around. So I am in a position where I never take nor give orders. For me this is the ideal position to be in.

And so I can live out my own life according to my own values; I'm allowed to live a life that suits me. Now I found myself in this position largely by accident, and then chose to continue to live my life this way. Related to this, I am a human being and so will make mistakes, but these mistakes will be things that I have chosen, things that I have personally done so there is nothing to do but to take responsibility for them. This is what I mean when I say that responsibility is an extremely important word.

Hirano: Well, you've exhaustively criticized this competitive society. You've said that this competitive society has ruined Japan and destroyed life based on what you call responsibility.

Koide: Yes. Everyone is running towards the exact same goal. It's ludicrous. You want to go that way; I want to go this way. I think this would be the ideal society. Full mutual recognition is a good thing.

Hirano: Does your view come from your personal experience? In your books you state that you were a really conscientious student when you were younger (laughs).

Koide: (laughs) Well, yes.

Hirano: You studied extremely hard. Did everything extremely hard. You continued this in

your nuclear research in college believing that a new energy source was cheap and good for everyone. You must have thought this was a great thing.

Koide: That's right.

Hirano: But you eventually noticed that it was all wrong. So on this, from deep in your own experience, it's an individual history, an individual experience, in one sense it's connected to your current individualism, to how you live your life focused on the important things to you.

Koide: I think that's right. So, well, when I was young, in my late teens, I was consumed by the dream of nuclear power. I devoted my life to it. That was all a mistake—it did not take me too long to realize that.

Hirano: When did it happen? In graduate school?

Koide: My third year in university.

Hirano: Third year—so as an undergraduate.

Koide: Yes, I came to this realization in the latter half of my undergraduate studies. It was foolish and I curse myself for it, but I didn't quit. To this day I've lived my life as someone who made that wrong choice, and there is nothing to do but make amends for that choice. At a minimum I wanted to get rid of nuclear power before there was a bad accident. I guess I've lived with this wish for over forty years—but that wish stayed out of reach. And here we have had the accident so my life has been for nothing. You could say that thing I wanted most to do has been denied. Really, what have I lived for? I think about that from time to time.

As this was my choice I have to accept it. So while the meaning of my life may have been lost, still I was able to live my own life as I pleased, without submitting to the orders of others and without ordering others around—for this I am grateful. My hopes were never realized. History is full of that kind of thing. Likely very few people see their hopes fulfilled. And while in my case they were rejected, I was able to live the life I wanted and that is a life to be grateful for.

Hirano: In a way, it's just how Tanaka Shōzō lived his life isn't it?

Koide: Yes it is. That is what I like about Shōzō.

Hirano: On that point. His life, too, was a defeat.

Koide: Complete and total defeat.

Hirano: Still, he used all sorts of means, and followed all the way through on his beliefs.

Hirano: So getting back to Fukushima, it seems when it comes to the life choices of the so-called Japanese elites, they seem caught in a system in which they will succeed and become famous by crushing their individuality and subsuming it under some organization in order to get ahead in a society and achieve fame and status. And the education system seems to be promoting this lifestyle where these sorts of people are created through intense competition. I think the very end result of this social and educational system was revealed, and it exploded in an explicit and ugly manner through various problems the Fukushima disaster has posed.

Koide: Yes, I think so. You said it.

Hirano: I see. In one sense it would have been possible even for these Japanese elites to make their personal responsibility clear and take appropriate actions only if they had lived a life based on individualism as you suggested.

Koide: Yes I think such a possibility exists, but unfortunately in Japan today that

possibility has been completely crushed. It was abundantly clear from the Fukushima disaster that no one in this country is going to take responsibility.

Hirano: You've already talked about how TEPCO and the government made huge mistakes in dealing with the problem immediately after the accident. What do you see as the definitive mistake that led to this disaster?

Koide: There's a ton of them. Any specialist would have known right away there had been a meltdown, and that everyone needed to be evacuated immediately. And evacuating to 20 km away is totally inadequate. Iitate village some 40-50 km away received an enormous amount of contamination and was neglected for over a month.

Soma residents evacuated to Iitate, this kind of stupidity cannot stand, the government's criminal mistakes.

The Hosokawa family of Iitate Village continues to live in the heavily radiated area to look after their horses (2014). More than a dozen horses died since 2011.

Kasai: I'm deeply taken by your previous discussion on responsibility. It's really a story of something with no owner. A golf course that has had to close because it is considered contaminated with radiation from TEPCO's plant has recently sued. TEPCO's top attorneys argued in defense that the radiation is not their property, which would make it no one's property and therefore TEPCO is not responsible. It seems the opposite of what you've just said about responsibility, to be sure, yet this declaration of complete lack of responsibility, once passed through the logic and system of the courts, these lawyers have arrived at precisely this conclusion. It is not a question of individual responsibility; it is a problem of the social system. Lack of any responsibility is the basis of the entire social system. What are your thoughts on this?

Koide: It's exactly as you say. This is what it has come to. I couldn't care less about a country like that. But in order to overcome this situation, it's something I mentioned earlier, but there is no way but for rather foolish citizens to get smarter. Only each individual standing up for his or her own way is going to do it.

Hirano: You've also talked about "responsibility for being fooled." You've said that even the deceived are guilty and stressed that they too must take responsibility. How do you think about this at the individual level? For example, you've often stated that there should be a new food labeling system put in place by which especially the generation that agreed to build the reactors would be obliged to eat the contaminated food—would this be an example of taking individual responsibility for you?

Koide: Yes, that's exactly what I mean. So, because I think that every Japanese adult has responsibility for both allowing the rampant development of nuclear power and the Fukushima disaster, I said that they should be the ones to eat the contaminated food. And so that this disaster may never happen again, nuclear power must be eliminated—of course there should be no question of restarting the reactors. Yet, what I've just said is not really a widespread idea. Slowly all the reactors are being restarted.

Hirano: So in that sense Japanese citizens' responsibility is increasing in that they are allowing the restart of the reactors.

Koide: I think the nuclear power issue is precisely analogous to the war.

Hirano: Indeed, as with the damage of misinformation and national morality discourse we talked about and the pressure that comes from those hints of someone being somehow "un-Japanese," it seems to really resemble the war.

Koide: I think so, yes.

Hirano: I'd like to ask more about the responsibility for being misled. Up to now the reason most would say that nuclear power has been allowed is the myth of safety—a myth invented by the coordination of the government, TEPCO, and the media. So Japanese citizens have been robbed of being told the truth, of having the chance to know the truth.

Koide: That's true.

Hirano: So the likely response to your position would be that it's unjust to blame those who were robbed of the chance to know the truth. How would you answer this challenge?

Koide: I also said that the current situation is just like during the war. Then, too, the media only reported the information coming from imperial headquarters: The Japanese military enjoyed nothing but a string of victories. We were all told that because of the emperor Japan was a divine country and therefore could not lose. You would go to school and there would be the emperor's portrait hanging on the wall. There was a place where the emperor was enshrined right there on school grounds. Every child was taught that the emperor was present there.

In such a country it wasn't strange to think that Japan would win the war. But those who knew more about the world, including of course those in the military, knew that Japan could not win. Still they said nothing. And so everyone was swept along with the current. But history is harsh, and in the end Japan was battered. And people at that time said, "Ah, we've been misled. The military are the culprits." But even within all of this there were those who resisted the war. The number of people tortured and killed by the Special Higher Police was huge. And those people, too, were labeled as "un-Japanese" and ostracized from society by the majority of the population. Whole families, whole groups of people were obliterated.

So those who lived then were duped, they were given false information. But should they say that's where their responsibility ends? I would respond that even if they were duped, the duped still bear the responsibility of the duped. How did each and every one of them live their lives during the war? How did they deal with the information they were being given? I think we need to include these kinds of questions when we interrogate ourselves over taking responsibility. Now if you say this people get angry but I think without question the emperor has absolute responsibility for the war. We ended up moving on without trying to pursue the emperor's war responsibility.

Even today you'll see people happily shouting "Tennō heika banzai," Long Live the Emperor. At midnight NHK will broadcast the Japanese flag flapping in the wind. I can't stand that and so don't watch TV. Most Japanese get happy when they hear 'honorable' addresses by His Majesty the Emperor or news about the imperial family. From the bottom of my heart I think we should have pursued his war crimes and punished him with whatever it takes, including execution. I have been saying this and people get very angry.

I am told not to criticize the emperor. They say if I do I'll harm the anti-nuclear movement.

Hirano: Even people in the anti-nuclear movement warn you about things like that? A critical reference to the emperor's wartime responsibility could be fatally divisive for the movement?

Koide: Those roots are that strong when you talk about war responsibility. But as I have mentioned to you, I feel at the bottom of my heart that each and every individual must take personal responsibility for how he or she lived his or her life. That's the reason why I wanted the emperor to take his responsibility as a person.

We must build such a country. Even the duped and the lied to have responsibility as individual human beings. It's true for those who lived through the war, and it's true for those who promote nuclear power in Japan today—indeed it's true for everyone on earth. Each one, should they be deceived, is responsible for being deceived.

Hirano/Kasai: Well we've gone on long today and heard some really important things. Thank you very much.

Recommended citation: *Katsuya Hirano and Hirotaka Kasai interview Koide Hiroaki, "The Fukushima Nuclear Disaster is a Serious Crime", The Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol. 14, Issue 6, No. 1, March 15, 2016.*

Notes

1

Koide Hiroaki, "The Truth About Nuclear Power: Japanese Nuclear Engineer Calls for Abolition," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* Vol 9, Issue 31 No 5, August 1, 2011.

2

Translator's note: There is also a significant amount Cs-134 (although now perhaps 20% of Cs-137 totals). Large amounts of Cs have flowed into the ocean as well. Cs-134 is the main tracer for following Fukushima effluents in the ocean. I am indebted to Timothy Mousseau for this insight.

3

放射線管理区域 "Controlled area means an area, outside of a restricted area but inside the site boundary, access to which can be limited by the licensee for any reason."

4

See the English translation of his testimony at the Diet: Koide Hiroaki, "The Truth About Nuclear Power: Japanese Nuclear Engineer Calls for Abolition" *The Asia-Pacific Journal* Vol 9, Issue 31 No 5, August 1, 2011.

5

"Tanemaki Journal," an Osaka based radio show by Mainichi Broadcasting Station, began to air critical evaluations of the Fukushima incident immediately after March 11th.

Tanemaki Journal invited Koide as a commentator on a daily basis and he offered astute and up-to-date comments on the disaster. Despite, or perhaps because of, its popularity, according to some reports, the radio program was shut down in July 2012 under pressure from Kansai Electric Power Company which was a major sponsor of the TV station MBS. When Mainichi announced the termination of Tanemaki, listeners protested outside the company's office. The program won a Sakata Memorial Journalism Award in March 2012.

6

Kariya Tetsu, *Oi Shinbo 111 Fukushima no shinjitsu* (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 2014). The episode was published in April 28th, 2014 in a popular comic book. After returning from their visit to Fukushima, Protagonist and his father began to feel very dull and

experienced nosebleeds. The episode developed into a social and political issue as it came under attack by conservative politicians and media for stirring up "damage by rumor."

7

Oi Shinbo discusses the theory that nosebleeds may be the result of ionizing radiation that converts H₂O in the nasal passages to the hydroxyl radical HO which can then form hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂), see Kariya, *Oi Shinbo*, 111: 240-48.

8

Kyushu Electric Power Co. (KEPCO) reactivated the No. 1 reactor in August 2015 and No. 2 in October in the same year. Abe Shinzō's government expressed confidence in the safety the restart by calling the new safety measure "the world toughest." According to the Japan Times, the government plans to have nuclear power account for 20 to 22 percent of the country's total electricity supply by 2030, compared with roughly 30 percent before the disaster at the Fukushima complex. The government continues with the policy despite the overwhelming public opposition against the reactivation of the reactors and the clear evidence that Japanese economy is sustainable without nuclear energy.

9

Mutō Ruiko and Fukushima residents filed a lawsuit against TEPCO and the Japanese government officials, seeking criminal responsibility for the Fukushima nuclear accident. Muto's interview will be published in the Asia-Pacific Journal this year.

10

In September 2015, TEPCO released its first 850 tons of filtered radioactive groundwater into the sea. This is a part of TEPCO's "subdrain plan" that was approved in late July, 2015, after a year-long battle with local fishermen who opposed the release fearing that it would pollute the ocean and contaminate the marine life. 300 tons of contaminated water is being generated at the plant daily. TEPCO has yet to deal with remaining 680,000 tons of highly contaminated water that was used to cool the reactors during the 2011 meltdown.

11

Kashiwazaki is a city in Niigata prefecture.

12

The Tokaimura nuclear accident occurred on September 30th 1999, resulting in two deaths. It was the worst civilian nuclear radiation accident in Japan prior to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster of 2011. The criticality accident happened in a uranium processing facility operated by JCO, a subsidiary of Sumitomo Metal Mining Co. in the village of Tokai, Ibaraki Prefecture. Both the national and the prefectural governments failed to deal promptly with the accident due to the lack of evacuation plan and Tatsuya Murakai, then the mayor of the Tokaimura, decided to evacuate villagers from the affected area. 27 workers, who contained the crisis, were exposed to radioactivity.

13

Tanaka Shōzō (1841-1913) is considered to be Japan's first environmentalist. Tanaka is well known for his activism in connection with pollution caused by waste from the Ashio Copper Mine in Tochigi prefecture. From the mid-1880s, the Watarase river near the mine became heavily contaminated by mine waste and in 1890 a large flood carried

poisonous waste from the mine into surrounding fields and villages. Tanaka took the cause to the National Diet as a member of the House of Representatives, but it ended with little success. In 1900, Tanaka and villagers in the valley of the Watarase river planned a mass protest in Tokyo, but were stopped and dispersed by government troops. He resigned from the Diet in 1901 and made a direct appeal to Emperor Meiji. He became the supporter of local autonomy and developed his own anti-war, anti-imperialist, and environmental philosophy. He died of cancer in Yanaka village in 1913.

Japan's Nuclear Map and Epicenter of the Earthquakes of 3.11

Contaminated Water Tanks

Decontamination Workers

Bags containing contaminated soil. This apocalyptic scene extends infinitely in the villages near the Fukushima dai-ichi

The Hosokawa family of Iitate Village continues to live in the heavily radiated area to look after their horses (2014). More than a dozen horses died since 2011.

**“The Fukushima Nuclear Disaster is a Serious Crime”: Interview with
Koide Hiroaki 福島核災害は明らかに深刻な犯罪である—小出裕章氏に聞
く
Katsuya Hirano and Hirotaka Kasai**

Japan's Nuclear Map and Epicenter of the Earthquakes of 3.11

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The Hosokawa family of Iitate Village continues to live in the heavily radiated area to look after their horses (2014). More than a dozen horses died since 2011.

<http://apjff.org/2016/06/Hirano.html>

Translation by Robert Stolz

Transcription by Akiko Anson

Introduction

Koide Hiroaki (66) has emerged as an influential voice and a central figure in the anti-nuclear movement since the nuclear meltdown at Fukushima Daiichi of March 11, 2011. He spent his entire career as a nuclear engineer working towards the abolition of nuclear power plants. His powerful critique of the "nuclear village" and active involvement in anti-nuclear movements "earned him an honorable form of purgatory as a permanent assistant professor at Kyoto University."¹ Koide retired from Kyoto University in the spring of 2015, but continues to write and act as an important voice of conscience for many who share his vision of the future free from nuclear energy and weapons. He has authored 20 books on the subject. Professor Kasai Hiroataka and I visited his office at Kyoto University's Research Reactor Institute in Kumatori, Osaka, on December 26th, 2014 for this interview. We believe that the contents of the interview, which offer new information about the degree of radioactive contamination and invaluable insight into Koide's ethical and political stance as a scientist, remain crucial for our critical reflection on ecological destruction, the violation of human rights, and individual responsibility. Professor Robert Stolz, the translator of this interview and the author of *Bad Water* (Duke University Press, 2015), provides a historical perspective on the interview in a separate article. KH Interview

The Fukushima Disaster and Government and Corporate Response

Hirano: How does the Fukushima accident compare with the bombing of Hiroshima or Chernobyl in its scale? What are the possible effects of this yet unknown exposure?

Koide: Let's start with the scale of the accident: It was a core meltdown involving the release of various kinds of radioactive material. Radioactive noble gas isotopes were also released, as were iodine, cesium, strontium, and other radioactive material. The noble gas isotopes have a short half-life and so at this stage they are all gone. Iodine, too, is gone. So now four years since the accident the materials that are still a problem are cesium-137, strontium-90, and tritium; really, it's these three.²

Now, as for the scale of the accident, I think it would be best to compare these three radionuclides. Today the main contamination of Japanese soil is the radionuclide cesium-137 [Cs-137 or ¹³⁷Cs]. The ocean is largely contaminated with strontium-90 [Sr-90 or ⁹⁰Sr] and tritium [T or ³H]. Right now the main culprit adding to the exposure of the people in Japan is Cs-137, so I think it's best to use Cs-137 as a standard for measuring the scale of the accident.

But we simply don't know with any precision how much Cs-137 was released. That's because **all the measuring equipment was destroyed at the time of the accident**. How much Cs-137 was released into the air? How much was spilled in the sea? We just don't know.

Still, the Japanese government has reported estimates to the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency]. According to those estimated levels, reactors 1, 2, and 3 had been in operation on March 11, 2011, and all three suffered meltdowns. Those three reactors released 1.5×10^{16} Becquerels of Cs-137, which would make it a release of 168 times more radioactive material than the Hiroshima bombing. And this is only material released into the atmosphere—at least according to Japanese government estimates.

But I myself think the government's numbers are an underestimate. Various experts and institutes from around the world have offered several of their own estimates. There are those that are lower than the Japanese government's numbers and those that are higher, some two or three times higher than the government's numbers. According to these other estimates I think that the release of Cs-137 into the atmosphere could be around 500 times the Hiroshima bombing.

Now for what has been washed into the sea. That number is likely not much different from the levels released into the atmosphere. Even today we are unable to prevent this release. And so if we combine the amount of Cs-137 released in the air and the ocean together, we get an estimate several hundred times the Hiroshima levels. And some estimates suggest the Fukushima accident could be as much as one-thousand Hiroshimas.

Now to compare this with other accidents: The amount released into the atmosphere from the explosion during the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear plant was 800 to 1000 times the Hiroshima levels. Put simply, these estimates place Fukushima on par with Chernobyl.

Worse than any of these, however, is atmospheric testing. From the 1950s to the 1960s atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons had already released Cs-137 into the air more than sixty times the numbers released even by the Japanese government for Fukushima. Of course Fukushima is an incredible tragedy, but considered from the earth as a whole it is a rather small accident.

Hirano: I want to ask in more detail about the effect of Cs-137 on the human body and the environment.

Koide: Cesium is an alkaline metal. From the human body's perspective, cesium closely resembles potassium. The body contains enormous amounts of potassium. It is essential for humans. It's everywhere in our bodies. Especially our flesh and muscles are full of potassium. And because of this, when cesium is released into the environment, the body deals with cesium as it does with the alkaline metal potassium, which is to say that it is taken into the body and accumulates there.

Strontium is an earth metal. The body treats it like calcium. As you know calcium is a human body building block that accumulates in our bones. Strontium, too, is taken into and collects in the bones. Just as cesium is taken in and is transported to the flesh and muscle.

Hirano: Comparing the releases from nuclear tests by the US and the USSR during the Cold War period, you said that the Fukushima accident was small. So in what way should we think about Fukushima: is it best to consider it a Japanese problem, or to consider it from a global perspective?

Koide: The amount of products of nuclear fission released during atmospheric testing was enormous, and these particles continue to expose humans to radiation. I'm a bit older than you and I recall in my childhood being told not to let the rain fall on me at the time of the testing. In this way everyone on earth has been exposed (*hibaku*/ 被曝). And because of this testing, historically speaking, cancer rates have slowly risen; I believe this increase in cancer is due to the exposure suffered during the atmospheric testing. Now the radioactive material released from Fukushima has been dispersed across the globe and so once again everyone on earth has been exposed to additional radiation. I think we can expect cancer rates to rise once again.

Atmospheric nuclear testing released all of the radioactive material in the explosions, which entered the stratosphere. Between the stratosphere and the troposphere there is the tropopause, and every year come spring all that material dispersed in the stratosphere breaks through the tropopause and falls to earth. So that material, though initially dispersed in the stratosphere, eventually falls to earth evenly, everywhere. Actually, it might not be accurate to say that it falls evenly on the earth. The majority of the testing

was done in the temperate regions of the northern hemisphere, such as Nevada and the Semipalatinsk test site [in Kazakhstan], so that the northern hemisphere—as the site of most of the testing—is heavily contaminated, and within that the temperate region is heavily contaminated. Still, I can say the atmospheric testing overall has caused global contamination.

My focus now is to figure out how to deal with the acute and heavy contamination from Fukushima. I know something needs to be done right there in that specific place. That contamination will disperse and be diffused across the globe. Once dispersed, the amount of radioactive material from Fukushima will be small when compared with the atmospheric testing. Which is not to say it is not harmful. An increase in cancer will be the result. I mention that for humanity as a whole; the atmospheric tests were worse. Now, strontium-90 [Sr-90] has been leaking from Fukushima into the ocean, so it will eventually reach the United States, especially the west coast. This much we are sure of. But to answer your question, the amount of dispersed cesium and strontium released by the atmospheric tests is tens of times greater than the Fukushima levels. Because the west coast of the US is already contaminated from the atmospheric testing, though the dispersed contamination from Fukushima will reach US shores, for people living on the US west coast, the Fukushima accident—and this is perhaps awful to say—contamination from Fukushima is hardly worth considering. Historically a much greater event has already taken place.

Hirano: To put that another way, the current Fukushima accident gives us a chance to reconsider the enormity of the past contamination from US and Soviet atmospheric tests, which has not been openly discussed.

Koide: Yes, that's exactly right. In fact, it is the masses of people who need to realize the impact of the contamination on them. In the case of the Fukushima disaster, for example, they need to be aware that some radioactive material is reaching the North American coast, and the prevailing westerly winds will carry anything released into the atmosphere to the US. Those earlier numbers from the Japanese government indicate that the levels for Cs-137 in the atmosphere are 168 times those of the Hiroshima bombing. I've been told that level is 1.5×10^{16} Becquerels [Bq]. These exponents can be a pain to process, so if we think of it in peta-units—which is 10^{15} —we get essentially 15 petabecquerels [PBq].

That said, while we are not really sure this is the number, we do know that a portion of this material will ride the prevailing winds across the Pacific Ocean. On the other hand, closer to the ground, the winds will be east, south, and north, and therefore this other portion will fall on Japan—and we can investigate the actual levels here: how much fell on this town, on this prefecture? Adding these up, it seems to be only 2.4 PBq. Which is to say of the total fifteen PBq, 2.4, or roughly only 16%, fell on Japanese soil. If the totals are higher, still a smaller share of the total contamination will have fallen on Japan compared with the Pacific, with the largest portion falling on the west coast of the United States.

So why don't we hear complaints from the US? Why are there no calls for compensation? Whenever someone asks me this, I simply say that there just aren't any such complaints. Why is this so? Well the levels released by the US during the atmospheric testing were tens of times greater than Fukushima. They are the criminals, so they cannot ask for compensation from Japan. The U.S. government does not want to have to reflect on its own past, and I think they are eager to completely avoid bringing up anything like that conversation. That is why I believe it is so important that those who have been exposed to radioactive contamination realize what atmospheric testing has done to them.

Kasai: I'd like to get back to the moment of the accident in some detail. On March 11, 2011 we had the East Japan Disaster (meaning the earthquake and tsunami off Tohoku). You've already talked about the string of accidents at the nuclear plant. At the moment the accident was taking place, you were following the response by the Japanese government and the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) in real time. What did you see in those initial moments?

Japan's Nuclear Map and Epicenter of the Earthquakes of 3.11

Koide: It was truly a disastrous response. On the 11th I was in the laboratory in Kyoto as March was my month to work in the radiation-controlled area.³ It was normal workday hours and various tasks kept me busy working within the controlled area. Of course there is no TV or anything like that in the work space. That night there was a meeting so I came out to attend and that's when I saw the images of the Sendai airport being swept away by the tsunami. The report said that there had been a devastating earthquake and tsunami. Then I wondered about the safety of the nuclear plants.

Right then, there really was no more information. We had scheduled a nuclear safety issues seminar for the 18th. I've participated in hundreds of these seminars. Participants from the Ukraine had just arrived on the 11th. We promised to go out drinking after they arrived and so that night I went out. There was no more TV, and while there was a vague unease among us, that's how we spent the time.

The next day I learned that all power at Fukushima had been lost and I knew things were not going to be simple. Then at noon on the 12th the roof of reactor one was blown off; at that point any expert must have known there had been a reactor meltdown. So I was certain of a core meltdown and because once it has gone this far, there is no going back, it was time to call for anyone who could evacuate to do so. I thought we were at that stage on the 12th.

Yet neither the government nor TEPCO said a single word about a core meltdown; they announced that the incident merited a 3 or 4 on the International Nuclear Event Scale. I remember thinking "You've got to be kidding! There's already been a meltdown. This is at least a level 6 or 7." But neither the government nor TEPCO gave any indication of this and there was no word of it in the media either.

One by one there were explosions at reactors 3, 4, and 2. As an expert in nuclear power, I understood there was absolutely nothing that could be done. I thought people needed to be evacuating, but still the Japanese government didn't make the call. Government officials had set up at an off-site center near a power plant in Fukushima—at first they announced evacuation inside two kilometers, then that expanded to three, five, ten, and finally twenty km. After that nothing was done. The offsite center was supposed to coordinate the emergency response in the event of an accident, but it turned out that every one of the officials fled. They left the employees behind and fled. The Japanese government's response was indescribably cruel.

Kasai: It seems the very words "meltdown" (メルトダウン) and "core meltdown" (*roshin yōyū*/炉心熔融) were strictly forbidden.

Koide: Exactly.

Kasai: I was in Japan watching on TV. What shocked me was all the nuclear power experts explaining the incident in the studio. I suppose it was a satellite relay, but when reactor number three exploded on our screens they were giving their analyses of the explosion in real time. There were experts on TV saying that the reactor had a blast valve that was used successfully. Even hearing that, an average viewer might think something was amiss. But having physicists, experts on radiation, on TV saying these things, well, even the average viewer wouldn't buy that explanation. In a broad sense, nuclear experts like yourself played several roles in the media and government.

Koide: Yes, that's clearly true for pronuclear experts. They all tended to tell a story that underestimated the accident. Immediately after the accident public announcements and information were restricted. As a result individual opinions or statements were strictly forbidden and nearly all experts remained silent, so even basic information was not broadcast. Though I'd made statements from the nuclear lab beginning on the 12th, it is likely there were instructions from the Ministry of Science and Education to silence me. The head of the lab convened several meetings where he told each of us not to make any statement, that the lab would toe the official line when dealing with the mass media. I thought this was wrong and said that anyone who was asked a question by the media should answer it, further saying that if I were asked a question, I had a responsibility to answer. Since then I've continued to make statements in the media. Still the large majority of nuclear researchers were not able to do this.

As a result it was the pronuclear researchers who monopolized the interpretations - exactly. So as they went to the TV studios I think each was

told: "Today, it's your turn to go to the studio." I think that's how they played their part and handled the media.

Kasai: With respect to controlling information, would you say your experience with the head of the nuclear lab shows how the professional organizations exert pressure on the universities?

Koide: Yes, I would. The head of the lab opened a conference with all the other laboratories—even I went. There he said that any statements to the media should be on message and come only from the information office.

Kasai: So pressure came from academic conferences.

Koide: Yes, there was pressure coming from the academic conference side as well. Take for example something like a conference on nuclear power. From the very start it was never a real discussion; it was a meeting of powerful and vocal spokesmen for the nuclear community or village (*genshiryoku kyōdōtai*/原子力共同体 or *genshiryoku mura*/原子力村), which is to say the group of pronuclear government officials and private companies mainly centered around the LDP and Toshiba, Hitachi, Mitsubishi, and other pronuclear manufacturers of power plants—and of course their supporters in the media. Thus as an organization the conference was predisposed to underestimate the accident and to then promote that underestimation.

Hirano: Immediately after the accident you testified in the Diet presenting data indicating the seriousness of the disaster and demanding that the government terminate the operation of all the power plants.⁴

Koide: I did.

Hirano: After that it seems you weren't again asked to speak publicly, or given the opportunity to offer more detailed thoughts on the situation.

Koide: By "speak publicly" you mean in the Diet or in some other official government setting?

Hirano: Yes, and also in the media.

Koide: With respect to the media, I've never really had any confidence in them. Since the accident, I've been overwhelmingly busy and haven't accepted a single invitation from TV stations.

Hirano: I see. So there were invitations.

Koide: There have been many calls saying, "come down to the studio." But I always tell them that I am too busy for this sort of thing. I'd say, if you come to my office, we could meet. Many did come by, even back then. But as everyone knows, in television you might talk for an hour and none of it makes it on air, or if it does, it's maybe thirty seconds.

Hirano: Right, and only the convenient parts.

Koide: That's it and there's really nothing that can be done about it. There was, however, one outlet for which I was extremely grateful: the daily radio program called Tanemaki Journal (種まきジャーナル).⁵ There I could go on every day and offer my thoughts live. I wish it could have continued, but it was completely and totally smashed. What a world we live.

Kasai: So, on the subject of standards used for assessing the danger posed by radiation for the human body and the environment: What are your thoughts

on how the government deals with this issue?

Koide: They are absolutely not dealing with it at all. I think you already know this but in Japan the average person is not supposed to be exposed to more than one milliSievert per year—that's set by law. Why is that the level decided on? Because exposure to radiation is dangerous. If exposure weren't dangerous, if low levels of exposure were safe, there'd be no problem even without that legal limit. But exposure to radiation is dangerous—this is the conclusion of all research. So every nation in the world has set legal limits for exposure.

For people like me who get paid to work with radiation, it's not really possible to observe the 1mSv/yr limit [1mSv/yr]. We're told that in exchange for our salaries, we accept exposure to twenty milliSieverts a year. That's the standard I work under in my job. But the current Japanese government has now stated that if contamination is under 20mSv/yr somewhere, that place is safe to return to—safe to return to even for children. This is way beyond common sense.

Hirano: What is the basis of this claim? Why would the government announce these numbers and forcefully declare these areas safe to return to? What's the basis for the government's numbers?

Koide: The basis for those numbers...for example the government says that organizations like the IAEA or the ICRP [International Commission on Radiological Protection] suggest that in emergencies during which the 1mSv/yr standard cannot be maintained standards should be set between twenty and 100mSv/yr. The government seizes on this and declares that since the IAEA and the ICRP have said this, that 20mSv/yr is therefore a safe level—usually adding that membership in both the IAEA and the ICRP is voluntary anyway. But because these organizations have said this is no reason to break Japanese law. If Japan is a nation governed by the rule of law at all, surely this means that the very people who make the laws should also follow them—that should be obvious. But these guys have declared 20mSv/yr safe even for children. There is absolutely no way I can consent to this.

Hirano: So there is no scientific basis for these levels.

Koide: Well... the danger corresponds to the amount of exposure—you probably know this—so for a country that has declared its intention to maintain the 1mSv/yr standard to then turn around and ask people to endure twenty times that level, there is no scientific basis for that declaration. That's a social decision.

But if you want to inquire as to why, as I've mentioned to you, some 2.4 petaBecquerels of radioactive material have fallen on Japan, that material has been dispersed, contaminating Tohoku, Kanto, and western Japan. So in addition to the law setting the legal limit for exposure at 1mSv/yr, there is another law that states that absolutely nothing may be removed from a radioactive management area in which the levels exceed 40,000 Becquerels per square meter.

So the question becomes how many places or how much area has been contaminated beyond 40,000 Bq/m²? And according to the investigations, that answer is 140,000 km². The entirety of Fukushima prefecture has been contaminated to where all of it must be declared a radioactivity management area. Indeed, while centered on Fukushima, parts of Chiba and Tokyo have also been contaminated. The number of people living in what must be called a radiation-controlled area is in the millions, and could exceed ten million. For me, if Japan is in fact a nation governed by the rule of law, I believe the government has the responsibility to evacuate these entire communities. Instead of taking a proper action to secure people's livelihood, the government decided to leave them exposed to the real danger of radiation. In my view, Fukushima should be declared uninhabitable and the government and TEPCO should bear a legal responsibility for the people displaced and dispossessed by the nuclear disaster. That's what I think, but if that were to be done, it would likely bankrupt the country. I think that even though it could bankrupt Japan, the government should have carried out the evacuation to set an example of what the government is supposed to do. But obviously those in and around the LDP certainly didn't agree. They've decided to sacrifice people and get by taking on as little burden as possible. So they've made the social decision to force people to endure their exposure. In my view, this is a serious crime committed by Japan's ruling elite. I would like people to know just how many thousands of people live in this abnormal situation where even nuclear scientists like me are not allowed to enter, not to mention, drink the water. It is strange that this issue has been left out of all debate over the effects of the radioactive exposure. We must be aware that contemporary Japan continues to operate outside the law in abandoning these people to their fate by saying it's an extraordinary situation. Under such circumstances, I think, there are a multitude of symptoms of illnesses in contaminated areas. But if we're talking about any given symptom, it's hard to say since we just don't have any good epidemiological studies, or even any good data. But there will surely be symptoms, namely cancer and leukemia. However little exposure to radiation is, it causes cancer and leukemia—this is the conclusion of all current science. These symptoms are said to become visible 5 years after the initial exposure. But because radiation is not the sole cause of cancer or leukemia establishing a direct causal relationship is extremely difficult. For this very reason we need to continue to investigate the state of exposure by conducting rigorous epidemiological studies. But this government wishes instead to hide the damage so I'm afraid no such study is on the horizon. In addition, I have heard about many cases of nose bleeding, severe headaches, and extreme exhaustion. And I am truly concerned about small children and young people living in Fukushima as they are most vulnerable to exposure.

Hirano: So what is your view of the actual damages of radiation exposure on human health?

Koide: On the evening of the Fukushima dai-ichi reactor accident of March 11, 2011, a Radiation Emergency Declaration was announced. The Declaration suspended existing Japanese law concerning exposure to radiation. Though Japanese law sets the limit for exposure for the general population at one milliSievert a year [1mSv/yr], the new permissible level would be 20 mSv/yr. That Emergency Declaration is still in effect. It is common knowledge that even low levels of exposure are dangerous. Including even infants in this newly imposed 20mSv/yr standard will obviously lead to various diseases. Further, because the monitoring equipment was destroyed at the time of the accident we do not have accurate data on the exposure levels of the residents. Numerous cases of thyroid cancer have been found. The prevalence of thyroid cancer is dozens of times that of normal incidence. Pro-nuclear groups say those numbers are the result of the screening process itself, not the effect of radiation exposure. Which is to say that this was the first major screening of that population and so it was natural that many cases of thyroid cancer would be found. Put differently, what they are saying is that they have never conducted a thorough study of radiation exposure and its impact on human health. Science should acknowledge what it already knows and what it does not. If it is true that there is no established scientific data, a properly scientific approach would be to carry out a thorough investigation. To deny the damage to health by exposure to radiation without such an investigation is absolutely at odds with the scientific spirit. Prof. Tsuda at Okayama University has already conducted a detailed study on the outbreak of thyroid cancer, showing an epidemiological-like outbreak. Just as happened at Chernobyl, as time passes it is clear there will be more and more instances of all kinds of illnesses.

Hirano: In your books you've often stated that there is no uncontaminated food. But for most Japanese, such basic knowledge seems limited to food from Fukushima, and nearby parts of Ibaraki, Gumma, Chiba, Miyagi. For food produced outside these areas, do you think it's necessary to have strict testing of food that is sold and consumed? What is to be done? Do you think food from outside these areas should also be subject to strict testing before being sent to market and consumed?

Koide: Right, as we discussed earlier, before the Fukushima accident the entire globe was already contaminated with radiation. This means that Tohoku or Kanto or Kansai food, all of it, has been contaminated with radiation—radiation from atmospheric tests. Beyond this, contamination from the 1986 Chernobyl accident reached Japan on the prevailing westerly winds, meaning that all Japanese food was contaminated. And on top of all this, with the Fukushima disaster, as I mentioned, it is not that a thick layer of contamination has dispersed to every corner of the globe from Fukushima, but that this thick layer of contamination is right now centered on Fukushima.

So if we were to carefully measure the levels of food contamination, we'd

more or less find moving out from the highest levels in Fukushima to say western Japan or Kyushu, that the numbers would gradually decline to the lower levels received from the atmospheric tests. Right now the people of Fukushima have been abandoned in the areas of the highest levels of radiation. And abandoned people have to find a way to live. Farmers produce agricultural goods, dairy farmers produce dairy products, and ranchers produce meat; these people must do so in order to live. They are not the ones to be blamed at all.

As the Japanese state is absolutely unreliable in this matter, these people have no choice but to go on producing food in that place, all the while suffering further exposure. So I don't think we can throw out the food they produce there under those conditions. Inevitably someone has to consume that food—I suggest it be fed to the pronuclear lobby (laughs). We should serve all of the most heavily contaminated food at say the employee cafeteria at TEPCO or in the cafeteria for Diet members in the Diet building. But that isn't nearly enough. We must carefully inspect the food, and once we've determined what foods have what levels of contamination, once that is fully measured and delineated, then those who have the corresponding levels of responsibility should eat it, should be given it.

Now of course strict levels of responsibility cannot really be allotted one by one to individuals that way, so when it comes to this food, I would propose devising a "60 and over" system. The most contaminated foods could only be eaten by those 60 years old and older, and from there also have food for "50 and over," "40 and over," "30 and over" - giving the best food to children. For example, school lunches would get the most uncontaminated food available—there'd still be contamination from the atmospheric tests—but food with only those levels would be given to children and only adults would receive the contaminated food. That would be my proposal.

My proposal would first be a precise measurement, starting from Fukushima and then of course including western Japan and Kyushu, to sort out the levels and then determine the relative burdens. I am aware that this is a controversial proposal, but each one of us, especially those who built postwar Japan, bears responsibility for allowing our society to heavily dependent on nuclear energy without carefully reflecting on the risks and consequences of it. And more importantly, we have the responsibility for protecting children.

Kasai: Recently, that idea has been suggested in Nishio Masamichi's *Radioactive Archipelago (Hibaku retto)* / 『被ばく列島』). You've just stressed that though the first step must be a rigorous measurement, right now that is simply impossible.

Koide: Right, completely impossible.

Kasai: So, that's true of water as well. First I don't think most people know how to measure the levels in water. You've already said how the current minimum standards are worthless, that below a certain threshold it would be displayed as "ND" (Not Detectable). For example, for tap water, up to 20

Becquerels would be posted as "ND," exactly as if there was no radiation detected at all. Yet even with all these doubts on measurement, we must start with it, though it's a dizzyingly long road ahead. But what do you think can be done to change this situation for the better?

Koide: Right now Japan has a standard of 100Bq/kg for general foodstuffs. Before the Fukushima disaster, Japanese foodstuffs were contaminated—by the atmospheric tests—at a level of 0.1Bq/kg. Of course there were some foods with less contamination and some with more. Still, roughly speaking it was 0.1Bq/kg. So when you're talking 100 Bq/kg that's allowing 1,000 times the [pre-Fukushima] levels.

As I said before, any exposure is absolutely dangerous. And the dangers increase corresponding to an increase in levels of exposure; this is the conclusion of all research. 100 Bq/kg is dangerous, 99 is dangerous, as is 90, and 50, and 10—they are all dangerous. 10 Bq/kg is 100 times the pre-Fukushima levels.

So I think it's necessary to precisely measure the levels of contamination. As many people are living in a state of anxiety, groups like consumers' cooperatives and other sorts of organizations are trying to measure the contamination on their own. But the measuring devices that these groups are able to get, such as the ones called NAI, these devices can only measure levels above 20Bq/kg. While this means that they can measure levels as little as one-fifth of the national thresholds, from my perspective even this lower level is far too high.

And the worst thing that could happen is thinking that any contamination below the detectable limits of these machines, meaning below 20Bq/kg, would be misunderstood as being free of contamination, and then having the Fukushima prefectural government actively using this data as good news: "measurements below the detectable limits of the device must be clean; we can even serve this food in school cafeterias," or PR campaigns announcing "Fukushima produce is safe." Of course it would be totally outrageous and unthinkable and yes I think every effort should be made to serve the least contaminated food in school cafeterias—but the reality is that any food tested below detectable levels is distributed to schools as safe produce.

I think we need to stop this situation, and technically speaking, I think several germanium semiconductor detectors must be deployed instead. But a germanium detector would cost from \$100,000 to \$200,000. And in order to use it, the detector needs to be kept at 150 degree below zero Celsius. So these are not devices that the average citizen is going to be able to use.

So no matter how dedicated any individual citizen may be, there are real limitations when it comes to measuring radiation levels. If you ask me what should be done, for example when faced with Cs-137 or Sr-90, what should be done about these contaminants? Well these contaminants were produced in a nuclear reactor at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi plant and it means that they are unmistakably TEPCO's property. And if their private property is found to have contaminated other areas they have undeniable responsibility

for it. So I think this is something that is required of TEPCO. I think it is TEPCO's responsibility to precisely measure which foods have been contaminated, and to what extent, and then to report the results to the public. I think this is something the public should demand. After TEPCO the government also has responsibility—they gave their seal of approval to TEPCO after all. So the public should also demand that the government precisely measure the levels and publish the results.

Because there are limits to what one can do on one's own, I think we need a movement that forces the government and TEPCO to take responsibility for the precise measurement of the contamination.

Hirano: Some have raised doubts over precisely this kind of rigorous measurement citing possible damage caused by rumors or misinformation (*fūhyōhigai*/風評被害), but to me this sort of criticism is tainted with a sort of "national morality" discourse (*kokumin dōtokuron*/国民道徳論).

Koide: Yes, I think so.

Hirano: There seems to be a very strong sense of dividing people into those who are seen as patriotic and those who are seen as un-Japanese (*hikokumin*/非国民).

Koide: For me, I've been making statements on the Fukushima contamination. These statements have been denounced and even made some angry with me. But the contamination is real. For a long time now I've been the kind of person who would rather hear the truth, no matter how awful, than to remain ignorant. I am absolutely not going to hide the truth; no matter how much criticism I have to take I am going to diligently report the truth. Yeah, a lot of people get angry with me. (Laughs).

Kasai: On this point, this year saw the publishing of Kariya Tetsu's manga series *Oi shinbo: Fukushima no shinjitsu* (『美味しんぼ – 福島の実』).⁶ It would seem a kind of political campaign was developed to attack it. What is your take on this?

Koide: The editors sent me a copy and I've read it. It's an awesome manga. In this day and age we just don't have this kind of detailed manga on this problem and I am grateful for it. And more, *Oi shinbo* talks about the nosebleeds [caused by radiation]. The nosebleeds are real. Lots of Fukushima residents are said to be suffering from nosebleeds. Itokawa, the mayor of Futaba machi, has shown us proof. One of my acquaintances often talks about the nosebleeds.

It was true at Chernobyl, too. But nosebleeds have not been definitively and scientifically linked to exposure to radiation.⁷ Still there is no denying that it is real and happening. So even if current science is unable to explain it, it's for science to ask just what is going on? Science has a duty to explain this, to tell the truth without obfuscation. No matter the reasons, we should be allowed to tell the truth. So for me I don't think there is anything wrong with this part of *Oi shinbo*.

Kasai: I think *Oi shinbo* clearly exposed the politically constructed narratives

"damage from rumor or misinformation" and "emotional bonds" (*kizuna*/絆) as fictions, and so for this reason it appears it had to be crushed.

Koide: Exactly. But Kariya, the author of *Oi shinbo*, is not one of the criminals responsible for the Fukushima disaster. Rather the government officials who caused the Fukushima disaster are the criminals. Yet it is these same government bureaucrats who now come out and complain that this manga is out of order. I say, "No, it's you who are out of order. We need to send you to prison right now."

But isn't it always the case that a criminal who has committed a crime remains unquestioned and so starts bashing those who are telling the truth? When that happens I think the problem is precisely this word you just used "emotional bonds." Since Fukushima, I have come to hate this word. (Laughs).

Hirano: "Bonds" seems to be the new nationalism, doesn't it?

Koide: Yes, yes it does.

Hirano: You've often said that the Japanese economy and the people's lifestyle would be fine even without a single nuclear power plant. In fact, since the government shut all the nuclear reactors down, the people have experienced no real trouble at all. In addition, considered in light of world standards we still have material riches and a lifestyle of surplus. Given this, what are your thoughts on the call to restart the reactors? For what purpose, what reason do you think the government has?⁸

Koide: First of all, the power companies don't want to go bankrupt. In other words, the heads of the power companies do not want to take personal responsibility. For example, if the reactors are restarted and there's an accident, are the heads of the power companies going to be punished? We already know that they will not be. Even after the Fukushima disaster neither the chairman, nor the CEO, nor anyone below—not a single person—was punished.⁹ It certainly looks as if the reactors are restarted and there's an accident, the heads of the power companies would not be required to take any responsibility. The heads of the power companies, from Kyushu Electric to Kansai Electric, have received this message loud and clear. What's more, if the nuclear power plants are idled and not allowed to restart, then all the capital they represent becomes a non-performing asset. And of course this is anathema to anyone in management.

Hirano: If we could return to a technical discussion specifically how to decommission a reactor. As have others in your field you've already stated that a full end game cannot be envisioned yet. Still could you talk about what makes this issue so difficult?

Koide: By decommissioning you mean the endpoint of the Fukushima reactors?

Hirano: Yes, what does it mean for Fukushima dai-ichi?

Koide: When we say decommission we basically mean: How do we fully contain the radiation? At least I think that's the main point. Now this is impossible if we don't know the status of the melted core. Though it's been

four years since the disaster we simply do not know where the core is or in what state it is.

This is a situation that only happens in nuclear accidents. However large a chemical plant explosion may be there'd probably be an initial fire, but usually after several days, perhaps weeks you'd still be able to go on site and investigate. You'd be able to see just how things broke down. And in some situations might even be able to fix them. But with an accident at a nuclear plant you cannot even go on site four years later—probably not even ten years later.

Hirano: Because the contamination is so severe that no one can come close to it.

Koide: Yes. For humans going there means instant death, so the only way at all is to use robots. But robots are extremely vulnerable to radiation.

Consider, robots receive their instructions through series of 1s and 0s, so should the radiation switch a 0 to a 1 you'd end up with completely different instructions. Essentially robots are useless. Even if you are able to send them in they can never return. Because this has been the case up to now, the only way left in the end might be to use robots that try to avoid exposure or that are built as much as possible to withstand exposure, but that is no simple thing.

So it means until we figure out what to do it would still take many years. Once you understand this fact you can start thinking about what can be done. And at the very least the "road map" devised by the government and TEPCO is the most absolutely optimistic road map that there could be. They are convinced that the melted core fell through the bottom of the pressure vessel and now lie at the bottom of the containment vessel—basically piling up like nuggets of the melted core. There's no way this would be the case. (Laughs).

As the severity of the disaster became clear, water was repeatedly thrown on the reactors. This water would evaporate and dissipate continuously. That was the actual situation. There is no way that the melted core would have stayed as slimy liquid and then piled up like so many little nuggets. It should have been scattered all over the place. This is how the government and TEPCO's roadmap goes: The buns would stay at the bottom of the containment vessel, above which is the reactor pressure vessel—a steel pressure furnace. With the furnace floor broken open, there is a hollow at the bottom through which the melted core must have leaked.

So at some point both the containment vessel and the pressure vessel would be filled with water and they'll be able to see the nuggets of melted core by looking from above down into the water. They say the nuggets (the fallen material), yes, that they sit some thirty to forty meters below the water's surface, that they'll eventually be able to grab and remove them. This is all it takes, according to the government and TEPCO's roadmap. Not a chance. This simply cannot be done.

Hirano: Obviously we can't confirm or really say anything definitive about

the situation in the reactors, but what do you think has happened?

Koide: I simply don't know. But as I have mentioned, this whole "nugget" scenario is just not the case, and so I think the materials are scattered all over the place. Though the containment vessel is made of steel, if the melted core has come in contact with that steel, just as it ate through the floor of the pressure vessel, it could possibly have melted through the containment vessel. Depending on how things developed this, too, is a possibility. Unfortunately, I simply do not know.

Hirano: If that is in fact the situation, what steps are necessary?

Koide: First, as we talked about earlier, radiation must be prevented from being released into the environment. As I consider this task as "decommissioning" or the final containment of the accident, I think in order to prevent the release into the environment you must do whatever you can starting from the worst-case scenario.

There are situations in which the containment vessel can suffer a melt-through. I think this likely has already happened. And if it has happened what should be done? Outside the reactor there flows ground water. If the melted core were to come in contact with the ground water, the whole situation would be unmanageable. While this may have already have happened, in order to get any kind of control over the situation, some sort of barrier must be built to prevent the melted core from reaching the ground water. I've been saying this since May 2011—and they have not done a thing.

Kasai: This barrier would be an ice dam, a wall of super-chilled soil.

Koide: That's the most recent idea. But it simply cannot be done successfully. It would cost billions of dollars. And it would fail. And when it did fail they'd say there's nothing to be done but build a concrete wall. No matter how foolish an idea may be, they'll just keep moving from failure to failure. But really, for the construction companies that's a good thing. I think Kashima would be the ones to build the super-chilled earth wall, for some billions of dollars. And if it doesn't work—they wouldn't have to take responsibility. Next they'd build an impermeable concrete wall. Several huge construction firms (*zenekon*/ゼネコン) would be contracted and would all make billions.

But considered from the perspective of actually ending the disaster, it would be a series of failures. Personally, I think an underground, impermeable wall needs to be built immediately. They are not going to be able to remove the material. All that can be done is to contain it. Underground the wall needs to be strengthened; above ground the only choice is some sort of sarcophagus like the one they built over Chernobyl. But even this would take dozens of years—I'll probably be dead by then.

Kasai: There are temporary tanks sitting on land for this water, but they are starting to leak. What should be done about this contaminated water?

There's not enough space for all of it on land; it cannot be controlled; and every year the volume grows larger.

Koide: The radioactive water has penetrated the coastline around the

Fukushima Daiichi. Underground water in the large area of Fukushima has been seriously contaminated. And at some point those contaminated water tanks will fail. I thought we must do everything that we possibly could. Already in March of 2011 there was some 100,000 tons of contaminated water. Even then I proposed moving it but didn't get anywhere with it. Now there's up-to 400,000 tons. In the near—meaning not too distant—future there will be nothing left but to release it into the sea.¹⁰ The water contains plutonium 239 and its release into the Ocean has both local and global impacts. A microgram of plutonium can cause death if inhaled.

Contaminated Water Tanks

Kasai: It appears that they are already moving toward that direction a little at a time aren't they.

Koide: The Nuclear Regulatory Committee has been hinting at the possibility of releasing it into the ocean.

Kasai: They have been trying to persuade the fishing cooperatives and others to allow the release.

Koide: Yes, they have.

Kasai: Something that has not been much of a topic of discussion today is decontamination. It has become a rather large industry, in other words, "the exposure industry" (*hibaku sangyō*/被曝産業). Do you think decontamination is really meaningful and effective?

Koide: Yes, I do. And we must do it. But, to say that because we've decontaminated some area that the whole issue is resolved, or that people may safely live in a decontaminated place—I think that is a real problem. First, fundamentally, people must not be forced to live in contaminated areas that must be decontaminated. First must come complete evacuation. The state must take on the responsibility to allow whole communities to evacuate. Of course, they did not do this.

Briefly, I use the word "decontamination" (*josen*/除染), which is a compound word written with the characters for "remove" and "stain." But this is something that cannot be completed when it comes to radiation, so the original sense of the word "removal of contaminants" is impossible. But as long as people are abandoned in the contaminated areas, I believe all possible actions should be taken to lessen their exposure. It is essential that the contamination be removed as far away as possible, to be transported far from where people live. For this reason I prefer to call it "[toxic] relocation" (*isen*/移染).

But even if this is done, that does not mean that the radiation has been erased. This stuff contaminates everything from mountains to what have you, it gets into the space of people's lives. When that happens it must be removed. But removal merely means moving it around—it does not mean

eliminating it. It means another job is waiting to handle the contaminated materials that get moved around.

Right now the authorities say they want various prefectures and other local governments to build a temporary storage and bury the accumulated contamination there.

We talked about this before, but the contaminants themselves were clearly formerly in the reactor at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi plant and are therefore also clearly TEPCO's property. So while it is residents who are doing the hard work of collecting all these contaminants, I think it would be right and just for these contaminants to be returned to TEPCO. Earlier prof. Kasai told us the contaminants were being called "no-one's property" (*mushubutsu*/無主物), but I say in all seriousness, the conclusion of my logic here is to say to TEPCO: "Hey, this is your crap" and return it to them. That way the residents are not forced to accept the stuff, TEPCO is. The best solution is to return all of the material back to the Fukushima Daiichi plant, but that is not possible. Right now that place is a battlefield between poorly paid workers and the radiation, so I don't see this as a possibility.

What I would most like to do is have TEPCO's headquarters buried under all the radiation, but whenever I say this people just laugh. (laughs)

I do have a second proposal. Fifteen kilometers south of Fukushima Daiichi [Fukushima 1] is the Fukushima dai-ni [Fukushima 2] nuclear plant. There is a lot of wide open space there. So first off we would return the Fukushima 1 contamination to TEPCO there. I think there would be enough space, but if there were not, the rest could be taken to TEPCO's Kashiwazaki Kariya nuclear plant. It's the world's largest nuclear plant and so there is a lot of space. I think turning that place into a nuclear waste site is a good idea. Lately I've been invited to Kashiwazaki¹¹ and talked about it. I think I've become a hated man there. (Laughs). But I think taking full responsibility for various actions is the most important thing. And when it comes to this particular disaster no one has greater responsibility than TEPCO. As I think it important for one to take full responsibility, if Fukushima 2 doesn't work out, then Kashiwazaki Kariya is the only other option.

Hirano: State expenditures for decontamination have supposedly reached one trillion yen.

Koide: It's more than that.

Hirano: This summer I spent some time in Iitate village. Of course at the time the place was crawling with decontamination workers. It was a truly bizarre scene. I had the feeling of running around on a moonscape. Of course there were no residents there-just decontamination workers in strange gear, trucks running all over the place. Looking at that scene, being shown the actual work of decontamination, it seemed to be an excruciatingly

slow—even endless—endeavor. I mean they were scrubbing everything with small brushes. I was able to ask the workers a few questions—off the record. Many were people from Hokkaido, Okinawa, and Fukushima who had lost their homes. It was a collection of modern day migrant workers and victims of disaster. They said that they work for just 15,000 yen a day.

I asked them if they thought their work was doing any good. They said they needed the money and honestly had no way of knowing if this sort of minute and delicate work would remove the contamination.

Was this a mistake? Is scrubbing everything by hand and then dumping it all in the ground really the only way to decontaminate an area?

Decontamination Workers

Koide: Well I think both that it is and it isn't effective. For example, when they first started the decontamination work, what they did was blasting everything with high-pressure water hoses. That's bad. All that does is get all the contamination moving around. It's really just dispersing it.

Some of my colleagues have said that is a bad method. Be it a roof or a wall, you shouldn't just douse it with water. To really remove the contamination, you would first cover it with something that could prevent the escape of radioactivity then knock down the radiated structure, tear it all off, and then fold it up and collect it all. I think that's probably true. But it takes a long time.

I think there are effective ways of doing it and I think there are ineffective ways. Still it is fundamentally impossible to erase the contamination and so it must be moved. The only thing we should be doing is thinking about the easiest way to relocate it all.

Hirano: That's the meaning of "effective" in this situation isn't it.

Koide: Right. So the current method may be rather small in scale. But for me even small-scale methods are necessary. As long as people are living there everything is necessary.

Of course, there's legitimate criticism over the fact that this is a decontamination business and that the large construction companies are getting rich, but again, for me, as long as there are abandoned people still living there it all must be done.

Hirano: It was really a shock going there and seeing it. To see those workers and, honestly, their lack of conviction for the work. It was a really weird scene. No real enthusiasm, but rather one day after the other, contingent labor. The media has reported that the workers come from a few particular prefectures, but actually being there and talking to them, I could really get a true sense of the structure of economic inequality in Japan, that this sort of work found this kind of person, a person coming from economically precarious and socially marginalized backgrounds. In fact, you come to

understand that decontamination work depends on these people. For example, decontamination, or your preferred "relocation," couldn't those jobs be made more equitable—say by requiring TEPCO office workers, especially executives, to do it?

Koide: I've said that.

Hirano: You have? (Laughs).

Kasai: So...about the airborne radiation dosage and the soil contamination, there is a public entity that measures and publishes the airborne levels. But the soil contamination is not measured. I remember reading about Chernobyl that the soil contamination levels are the standard by which one gets the right to evacuation and refuge. But Japan only measures the air. And there are those who doubt the accuracy of the levels recorded. I thought the soil contamination had not been measured yet, but from what you mentioned earlier, we do know the extent of the contamination, don't we?

Koide: Yes, we do.

Kasai: The actual levels?

Koide: With respect to soil contamination we more or less know the extent of it. We largely know which prefectures, which towns, and which villages—as well as how badly—have been contaminated. Four years after the disaster it has moved around. Radiation moves through the environment; it has a material existence and also does die out. I'm sure much has changed since immediately following the accident.

We have the data necessary to draw a map of the situation immediately following the accident, but we don't have the data necessary to draw a map of the contamination today. That said, we basically know the extent of the soil contamination.

Kasai: Who is it that is making these measurements?

Koide: It is basically the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Some local governments took part as well. Some independent groups, as well as some local governments, took part in taking measurements back then. But for us the number one data source is the US military.

Hirano: I see; how is that?

Koide: They worked at truly amazing speed-and accuracy.

Hirano: Sorry if this next thought seems a bit of a tangent, but right after the accident both the US and Japan were looking at the same data. But their interpretations of it were extremely far apart. The US ordered all of its personnel to evacuate an area 80 km from Fukushima. While Japan's largest evacuation zone was 20 km. Where does this disparity in evacuation zones come from? They are both looking at the same data. How do they arrive at such definitive and divergent judgments?

Koide: Well...and this was true for me, too, any nuclear specialist would have known on March 11th-March 12th at the latest-that there had been a meltdown. And this means, quite simply, that control had been lost. And once control is lost you simply don't know what is going to happen next-or that's what you must think at the time. Disaster preparedness must always imagine the worst-case scenario. If you don't plan for the worst-case scenario it will be too late. What the US did was believe there had been a worst-case scenario-a meltdown-and so moved to take care of its people. That's why they ordered an 80 km evacuation. I think this was the correct strategy. Japan didn't do this. Japan was always thinking of the ideal, the best case scenario. They had to be thinking they could still get control and based their policy on that optimistic assumption. So they only declared a 20 km evacuation zone. I would say that from this conclusion two things may unfold: one is their desire to see this as a best-case scenario and the other is their inability to deal with it.

Hirano: What do you mean by their inability?

Bags containing contaminated soil. This apocalyptic scene extends infinitely in the villages near the Fukushima dai-ichi

Koide: In a word, the Japanese state is incapable of functioning adequately when dealing with a disaster. That's why they evacuated those within 20 km by bus but when it came to the 30 km zone they told those who could easily evacuate to do so and for all others to merely close their doors and windows.

Hirano: So there was no emergency management.

Koide: None. There simply is not a single person in the Japanese government who had thought an accident like this was possible. They all immediately fled the off-site center and so there was absolutely no emergency management—there couldn't be. And because management was now impossible, there were no announcements. Even if they had declared an 80 km evacuation zone there were no emergency shelters. They had made no preparations, so there was nothing to be done.

Hirano: Last summer I interviewed Murakami Tetsuya ¹² Just as the accident was happening he reached out to the government. But he got no response. He went to the prefecture. No response from them either. In the end he just used his own judgment. So really there was essentially zero emergency management in place. His thoughts at the time were to get the whole village to emigrate; that really there was nothing to do but to buy land and move to Hokkaido. He said these were his actual plans at the time. In fact, it would seem that the myth of safety has so totally permeated the bureaucracy that there really is no one who thinks about these things—wouldn't you say?

Koide: That's right. Not a single nuclear expert or policy maker ever

seriously considered the possibility of an accident like this. I knew accidents were possible, and that when they happened the damage would be enormous; I had been commenting on the possibility, referring to some results of simulations. But still I would have thought the kind of disaster that happened at Fukushima was some kind of impossible nightmare—yet it actually happened. It was like the worse nightmare becoming a reality. And if even I thought this then all those pronuclear people surely never gave it a moment's thought. And so when it actually happened, no one had thought about, let alone built a system to deal with it.

II The Responsibility of the Scientist and the Citizen

Kasai: In your books and lectures you often express strong respect for Tanaka Shōzō.¹³ Can you connect what you've just said to this as well?

Koide: Sure. I first became aware of Shōzō when I was in the student movement during the 1970s. This was a time when there was close attention paid to Japan's many pollution incidents, such as at Minamata. Personally I was working on nuclear power, but it was a time when, like it or not, we learned of all the harm that came along with building Japan into a modern nation. What I got from Shōzō was this epiphany that just like the Minamata disease right there before our eyes these sorts of pollution incidents went way back in Japanese history. With Japan's decision to cast off Asia and follow the West after the Meiji Ishin of 1868 came these sorts of incidents, and the question within that was just how should one live? I learned the way Shōzō lived his life. I thought: Wow, it is possible to live that way; I must do it. Unfortunately I am completely unable to do so, but I never stop thinking that Shōzō's was a wonderful way to live a life.

Hirano: Going back to an earlier discussion. You've repeatedly talked about the government's responsibility, scientists' responsibility, and individual responsibility. It would seem that this word "responsibility" is an extremely important keyword for you. You often emphasize it in your writing, too. What I want to ask concerns the issue of scientists' special responsibility, a particular social responsibility. Scientists are often thought of as technicians, but this is not really the case. As a result, I feel you've pursued an intense interrogation of yourself as a scientist. As you've said you are not going to enter politics, could you connect this discussion of scientific responsibility to your earlier discussion of doing all that has fallen to you personally to do? How should we think about these two things?

Koide: I am in science and as such I have to take on the responsibility of a scientist—just as a politician must take political responsibility. I think I mentioned this to you the last time, but I am an absolute individualist (*tetteiteki na kojishugisha*/徹底的な個人主義者). I don't want to be constrained by anyone. I want to be able to decide my own life for myself. But because I've made this choice by myself I must also take full responsibility for that choice.

It's two sides of the same coin. I don't take orders from anyone. And this means that I alone bear the responsibility. It's really as simple as saying: I'm

a scientist and so I have the responsibility of a scientist.

Hirano: On this way of thinking about responsibility: "Who is the subject responsible?"—this way of thinking about it seems to be quite absent in contemporary Japan.

Koide: Right. People living in Japan today have not made decisions as individuals. They just "go with the flow;" as long as they follow the "authorities" whom they believe will guarantee the happiness of their individual selves. This seems true of education, too. Go to a slightly better school; get into a slightly better company; grow a bit more rich, a bit more grand. I think everyone is swept up in this current, and it's really senseless. I think it is extremely important that each and every individual live out their individuality. The absolute worst thing is for everyone to become blindly obedient to the "authorities," yet this is the Japan we find ourselves in today. And so no one takes any responsibility. Living in such a society it is too easy to say, "It can't be helped." Everyone is thus able to blame the society as a whole; "It can't be helped." And so no one takes any individual responsibility. The most extreme and obvious example was the war. Everyone would say: "It's not my fault; I was deceived. The military were the culprits." Saying this allows people to remain at a distance, indifferent. It is bad news for a nation when its citizens have only this view of responsibility.

Hirano: You've declared, "I am an absolute individualist." Personally I am very interested in that statement. So could you speak a bit more concretely about the meaning of your individualism for how one lives a life? In other words, could you explain just what you mean by this "individualism?" That is, in Japan being individualistic is more often a way to say egotistical; a sort of disregard of others. One should pursue one's own interests—in English the word is "selfish" — egocentric — pursue your own egotistic advantage. Now this seems completely different from the way you use the term. Could you speak directly to this difference?

Koide: I think you've just done so.

Hirano: Did I? (Laughs). So that's it then, just as I said? Still it's clearly not selfishness.

Koide: No, I don't think it's about interests.

Hirano: It's about values isn't it?

Koide: Yes, it's about personal values. You and I are different people. I am different again from Mr. Kasai. Why? Well our genetic information is different. I received a bundle of information from my parents. You and Mr. Kasai, too, are influenced by your genetic information. Every one of the over one hundred million Japanese is a unique human being; and every one of the over 7.3 billion people on earth are unique individuals.

History may keep moving on, and there is a big, wide world here on this planet earth. That said, right now, at this moment, and right now, in this place, I exist as an irreplaceable being. It is nothing but an absolute truth. You normally live in Los Angeles, but right now at this moment you are a person who is here. Mr. Kasai has come down from Tokyo. While

acknowledging all the implications of being within the flow of history, we are all right here, right now.

In other words, every single individual human being has a different way of living a life; they are each unique. They have each lived a life that absolutely no one else could have lived. It is a real loss if they don't live up to their full potential. Those are my thoughts.

So for my own unique self, and so for your own unique self, and Mr. Kasai's own unique self, none of us should be compelled by someone else to do something (*meirei o sarete*/命令されて). If we don't live our lives according to the will coming from deep within ourselves, that's a real loss; we must all live with our values coming from within ourselves.

I am going to retire next March, but though I am the lowest ranked employee here— above me are assistant professors and professors — because of the peculiar arrangements of working where I do, I am not compelled to take orders from anyone. I am the lowest ranked so of course there is also no one below me to order around. So I am in a position where I never take nor give orders. For me this is the ideal position to be in.

And so I can live out my own life according to my own values; I'm allowed to live a life that suits me. Now I found myself in this position largely by accident, and then chose to continue to live my life this way. Related to this, I am a human being and so will make mistakes, but these mistakes will be things that I have chosen, things that I have personally done so there is nothing to do but to take responsibility for them. This is what I mean when I say that responsibility is an extremely important word.

Hirano: Well, you've exhaustively criticized this competitive society. You've said that this competitive society has ruined Japan and destroyed life based on what you call responsibility.

Koide: Yes. Everyone is running towards the exact same goal. It's ludicrous. You want to go that way; I want to go this way. I think this would be the ideal society. Full mutual recognition is a good thing.

Hirano: Does your view come from your personal experience? In your books you state that you were a really conscientious student when you were younger (laughs).

Koide: (laughs) Well, yes.

Hirano: You studied extremely hard. Did everything extremely hard. You continued this in your nuclear research in college believing that a new energy source was cheap and good for everyone. You must have thought this was a great thing.

Koide: That's right.

Hirano: But you eventually noticed that it was all wrong. So on this, from deep in your own experience, it's an individual history, an individual experience, in one sense it's connected to your current individualism, to how you live your life focused on the important things to you.

Koide: I think that's right. So, well, when I was young, in my late teens, I was consumed by the dream of nuclear power. I devoted my life to it. That was all

a mistake—it did not take me too long to realize that.

Hirano: When did it happen? In graduate school?

Koide: My third year in university.

Hirano: Third year—so as an undergraduate.

Koide: Yes, I came to this realization in the latter half of my undergraduate studies. It was foolish and I curse myself for it, but I didn't quit. To this day I've lived my life as someone who made that wrong choice, and there is nothing to do but make amends for that choice.

At a minimum I wanted to get rid of nuclear power before there was a bad accident. I guess I've lived with this wish for over forty years—but that wish stayed out of reach. And here we have had the accident so my life has been for nothing. You could say that thing I wanted most to do has been denied. Really, what have I lived for? I think about that from time to time.

As this was my choice I have to accept it. So while the meaning of my life may have been lost, still I was able to live my own life as I pleased, without submitting to the orders of others and without ordering others around—for this I am grateful. My hopes were never realized. History is full of that kind of thing. Likely very few people see their hopes fulfilled. And while in my case they were rejected, I was able to live the life I wanted and that is a life to be grateful for.

Hirano: In a way, it's just how Tanaka Shōzō lived his life isn't it?

Koide: Yes it is. That is what I like about Shōzō.

Hirano: On that point. His life, too, was a defeat.

Koide: Complete and total defeat.

Hirano: Still, he used all sorts of means, and followed all the way through on his beliefs.

Hirano: So getting back to Fukushima, it seems when it comes to the life choices of the so-called Japanese elites, they seem caught in a system in which they will succeed and become famous by crushing their individuality and subsuming it under some organization in order to get ahead in a society and achieve fame and status. And the education system seems to be promoting this lifestyle where these sorts of people are created through intense competition. I think the very end result of this social and educational system was revealed, and it exploded in an explicit and ugly manner through various problems the Fukushima disaster has posed.

Koide: Yes, I think so. You said it.

Hirano: I see. In one sense it would have been possible even for these Japanese elites to make their personal responsibility clear and take appropriate actions only if they had lived a life based on individualism as you suggested.

Koide: Yes I think such a possibility exists, but unfortunately in Japan today that possibility has been completely crushed. It was abundantly clear from the Fukushima disaster that no one in this country is going to take responsibility.

Hirano: You've already talked about how TEPCO and the government made

huge mistakes in dealing with the problem immediately after the accident. What do you see as the definitive mistake that led to this disaster?

Koide: There's a ton of them. Any specialist would have known right away there had been a meltdown, and that everyone needed to be evacuated immediately. And evacuating to 20 km away is totally inadequate. Iitate village some 40-50 km away received an enormous amount of contamination and was neglected for over a month.

Soma residents evacuated to Iitate, this kind of stupidity cannot stand, the government's criminal mistakes.

The Hosokawa family of Iitate Village continues to live in the heavily radiated area to look after their horses (2014). More than a dozen horses died since 2011.

Kasai: I'm deeply taken by your previous discussion on responsibility. It's really a story of something with no owner. A golf course that has had to close because it is considered contaminated with radiation from TEPCO's plant has recently sued. TEPCO's top attorneys argued in defense that the radiation is not their property, which would make it no one's property and therefore TEPCO is not responsible. It seems the opposite of what you've just said about responsibility, to be sure, yet this declaration of complete lack of responsibility, once passed through the logic and system of the courts, these lawyers have arrived at precisely this conclusion. It is not a question of individual responsibility; it is a problem of the social system. Lack of any responsibility is the basis of the entire social system. What are your thoughts on this?

Koide: It's exactly as you say. This is what it has come to. I couldn't care less about a country like that. But in order to overcome this situation, it's something I mentioned earlier, but there is no way but for rather foolish citizens to get smarter. Only each individual standing up for his or her own way is going to do it.

Hirano: You've also talked about "responsibility for being fooled." You've said that even the deceived are guilty and stressed that they too must take responsibility. How do you think about this at the individual level? For example, you've often stated that there should be a new food labeling system put in place by which especially the generation that agreed to build the reactors would be obliged to eat the contaminated food—would this be an example of taking individual responsibility for you?

Koide: Yes, that's exactly what I mean. So, because I think that every Japanese adult has responsibility for both allowing the rampant development of nuclear power and the Fukushima disaster, I said that they

should be the ones to eat the contaminated food. And so that this disaster may never happen again, nuclear power must be eliminated—of course there should be no question of restarting the reactors. Yet, what I've just said is not really a widespread idea. Slowly all the reactors are being restarted.

Hirano: So in that sense Japanese citizens' responsibility is increasing in that they are allowing the restart of the reactors.

Koide: I think the nuclear power issue is precisely analogous to the war.

Hirano: Indeed, as with the damage of misinformation and national morality discourse we talked about and the pressure that comes from those hints of someone being somehow "un-Japanese," it seems to really resemble the war.

Koide: I think so, yes.

Hirano: I'd like to ask more about the responsibility for being misled. Up to now the reason most would say that nuclear power has been allowed is the myth of safety—a myth invented by the coordination of the government, TEPCO, and the media. So Japanese citizens have been robbed of being told the truth, of having the chance to know the truth.

Koide: That's true.

Hirano: So the likely response to your position would be that it's unjust to blame those who were robbed of the chance to know the truth. How would you answer this challenge?

Koide: I also said that the current situation is just like during the war. Then, too, the media only reported the information coming from imperial headquarters: The Japanese military enjoyed nothing but a string of victories. We were all told that because of the emperor Japan was a divine country and therefore could not lose. You would go to school and there would be the emperor's portrait hanging on the wall. There was a place where the emperor was enshrined right there on school grounds. Every child was taught that the emperor was present there.

In such a country it wasn't strange to think that Japan would win the war. But those who knew more about the world, including of course those in the military, knew that Japan could not win. Still they said nothing. And so everyone was swept along with the current.

But history is harsh, and in the end Japan was battered. And people at that time said, "Ah, we've been misled. The military are the culprits." But even within all of this there were those who resisted the war. The number of people tortured and killed by the Special Higher Police was huge. And those people, too, were labeled as "un-Japanese" and ostracized from society by the majority of the population. Whole families, whole groups of people were obliterated.

So those who lived then were duped, they were given false information. But should they say that's where their responsibility ends? I would respond that even if they were duped, the duped still bear the responsibility of the duped. How did each and every one of them live their lives during the war? How did they deal with the information they were being given? I think we need to include these kinds of questions when we interrogate ourselves over taking

responsibility. Now if you say this people get angry but I think without question the emperor has absolute responsibility for the war. We ended up moving on without trying to pursue the emperor's war responsibility. Even today you'll see people happily shouting "Tennō heika banzai," Long Live the Emperor. At midnight NHK will broadcast the Japanese flag flapping in the wind. I can't stand that and so don't watch TV. Most Japanese get happy when they hear 'honorable' addresses by His Majesty the Emperor or news about the imperial family. From the bottom of my heart I think we should have pursued his war crimes and punished him with whatever it takes, including execution. I have been saying this and people get very angry. I am told not to criticize the emperor. They say if I do I'll harm the anti-nuclear movement.

Hirano: Even people in the anti-nuclear movement warn you about things like that? A critical reference to the emperor's wartime responsibility could be fatally divisive for the movement?

Koide: Those roots are that strong when you talk about war responsibility. But as I have mentioned to you, I feel at the bottom of my heart that each and every individual must take personal responsibility for how he or she lived his or her life. That's the reason why I wanted the emperor to take his responsibility as a person.

We must build such a country. Even the duped and the lied to have responsibility as individual human beings. It's true for those who lived through the war, and it's true for those who promote nuclear power in Japan today—indeed it's true for everyone on earth. Each one, should they be deceived, is responsible for being deceived.

Hirano/Kasai: Well we've gone on long today and heard some really important things. Thank you very much.

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Notes

1

Koide Hiroaki, "The Truth About Nuclear Power: Japanese Nuclear Engineer Calls for Abolition," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* Vol 9, Issue 31 No 5, August 1, 2011.

2

Translator's note: There is also a significant amount Cs-134 (although now perhaps 20% of Cs-137 totals). Large amounts of Cs have flowed into the ocean as well. Cs-134 is the main tracer for following Fukushima effluents in the ocean. I am indebted to Timothy Mousseau for this insight.

3

放射線管理区域 "Controlled area means an area, outside of a restricted area but inside the site boundary, access to which can be limited by the licensee for any reason."

4

See the English translation of his testimony at the Diet: Koide Hiroaki, "The Truth About Nuclear Power: Japanese Nuclear Engineer Calls for Abolition" *The Asia-Pacific Journal* Vol 9, Issue 31 No 5, August 1, 2011.

5

"Tanemaki Journal," an Osaka based radio show by Mainichi Broadcasting Station, began to air critical evaluations of the Fukushima incident immediately after March 11th. Tanemaki Journal invited Koide as a commentator on a daily basis and he offered astute and up-to-date comments on the disaster. Despite, or perhaps because of, its popularity, according to some reports, the radio program was shut down in July 2012 under pressure from Kansai Electric Power Company which was a major sponsor of the TV station MBS. When Mainichi announced the termination of Tanemaki, listeners protested outside the company's office. The program won a Sakata Memorial Journalism Award in March 2012.

6

Kariya Tetsu, *Oi Shinbo 111 Fukushima no shinjitsu* (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 2014). The episode was published in April 28th, 2014 in a popular comic book. After returning from their visit to Fukushima, Protagonist and his father began to feel very dull and experienced nosebleeds. The episode developed into a social and political issue as it came under attack by conservative politicians and media for stirring up "damage by rumor."

7

Oi Shinbo discusses the theory that nosebleeds may be the result of ionizing radiation that converts H₂O in the nasal passages to the hydroxyl radical HO which can then form hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂), see Kariya, *Oi Shinbo*, 111: 240-48.

8

Kyushu Electric Power Co. (KEPCO) reactivated the No. 1 reactor in August 2015 and No. 2 in October in the same year. Abe Shinzō's government expressed confidence in the safety the restart by calling the new safety measure "the world toughest." According to the Japan Times, the government plans to have nuclear power account for 20 to 22 percent of the country's total electricity supply by 2030, compared with roughly 30 percent before the disaster at the Fukushima complex. The government continues with the policy despite the overwhelming public opposition against the reactivation of the reactors and the clear evidence that Japanese economy is sustainable without nuclear energy.

9

Mutō Ruiko and Fukushima residents filed a lawsuit against TEPCO and the Japanese government officials, seeking criminal responsibility for the Fukushima nuclear accident. Muto's interview will be published in the Asia-Pacific Journal this year.

10

In September 2015, TEPCO released its first 850 tons of filtered radioactive groundwater into the sea. This is a part of TEPCO's "subdrain plan" that was

approved in late July, 2015, after a year-long battle with local fishermen who opposed the release fearing that it would pollute the ocean and contaminate the marine life. 300 tons of contaminated water is being generated at the plant daily. TEPCO has yet to deal with remaining 680,000 tons of highly contaminated water that was used to cool the reactors during the 2011 meltdown.

11

Kashiwazaki is a city in Niigata prefecture.

12

The Tokaimura nuclear accident occurred on September 30th 1999, resulting in two deaths. It was the worst civilian nuclear radiation accident in Japan prior to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster of 2011. The criticality accident happened in a uranium processing facility operated by JCO, a subsidiary of Sumitomo Metal Mining Co. in the village of Tokai, Ibaraki Prefecture. Both the national and the prefectural governments failed to deal promptly with the accident due to the lack of evacuation plan and Tatsuya Murakami, then the mayor of the Tokaimura, decided to evacuate villagers from the affected area. 27 workers, who contained the crisis, were exposed to radioactivity.

13

Tanaka Shōzō (1841-1913) is considered to be Japan's first environmentalist. Tanaka is well known for his activism in connection with pollution caused by waste from the Ashio Copper Mine in Tochigi prefecture. From the mid-1880s, the Watarase river near the mine became heavily contaminated by mine waste and in 1890 a large flood carried poisonous waste from the mine into surrounding fields and villages. Tanaka took the cause to the National Diet as a member of the House of Representatives, but it ended with little success. In 1900, Tanaka and villagers in the valley of the Watarase river planned a mass protest in Tokyo, but were stopped and dispersed by government troops. He resigned from the Diet in 1901 and made a direct appeal to Emperor Meiji. He became the supporter of local autonomy and developed his own anti-war, anti-imperialist, and environmental philosophy. He died of cancer in Yanaka village in 1913.

Katsuya Hirano is Associate Professor of History at UCLA. He is the author of *The Politics of Dialogic Imagination: Power and Popular Culture in Early Modern Japan* (Chicago). This interview is the second installment of his oral history project on Fukushima in *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*. The first interview was with Murakami Tatsuya: "Fukushima and the Crisis of Democracy: Interview with Murakami Tatsuya", *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 13, Issue 20, No. 1, May 25, 2015.

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Perspective on Koide's interview

Nuclear Disasters: A Much Greater Event Has Already Taken Place

Robert Stolz

3/11 and Japanese Resilience Five Years Later

March 15, 2016

Volume 14 | Issue 6 | Number 3

Koide Hiroaki has dedicated his career to preventing a nuclear disaster in Japan. That disaster has now happened. As we learn in this wide-ranging and important interview, the accident often referred to as 3/11 was enormous and in many ways unprecedented. The full scope of the disaster is still unknown, but is clearly on the scale of Chernobyl, placing the amount of radioactive material released into the atmosphere possibly up to 1,000 times the Hiroshima bombing of 1945. Professor Koide's reporting in his many books, interviews, and radio programs is essential reading for anyone wishing to learn the nature and extent of the radiological event of March 2011 and beyond. But early in the interview we learn something else. For while in ways unprecedented, 3/11 is also a part of a historical series of nuclear exposures from the Trinity test in the New Mexico desert in July 1945, to the Castle-Bravo Lucky Dragon Incident of 1954, to Semipalatinsk, to Chernobyl, and to the next sure-to-happen event.¹ In fact, while it is clear that the urgent social, political, and medical task right now is the acute contamination of land, air, sea, and bodies by the Fukushima dai-ichi meltdowns, as Prof. Koide says, as bad as Fukushima is, "a much greater event has already taken place." His immediate reference is **the enormous amount radioactive material released in the atmospheric testing from 1945 to 1980.**²

Though many decades in the past, these radioactive releases at the height of the Cold War continue to contaminate the entire globe. Originally, huge amounts of radioactive material, several times greater than Chernobyl or Fukushima, were released into the air and dispersed by the prevailing winds and jet stream before falling on the oceans and land contaminating huge areas of the earth-especially in the main test sites in the South Pacific, the US West, and Kazakhstan. But some of this released material breached the tropopause, the soft barrier between the troposphere and the stratosphere, escaping the troposphere before becoming trapped aloft in the stratosphere. Recently it has been discovered that major spring thunderstorms-and notably the 2010 eruption of Eyjafjallajökull in Iceland- regularly rise high enough to breach the tropopause. Radioactive particles, mostly plutonium and Cesium-137, now decades old, attach to the storms and fall back to earth as a fresh contamination of material from atmospheric testing. As prof. Koide points out this means that **the entire earth has been and continues to be exposed to radiation from these tests.** Following the widely accepted model of radiation exposure as damaging at all levels-the

linear, no threshold model (LNT)-it follows that this exposure led to a rise of damage to global health, especially childhood thyroid cancer, leukemia, and other health effects.³

But 3/11 is not only one in a series of radiation contaminations dating back to the birth of the atomic age. These nuclear disasters are also part of a larger historical series of toxic events dating back to the birth of the industrial age. Prof. Koide himself notes the parallels of his own work with the Japanese anti-pollution activist Tanaka Shōzō's (1841-1913) fight against the pollution of the Watarase and Tone rivers north of Tokyo by the Ashio Copper Mine in the 1890s. Fukushima must be seen in the context of these other toxic events, one in a series which, though the particular pollutant may have been different, all share a family resemblance: **each names a particular site of industrial capitalist production that results in the contamination of a space that in turn requires the sacrifice of that region for future use and the loss of the means of life by any who live in the area.** The list of these national sacrifice zones is long and growing: Ashio, Minamata, Grassy Narrows, Ontario, Hinkley, California, the Gulf of Mexico Hypoxic Zone, Bikini Atoll, the "downwind" sections of the Great Basin of eastern California, Nevada, and western Utah,⁴ Hanford, Washington and Ozersk, Kazakhstan,⁵ Chernobyl. The list now includes a region some 20km around Fukushima dai-ichi.

Tanaka Shōzō glimpsed the logic of the national sacrifice zone in 1902 when he fought against the Japanese state's seizing of the village of Yanaka and displacing its residents in order to build a flood control reservoir. For Tanaka, this enormous re-making of the Watarase and Tone rivers signaled no less than converting an entire watershed that had served as a centuries-long source of production and sustenance into a sink of contaminants: "If [the pollution] continues too long, the river's headwaters will trickle out from a poisoned mountain of foul rocks and polluted soil that wholly penetrates the water, forming a second [toxic] nature (*dai ni no tensei o nashi*); once this happens there will be no saving anyone."⁶ This event was the turning point in Japan's environmental history, one that was repeated across the globe in the 19-20th centuries. **The insatiable drive for more powerful energy sources to fuel more economic growth is everywhere hitting barriers, creating more and more national sacrifice zones on larger and larger scales.**

The growing toxicity of daily life stretches from the local and personal in the toxic working environments of computer production and waste disposal to the truly global. With global warming, ocean acidification, bioaccumulation of mercury, desertification, and countless other alarming trends we risk sacrificing the earth itself as these trends combine to make the earth less and less amenable to increased or even stable production of the means of subsistence. 2002 marked an uptick in global food prices that has continued to this day, reversing a centuries long trend of cheaper food—a trend that drove much of the economic progress since the nineteenth century. Global food prices in 2014 were 127% of 2002⁷ and show few signs of stopping their rise. The implications for increasing toxicity and undemocratic politics in an era of unprecedented rising food prices are dire, as the motivation to dig deeper for water and nutrients will require even greater projects that demand ever greater chemical and energy inputs.

The Cosmic Horror of Hoshanō sekai

Even so the nuclear question remains special—a culmination or apotheosis of this longer trend. As we learn in the interview, a nuclear disaster is different from other contaminations. Because of the very nature of radiation, namely its spatial and temporal scales, in many ways we lack a language adequate to a world lorded over by radiation. The literary genre called Cosmic Horror of Algernon Blackwood or H. P. Lovecraft has long attempted to grasp the frightening realities of unleashing a force that operates on such a-human scales and temporalities as plutonium-239 (half-life over 24,000 years) or uranium-235 (half-life over 700 million years). The Horror writer and arch-pessimist Thomas Ligotti perhaps comes closest to describing the implications of unleashing truly astronomical forces into human everyday life when he

writes: "Such is the motif of supernatural horror: Something terrible in its being comes forward and makes its claim as a shareholder in our reality, or what we think is our reality and ours alone. It may be an emissary from the grave, or an esoteric monstrosity.... It may be the offspring of a scientific experiment with unintended consequences.... Or it may be a world unto itself of pure morbidity, one suffused with a profound sense of doom without a name - Edgar Allan Poe's world."⁸ In our present of 2016 the sense of doom does have a name: Hoshanō sekai-Radiation's World. Radiation's World announces that the earth-or at least large parts of it-is no longer exclusively ours. We have rendered huge spaces of the planet off limits for time periods beyond any scale of recorded history.⁹ Parallel to but different than the rapacious depletion of the natural world from forests to cod stocks to fossil fuels that took millennia to build up but are consumed in decades, as we mine deeper temporalities in pursuit of open ended consumption we have also unleashed anti-human temporalities incompatible with continued production or consumption.¹⁰ It is these spaces that are now ruled by radiation and are no longer part of human society. Like the old Horror trope, **we have unleashed forces that we cannot contain.** But unlike Horror, there is no discrete monster to kill at the end.¹¹ Pessimism is surely called for.

Though our world of cosmic horror may have a name, hoshanō sekai likely does not have a politics. At Ashio, Tanaka fought the re-engineering of the watershed by building different relations to the river in the doomed village of Yanaka, a politics he called Yanaka Studies (*Yanakagaku*). In the post-war period the physician and activist Harada Masazumi called his effort to rebuild the fishing village poisoned by methyl mercury effluent Minamata Studies (*Minamatagaku*). And globally there is the Salvagepunk movement to reclaim abandoned urban zones by reassembling of collapsing infrastructure from Detroit to the Parisian banlieues.¹² But the very nature of radiation thwarts this process. There cannot be an Atomic Punk. The 20 km zone around the Fukushima plant has been appropriated by radiation and will not be re-appropriated by humans for decades - the site itself remains off limits for much longer. Because the monitoring equipment was destroyed by the accident itself, the oft-cited maximum recorded doses of 25 mSv/yr cover only the first four months of the disaster and only include external radiation. Adding internal radiation through inhaling radioactive dust or consumption of radioactive food and water means the levels are necessarily higher. Further, current readings take only the readings in the air and not in the soil or water.¹³ A purely technical fix seems unlikely as even robots may not safely venture onto the reactor site, putting a pessimistic spin on the term post-human. The contamination has its own lifespan; it can only be moved and hopefully contained, in some cases for millennia. Populations cannot safely repopulate the area no matter what alternative politics they may practice. **As prof. Koide and many others note, there is nothing to do but cede the ground to radiation and relocate.**

Though a long planned Cold War prelude to the remilitarization of Japan, the new State Secrets Law of 2014 was predictably used first to control the information on the levels of contamination outside the 20km exclusion zone. And thus the long historical trend linking toxicity and undemocratic politics is renewed and extended. **It is likely this very nexus of toxicity and undemocratic politics that is the source of the repetition compulsion at the core of the historical series of national sacrifice zones.** Just as the existence of nuclear weapons requires a national security state, the existence of nuclear power presupposes appropriation of the kind resisted since Ashio. In short, the nuclear reactors instantiate a fundamentally untenable social relation to nature-and thus a fundamentally untenable social relation to life itself. What is called for is a new environmental regime based on an ecologically sound everyday life. This is Tanaka's Yanaka Studies. It is the physician Harada Masazumi's Minamata Studies, and it is a yet to be formed Fukushima Studies. But a Fukushima Studies must start, as Prof. Koide tells us, with the immediate end to nuclear power. **Though radiation contamination does not have a technical fix, it may have a political one.** As Prof. Koide says, Germany has done just this: declared an end to nuclear

power.¹⁴ This is the necessarily political decision that can then be the basis of a new energy regime. This is not easy, but it is possible. The encouraging grassroots politicization of "electricity conservation" (setsuden) of recent years has shown the feasibility of just such a new energy regime in Japan, one without nuclear power or increased imports of polluting coal and oil. But this trend is countered by others. In the face of strong anti-nuclear protests, the Abe government has already restarted reactors in Kyushu, and just as Prof. Koide feared in his discussion of the 2014 LDP election, the government has plans to restart the others moving towards a Japanese energy regime hardly changed from before the Fukushima disaster. Prof. Koide's career was not able to prevent the disaster. But his message still points the way to a better future. With the popular mood turned into a political movement-a movement that the 2014 election shows is not yet currently on the horizon-a less toxic, more democratic society is surely possible. More, it is necessary.

Recommended citation: *Robert Stolz, "Nuclear Disasters: A Much Greater Event Has Already Taken Place Robert Stolz", The Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol. 14, Issue 6, No. 2, March 15, 2016.*

Notes

1

Charles Perrow, *Normal Accidents: Living With High-Risk Technologies* (Princeton University Press, 1999); Paul Virilio, "The Primal Accident," in *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, ed. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

2

The United States and the Soviet Union signed a test ban treaty for 1963, but France continued atmospheric testing until 1974 and China until 1980.

3

As the Chernobyl and Fukushima researcher Timothy Mousseau has shown, cancer is only one of the damaging health effects of ionizing radiation. His studies of birds and rodents have shown smaller brain sizes, male sterility, cataracts, and reduced life-spans. Personal communication, February 2016.

4

Mike Davis, *Dead Cities: And Other Tales* (New Press, The, 2003), 33, 40.

5

For the shared toxic legacy of both sides of the Cold War see in English Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (Oxford University Press, 2015). In Japanese see Suga Hidemi, *Han genpatsu no shisōshi: reisen kara Fukushima e* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 2012).

6

Quoted in Robert Stolz, *Bad Water: Nature, Pollution, and Politics in Japan, 1870–1950 (Asia-Pacific: Culture, Politics, and Society)* (Duke University Press Books, 2014), 98.

7

Jason W. Moore, "Cheap Food and Bad Climate: From Surplus Value to Negative Value in the Capitalist World Ecology," *Critical Historical Studies* Spring (2015), 18-19.

8

Thomas Ligotti, *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race: A Contrivance of Horror* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2011), 57.

9

The failed but instructive Pentagon program to attempt to craft a warning not to open Yucca Mountain that could be understood by any civilization some 10,000 years in the future-beyond the time span of existing human language-immediately runs into Lovecraftian notions of time and ancient angry gods

buried in deep in the earth. See Peter van Wyck, *Signs of Danger: Waste, Trauma, and Nuclear Threat* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

10

The alien origin of the "black oil" of the X-Files speaks to this cosmic horror while also linking it to fossil fuel consumption. See for example Justin McBrien, "Accumulating Extinction: Planetary Catastrophism in the Necrocene" in Jason W. Moore, ed., *Anthropocene or Capitalocene: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland: PM Press, forthcoming).

11

Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster," *Commentary* October (1965).

12

Evan Calder Williams, *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse* (Washington: Zero Books, 2011), chapter two.

13

Hiroataka Kasai: "Kasai: So...about the airborne radiation dosage and the soil contamination, there is a public entity that measures and publishes the airborne levels. But the soil contamination is not measured. I remember reading about Chernobyl that the soil contamination levels are the standard by which one gets the right to evacuation and refuge. But Japan only measures the air." Unpublished interview with Koide Hiroaki, December 2014. See also, Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Touching the Grass: Science, Uncertainty and Everyday Life from Chernobyl to Fukushima" in *Science, Technology, & Society* 19:3 (2014): 331-362.

14

Koide: "Take Germany for example. There both the government and industry decided to eliminate nuclear power. When it came to the question of what happens to all the people in that industry the answer led to entirely new jobs being born. In short, if the decision is made to eliminate nuclear power, and the entire society works towards that goal, then I think it can be done - even though people hooked on the drug will truly believe that they will die without it. So the job is to show them that is not the case, that we can build an alternative one piece at a time. Then again, that's really my responsibility isn't it?" (Laughs).

Unpublished interview December 2014.

More compensation for TEPCO

May 26, 2016

TEPCO ordered to pay compensation over 2 Fukushima evacuee deaths

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160526/p2a/00m/0na/013000c>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) was ordered to pay compensation over the deaths of two evacuees from the Fukushima nuclear disaster in rulings at the Tokyo District Court on May 25.

The court, presided over by Judge Yuko Mizuno, ordered that a total of around 30 million yen be paid in the two cases to the relatives of evacuees Masami Fujiyoshi, who died at age 97, and a woman who died at age 86. Fujiyoshi was a patient at Futaba Hospital in Okuma, Fukushima Prefecture, and the woman was a patient at an adjacent, related facility for the elderly. Both died after being evacuated by bus around 230 kilometers away to the city of Iwaki. They were among around 50 patients at the facilities who died after the disaster.

The rulings are the third and fourth concerning patients evacuated from Futaba Hospital or related facilities. Just as in the first and second rulings, the latest rulings recognized a causal relationship between the nuclear disaster and the deaths of the evacuees.

Plaintiffs in the two newer cases had sought a total of about 66 million yen in compensation. In each of the latest cases the court set the compensation to be paid at 20 million yen, then reduced this by around 20 to 30 percent based on the evacuees' pre-existing conditions unrelated to the nuclear disaster. TEPCO released a comment saying, "We will check the ruling and respond to it sincerely."

The chosen few

May 31, 2016

TEPCO reveals only handful knew meltdown manual existed

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201605310068.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Although a manual existed that outlined the criteria for a meltdown, Tokyo Electric Power Co. admitted that only five or so employees at its main office knew of it at the onset of the 2011 nuclear crisis.

Those employees belonged to a section that manages the manual at the company's Tokyo headquarters, TEPCO said at a news conference on May 30.

The utility has been under fire for the delay in acknowledging in May 2011 that triple meltdowns took place at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, two months after they actually occurred following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

TEPCO had maintained that the reactors at the plant suffered "core damage," rather than more serious meltdowns.

Explaining the delay, the company initially cited a lack of guidelines for determining a meltdown.

But TEPCO admitted in February this year that the company manual did contain entries defining a meltdown, although the company said it was unaware of the descriptions for the past five years. The criteria requires the company to declare a meltdown when damage to a reactor core passes 5 percent.

Takafumi Anegawa, chief nuclear officer with TEPCO, told the news conference that a third-party panel will investigate why it took the company five years to disclose the existence of the manual.

In April, a TEPCO senior official admitted that he knew of the criteria when the crisis was unfolding at the plant.

Govt. withholds report on health effects of Chernobyl

June 4, 2016

Japanese gov't withheld report on Chernobyl disaster's health effects

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160604/p2a/00m/0na/006000c>

The Japanese government has withheld an investigative report it compiled on health effects from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe despite spending 50 million yen on the survey in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, it has been learned.

The government's investigation into the aftereffects of the Chernobyl disaster began in November 2012 -- the year after the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant -- under the then Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ)-led administration, and was completed in March 2013 after the Liberal Democratic Party returned to power.

The investigative report denies local documents that confirmed far more serious health hazards from the Chernobyl accident in the former Soviet Union than those recognized by international organizations. An expert familiar with information disclosure points out that the report "should be publicized as a resource for verification from a critical point of view, considering that public money was spent on it" amid sharply divided opinions over nuclear power in Japan.

The investigation was budgeted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and was commissioned to a Tokyo-based consulting firm funded by power companies. **A committee set up to evaluate the survey results was chaired by Nagasaki University professor emeritus Shigenobu Nagataki, who formerly served as chairman of the Radiation Effects Research Foundation.** The investigative team primarily examined and assessed two local reports -- "Twenty-five years after the Chernobyl accident: Safety for the future" and "Chernobyl: Consequences of the catastrophe for people and the environment."

The "Safety for the future" report, which was compiled by Ukraine's Ministry of Emergencies in 2011, points out that the ratio of healthy workers dealing with post-disaster work in Chernobyl plunged from 67.6 percent in 1988 to 5.4 percent in 2008. The latter report, which was put together by local researchers in 2009, estimates that a total of 985,000 people died from the effects of the Chernobyl disaster between April 1986 and December 2004 after their constant exposure to radiation following the disaster triggered cancer, heart and vein disorders and other ailments.

Both reports claim far more serious health hazards than those recognized by international organs, and gained much public attention here in Japan after the reports were highly publicized in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima disaster.

The Japanese government report's assessment panel examined the two reports with regard to 124 parts concerning blood and lymphatic disorders and analyzed whether radiation dose assessments were carried out where radiation exposure was linked to health damage. The committee also conducted an on-site investigation and concluded that it couldn't find any resources with which they could determine the relationship between exposure doses and health damage, based on scientific grounds.

Subsequently, **the science ministry department that was in charge of the survey was moved to the secretariat of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) in April 2013, and the Japanese government's report was not released. The NRA secretariat eventually placed the report in the National Diet Library by way of the Environment Ministry.**

Nagataki told the Mainichi Shimbun, "After we filed the investigation report with the science ministry, the ministry department in charge was shifted to the NRA secretariat, leaving us no clues as to what has become of the report. I felt uncomfortable when I heard the report was kept at the National Diet Library, but I also thought it would be inappropriate for us to demand that the report be released."

A source close to the government told the Mainichi, "The investigation was decided upon under the DPJ administration, and we had to use up the budget. As the government changed hands, we had no intention of proactively publicizing the report." Another government insider said, **"Nondisclosure of the report**

was also intended to avoid causing fear among people in Fukushima. It was also aimed at preventing harmful rumors."

Make March 11 International Day of Global Ethics

Received from Mitsuhei Murata:

Comment on the attached Joint Statement promoting March 11 as an International Day of Global Ethics

A new international system is needed to minimize the consequences of nuclear accidents. Fukushima is revealing the limitations of a government facing a national crisis, its longevity being but of a few years. Nuclear accidents have shown the necessity of coping with their consequences quasi-permanently.

By dint of procrastination, the government of a country where a severe nuclear accident has broken out, could avert the crucial duty to make maximum efforts to cope with the accident by an operation of diversion with the collaboration of the media.

I would like to urge the international community to take up this new problem. Fukushima is now a global security issue.

We need a new system to cope with it.

To supplement this argument, it will help to take up the existence of the IAEA which is given the incompatible mission of preventing the nuclear proliferation and the promotion of nuclear power generation. This organization is known to protect the interests of electric companies. It minimizes the consequences of a nuclear accident and the dangers of radiation. Fully aware of this serious defect, the member states continue to tolerate its existence. This is due to the limitations of the governments of the member states that do not dare to take up a challenging issue that could not easily be solved during their tenure of office.

Now that it is established that nuclear accidents constitute a most serious global security issue, we need a special international system that obliges governments to carry out prescribed duties.

In this connection, an epoch-making development has taken place. It is the attached Joint Statement, calling for the reform of the IAEA. It has been supported by Former President of the Swiss Confederation Moritz Leuenberger, Former Japanese Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa and Professor Ernst von Weizsäcker.

**Joint Statement
promoting March 11 as an International Day of Global Ethics**

The lesson of Fukushima is that we should not use any scientific technology susceptible of causing such damage that human society cannot endure, irrespective of the figures of probability of accident, unless the risk is completely zero.

Any conduct that permits radioactive contamination would create incalculable harm to mankind and the earth almost permanently. It should be condemned as lacking ethics and responsibility.

Japan, alas, has been the victim of both military and civil use of nuclear energy. After Fukushima, Japan is not only suffering from radioactive contamination, but also is encountering not easily surmountable difficulties to bring the disastrous consequences of the accident under control.

It is recognized clearly that nuclear technology is indivisible and cannot be separated between the military and the civilian sectors. We believe that Japan now has the historical mission to plead for the complete nuclear abolition, both military and civil. It is the lesson of Fukushima.

From this point of view, we would like to propose the following:

- 1. The I.A.E.A .that is given an incompatible mission of preventing nuclear proliferation and promoting nuclear power generation should be reformed.**
- 2. International control over the safety of existing nuclear plants must be strengthened.**

The present crisis confronting mankind is a crisis of civilization. We should transform this civilization – the civilization of power based on ‘paternal culture’ – into a civilization of harmony based on ‘maternal culture’ that gives the supreme value to life.

The deeply-rooted cause of the crisis confronting mankind is the universally prevalent lack of ethics. It is against fundamental ethics to abuse and exhaust natural resources that belong to future generations and leave behind permanently poisonous waste and enormous financial debts. Nature and resources of the world are being exploited without regard for the consequences.

Without establishing global ethics, we cannot create future civilization of mankind that leaves behind the beautiful planet for succeeding generations.

In this spirit, we stand for convening a United Nations Ethics Summit and creating an International Day of Global Ethics as is called upon by WFUCA. We fully support the official declaration of WFUCA to make 3.11 the UNESCO World Day of Global Ethics, inviting the international community to support this idea. We believe that this Summit will pave the way toward the vision of President Obama for the” World without Nuclear Weapons”.

This International Day for Global Ethics will allow us every year to renew our determination never to resort to war as a solution to conflict.

We must prepare to make the short term sacrifices in our lifestyles for the long term safety of mankind and the earth without nuclear energy. Natural and renewable energies could constitute the basis for a new civilization based on ethics and solidarity that respects the environment and the interests of future generations.

Only the Fukuryu Maru?

June 5, 2016

Fukuryu Maru got health-damaging dose from 1954 H-bomb tests, ministry claims

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/06/05/national/fukuryu-maru-got-health-damaging-dose-1954-h-bomb-tests-ministry-claims/#.V1R_ZuRdeot

Kyodo

No other Japanese ship was exposed to health-damaging radiation from the 1954 U.S. hydrogen bomb tests in the Pacific Ocean aside from the Fukuryu Maru No. 5, which was contaminated by fallout from one of the tests at Bikini Atoll, according to a recently released health ministry study.

“We were not able to confirm that the exposures (of other vessels) were around the levels that would have had an impact on their health,” a health ministry team said in a report last week, adding that the maximum estimated external exposure was far below the international threshold of 100 millisieverts at which an increased risk of cancer is expected.

The study began after the health ministry disclosed **an abundance of records in September 2014 that were related to radiation checks conducted on ships that were in the vicinity of Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands when the United States conducted its hydrogen bomb tests there in 1954.**

With the disclosure, the ministry also retracted its earlier, long-held position that the radiation testing records no longer existed.

Supporters of the former Fukuryu Maru fishermen said that the health ministry’s new study wasn’t thorough enough.

“The government study is only checking radiation exposures from the first of the six tests held,” said Masatoshi Yamashita, 71, an executive at a civic group who’s been researching the Bikini Atoll case for over 30 years. “It’s not enough.”

While the story of the tuna trawler also known as the Lucky Dragon is well known for the fatal H-bomb fallout that rained down on its deck following the test on March 1, 1954, details about the radiation exposure received by other ships that were in the vicinity at the time have largely been a mystery.

This is the first time that the government has come up with an estimate of the radiation received by other ships’ crews, the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry said.

Earlier this year, a group of former crew members from those ships applied for workers’ compensation for cancer and other diseases that they say were caused by exposure to the atomic tests.

The report, however, says the health ministry team did not find clear signs that the radiation had affected the white and red blood cell counts of those who were exposed, based on blood tests and other data contained in the records disclosed in 2014.

It also reported that the maximum external exposure stood at 1.12 millisieverts, and claimed that internal exposure is likely to have been “quite small in comparison to the external exposure,” based on other exposure studies related to the Fukuryu Maru’s crew and to residents of the Marshall Islands.

All 23 members of the Fukuryu Maru began developing acute symptoms of radiation sickness shortly after the trawler was showered by fallout from the Castle Bravo H-bomb test on March 1, 1954.

One member of the fishing boat died about six months later at the age of 40.

New cases of cancer in children (3)

To refresh memories :

The recent report from the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) and Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR)

5 Years living with Fukushima : Summary of the health effects of the nuclear catastrophe

<http://www.fukushima-is-still-news.com/2016/03/new-report-on-cancers.html>

https://ippnw.de/commonFiles/pdfs/Atomenergie/Tschernobyl/Report_TF_3005_en_17_screen.pdf

Vivre 5 ans avec Fukushima

Résumé des effets sanitaires
de la catastrophe nucléaire



IPINW
International Programme
on the Impact
of Nuclear War

PSR
PUBLIC SERVICE FOR
RADIATION SAFETY

ippnw/psr
report



Version française

the English version of the report : <http://www.psr.org/assets/pdfs/fukushima-report.pdf>

in French

- on the site "Vivre après Fukushima"

<http://www.vivre-apres-fukushima.fr/le-rapport-des-medecins-de-lipnwpsr-sur-fukushima-5-ans-disponible-en-francais/>

- on the site of IPPNW Europe :

<http://www.ippnw.eu/fr/accueil.html>

Stigma attached to cancer

June 7, 2016

Fukushima woman speaks out about her thyroid cancer

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201606070049.html>

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KORIYAMA, Fukushima Prefecture--She's 21, has thyroid cancer, and wants people in her prefecture in northeastern Japan to get screened for it. That statement might not seem provocative, but her prefecture is Fukushima, and of the 173 young people with confirmed or suspected cases since the 2011 nuclear meltdowns there, **she is the first to speak out.**

That near-silence highlights the fear Fukushima thyroid-cancer patients have about being the "nail that sticks out," and thus gets hammered.

The thyroid-cancer rate in the northern Japanese prefecture is many times higher than what is generally found, particularly among children, but the Japanese government says more cases are popping up because of rigorous screening, not the radiation that spewed from Fukushima No. 1 power plant.

To be seen as challenging that view carries consequences in this rigidly harmony-oriented society. **Even just having cancer that might be related to radiation carries a stigma** in the only country to be hit with atomic bombs.

"There aren't many people like me who will openly speak out," said the young woman, who requested anonymity because of fears about harassment. "That's why I'm speaking out so others can feel the same. I can speak out because I'm the kind of person who believes things will be OK."

She has a quick disarming smile and silky black hair. She wears flip-flops. She speaks passionately about her new job as a nursery school teacher. But she also has deep fears: Will she be able to get married? Will her children be healthy?

She suffers from the only disease that the medical community, including the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, has acknowledged is clearly related to the radioactive iodine that spewed into the surrounding areas after the only nuclear disaster worse than Fukushima's, the 1986 explosion and fire at Chernobyl, Ukraine.

Though international reviews of Fukushima have predicted that cancer rates will not rise as a result of the meltdowns there, **some researchers believe the prefecture's high thyroid-cancer rate is related to the accident.**

The government has ordered medical testing of the 380,000 people who were 18 years or under and in Fukushima prefecture at the time of the March 2011 tsunami and quake that sank three reactors into

meltdowns. About 38 percent have yet to be screened, and the number is a whopping 75 percent for those who are now between the ages of 18 and 21.

The young woman said she came forward because she wants to help other patients, especially children, who may be afraid and confused. She doesn't know whether her sickness was caused by the nuclear accident, but plans to get checked for other possible sicknesses, such as uterine cancer, just to be safe.

"I want everyone, all the children, to go to the hospital and get screened. They think it's too much trouble, and there are no risks, and they don't go," the woman said in a recent interview in Fukushima. "My cancer was detected early, and I learned that was important."

Thyroid cancer is among the most curable cancers, though some patients need medication for the rest of their lives, and all need regular checkups.

The young woman had one cancerous thyroid removed, and does not need medication except for painkillers. But she has become prone to hormonal imbalance and gets tired more easily. She used to be a star athlete, and snowboarding remains a hobby.

A barely discernible tiny scar is on her neck, like a pale kiss mark or scratch. She was hospitalized for nearly two weeks, but she was itching to get out. It really hurt then, but there is no pain now, she said with a smile.

"My ability to bounce right back is my trademark," she said. "I'm always able to keep going."

She was mainly worried about her parents, especially her mother, who cried when she found out her daughter had cancer. Her two older siblings also were screened but were fine.

Many Japanese have deep fears about genetic abnormalities caused by radiation. Many, especially older people, assume all cancers are fatal, and even the young woman did herself until her doctors explained her sickness to her.

The young woman said her former boyfriend's family had expressed reservations about their relationship because of her sickness. She has a new boyfriend now, a member of Japan's military, and he understands about her sickness, she said happily.

A support group for thyroid cancer patients was set up earlier this year. The group, which includes lawyers and medical doctors, has refused all media requests for interviews with the handful of families that have joined, saying that kind of attention may be dangerous.

When the group held a news conference in Tokyo in March, it connected by live video feed with two fathers with children with thyroid cancer, but their faces were not shown, to disguise their identities. They criticized the treatment their children received and said they're not certain the government is right in saying the cancer and the nuclear meltdowns are unrelated.

Hiroyuki Kawai, a lawyer who also advises the group, believes patients should file Japan's equivalent of a class-action lawsuit, demanding compensation, but he acknowledged more time will be needed for any legal action.

"The patients are divided. They need to unite, and they need to talk with each other," he said in a recent interview.

The committee of doctors and other experts carrying out the screening of youngsters in Fukushima for thyroid cancer periodically update the numbers of cases found, and they have been steadily climbing.

In a news conference this week, they stuck to the view the cases weren't related to radiation. Most disturbing was a cancer found in a child who was just 5 years old in 2011, the youngest case found so far. But the experts brushed it off, saying one wasn't a significant number.

"It is hard to think there is any relationship," with radiation, said Hokuto Hoshi, a medical doctor who heads the committee.

Shinsyuu Hida, a photographer from Fukushima and an adviser to the patients' group, said fears are great not only about speaking out but also about cancer and radiation.

He said that when a little girl who lives in Fukushima once asked him if she would ever be able to get married, because of the stigma attached to radiation, he was lost for an answer and wept afterward.

"They feel alone. They can't even tell their relatives," Hida said of the patients. "They feel they can't tell anyone. They felt they were not allowed to ask questions."

The woman who spoke to AP also expressed her views on video for a film in the works by independent American filmmaker Ian Thomas Ash.

She counts herself lucky. About 18,000 people were killed in the tsunami, and many more lost their homes to the natural disaster and the subsequent nuclear accident, but her family's home was unscathed.

When asked how she feels about nuclear power, she replied quietly that Japan doesn't need nuclear plants. Without them, she added, maybe she would not have gotten sick.

Ash's video interview:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpmdZYCRIZfvTtTE1sbY3ynaGsfDYmNWn>

The importance of words

June 16, 2016

Panel: Use of words 'core meltdown' banned

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160616_32/

A panel report says a former president of Tokyo Electric Power Company had instructed its officials not to use the words "core meltdown" in explaining the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. The panel says the president banned use of the words following what he said was **an instruction from the prime minister's office**.

TEPCO admitted meltdowns at 3 of its reactors at the Fukushima plant 2 months after the March 2011 accident. It had instead explained that the reactors' cores had been damaged.

A third-party panel was set up by the utility in March to investigate responses to the accident. It submitted the probe results on Thursday.

The panel report says then-TEPCO president Masataka Shimizu instructed a vice president, who was attending a news conference 3 days after the accident, not to use the words "core meltdown."

The report says the ban was conveyed to the vice president through a public relations officer and that it was explained as an instruction from the prime minister's office.

But the panel says it did not carry out investigations of the prime minister's office and that it could not gain details of the instruction through interviews with Shimizu and other officials. Such details include which member of the prime minister's office gave it and how.

Another panel set up by the Niigata prefectural government has also been investigating TEPCO's handling of the accident.

TEPCO earlier told the Niigata panel that it did not use the words "core meltdown" because there is no concise definition of them and that using the words may have given misleading information.

The third-party panel referred to the fact that it took more than 2 months for TEPCO to admit core meltdowns.

The panel report says it cannot say this was improper because TEPCO officials could not determine whether core meltdowns had taken place by inspecting the reactors at that time.

But the report also says core meltdowns were being mentioned within the company at that time and that it could have admitted the phenomena externally.

A panel jointly set up by Niigata Prefecture and TEPCO is expected to carry out further investigations of the matter.

Core meltdown & denials

June 17, 2016

DPJ leaders deny urging cover-up of Fukushima meltdown

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201606170063.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Former government leaders vehemently rejected suggestions in a report that they were pulling the strings behind a suspected meltdown cover-up when the Fukushima nuclear disaster was unfolding in 2011.

The report, compiled by an investigation panel commissioned by Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the crippled nuclear power plant, said Masataka Shimizu, who was TEPCO president at the time of the accident, instructed employees not to use the term "meltdown," leading to a delay in the official announcement.

But the report also implied that Shimizu was acting on orders from high up in the government.

Yukio Edano, who was chief Cabinet secretary of the Democratic Party of Japan-led government when the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami triggered the nuclear crisis on March 11, 2011, described the report as preposterous.

"As far as I know, it is unthinkable for government officials back then to ask TEPCO to do such a thing,"

Edano, now the secretary-general of the opposition Democratic Party, told reporters on June 16.

He accused the panel of merely skimming the surface of the matter and sidestepping the truth behind the instructions to avoid using the term "meltdown."

"It is utterly irresponsible for the panel to say that it did not uncover that (Shimizu) was instructed by who and what," he said.

The third-party panel of legal experts said in the report released on June 16 that it can be assumed that Shimizu understood that he was requested by the prime minister's office to seek its approval beforehand if the company were to announce the "meltdown."

The panel also said it would be difficult to conclude that TEPCO's delay in declaring the meltdown was a "deliberate cover-up."

"Since TEPCO released information on radiation levels inside the reactors and other related data at that time, just not using the term meltdown cannot be described as an act of a deliberate cover-up," the panel said.

TEPCO declared the meltdown at three reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 plant in May 2011, two months after it occurred.

According to the report, Shimizu entered the chief Cabinet secretary's office, which is located at the prime minister's office building, by himself on March 13, 2011. The following day, Sakae Muto, vice president of TEPCO, explained the conditions of the reactors at the plant.

During the news conference, Shimizu handed a memo to Muto through a TEPCO public relations official, telling him not to use the word "meltdown" on the instructions of the prime minister's office, according to the panel.

Naoto Kan, who was prime minister at the time of the disaster, denied giving the instruction to TEPCO.

"I myself have never given directions to TEPCO not to use the expression 'meltdown,'" Kan, a member of the Democratic Party, said in a statement.

One reason for the lack of clarity in the report is that Shimizu, who was interviewed twice for a total of four hours, said, "I do not remember very well" with regard to who gave what instructions.

Another TEPCO employee interviewed by the panel said Shimizu "was under tremendous pressure and must not have a detailed recollection."

The panel interviewed about 60 former and current TEPCO officials but no government officials and bureaucrats who were involved in dealing with the crisis.

"Our authority to investigate is limited, and it is difficult (to uncover the entire truth) in such a short time," said Yasuhisa Tanaka, the lawyer who headed the investigation.

Tanaka and another panel member, Zenzo Sasaki, a former prosecutor at the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office, were also in charge of the third-party investigation into the accident conducted in 2013.

That investigation, based on interviews of TEPCO officials, came under fire for "only arbitrarily presenting TEPCO's argument that is convenient to the company."

The findings by the latest panel showed TEPCO officials looking into the nuclear disaster were aware of Shimizu's order not to use "meltdown," but TEPCO's in-house investigation team did not include it in its report in 2012, apparently believing it was not significant enough to mention.

"TEPCO's efforts to share information inside the company were insufficient," Tanaka said. "It lacked consideration for local governments, which should have been top priority."

The revelation that Shimizu ordered the avoidance of "meltdown" fueled feelings of distrust toward TEPCO among local governments hosting TEPCO nuclear power plants.

"We are still in this stage of the investigation even five years after the accident," said Toshitsuna Watanabe, mayor of Okuma, which co-hosts the crippled Fukushima plant.

Hirohiko Izumida, governor of Niigata Prefecture, home to TEPCO's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant, called for a further investigation to reveal the whole picture of the Fukushima disaster.

"We need to step up efforts to uncover what has not been sufficiently investigated before," he said.

"TEPCO, as an organization, should make a sincere response without hiding anything."

The latest panel was established in March at the request of the Niigata prefectural government's technology committee, which aims to determine why TEPCO waited until May 2011 to announce the triple meltdown.

TEPCO initially said it did not have the criteria for defining and determining a meltdown.

But it announced in February this year that the company "found" an in-house manual that explained whether a meltdown was taking place.

Japan lawmaker denies pressuring TEPCO not to say 'meltdown'

June 17, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160617/p2g/00m/0dm/062000c>

TOKYO (AP) -- A Japanese opposition leader who was a senior official during the 2011 Fukushima nuclear plant crisis denied Friday that he or the prime minister at the time pressured the president of Tokyo Electric Power Co. not to use the term "meltdown."

- **【Related】** TEPCO head banned use of 'meltdown' in describing Fukushima crisis

Democratic Party Secretary-General Yukio Edano called a special news conference to refute a finding in a new report that then-TEPCO President Masataka Shimizu apparently came under political pressure not to use the word. The report did not find direct evidence of that.

"The fact that I or then-Prime Minister (Naoto) Kan ordered or requested then-President Shimizu to avoid using the term 'meltdown' under any circumstance does not exist," Edano said. He said the timing of the report was suspicious ahead of an Upper House election next month.

The report released Thursday by a team of three lawyers appointed by TEPCO found that an instruction from Shimizu to avoid using the term "meltdown" delayed full public disclosure of the status of the nuclear plant, which suffered three reactor meltdowns after a major earthquake and tsunami hit the northeastern Japanese coast on March 11, 2011.

The utility used the less serious phrase "core damage" for two months after the disaster.

TEPCO reported to authorities three days after the tsunami that the damage, based on a computer simulation, involved 25 to 55 percent of the fuel but did not say it constituted a "meltdown," the report said. Yet the company's internal manual defined a meltdown as damage to more than 5 percent of the fuel. In May 2011, TEPCO finally used "meltdown" after another computer simulation showed fuel in one reactor had almost entirely melted and fallen to the bottom of the primary containment chamber, and that the two other reactor cores had melted significantly.

TEPCO has been accused of softening its language to cover up the seriousness of the disaster, though the investigation found TEPCO's delayed acknowledgement did not break any law.

In the 70-page report, the lawyers said Shimizu instructed his deputy not to use the word "meltdown" during news conferences immediately after the crisis. TEPCO's vice president at the time, Sakae Muto, used the phrase "possibility of meltdown" until March 14, 2011.

Video of a news conference that day shows a company official rushing over to Muto when he was about to respond to a question, showing him a memo and hissing into his ear, "The prime minister's office says never to use this word."

Yasuhisa Tanaka, the lawyer who headed the investigation, said interviews of 70 former and current TEPCO officials, including Muto and Shimizu, showed that Muto had planned to use the word "meltdown" until he saw the memo, which has not been found.

"Mr. Shimizu's understanding was the term 'meltdown' could not be used without permission from the prime minister's office," Tanaka said at a news conference at TEPCO headquarters. "The notion that the word should be avoided was shared company-wide. But we don't believe it was a cover-up."

Edano criticized the report as "inadequate and unilateral," and said the team didn't talk to him or Kan. Tanaka said his investigation, which did not interview any government officials, could not track down what exactly happened between Shimizu and the prime minister's office.

The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, Japan's nuclear regulatory unit at the time, was also reluctant to use the word. Two spokesmen were replaced between March 12 and 13, 2011, after suggesting meltdowns had occurred.

TEPCO has said the delay in confirming the meltdowns didn't affect the company's response to the emergency.

The issue surfaced earlier this year in a separate investigation in which TEPCO acknowledged that a company manual had been overlooked, reversing its earlier position that it had no internal criteria for a meltdown. TEPCO has eliminated the definition of a meltdown from the manual in revisions after the Fukushima disaster.

Kan denies ordering ban on using 'meltdown'

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160617_23/

Former prime minister Naoto Kan has denied telling anyone to avoid using the word "meltdown" in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear accident.

Kan released a statement on Friday. He was prime minister at the time of the March 2011 accident.

In the statement, Kan says he never gave instructions to Tokyo Electric Power Company or the now-defunct Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency to avoid using "meltdown" or its Japanese equivalent.

Kan says the TEPCO panel should clarify who gave such an order. He says people from the utility were in the prime minister's office at the time, in addition to politicians and bureaucrats who were dealing with the accident.

Kan says what TEPCO describes as a "third-party" panel never questioned him about the issue. He went on to say that lawyers and other panel members were chosen by the utility, so they were not independent at all.

Kan said the most important point in verifying the details of the nuclear accident is to disclose all the testimonies that TEPCO officials gave to a government inquiry, as well as the recordings of teleconferences held during the crisis.

Was it TEPCO's chief?

June 17, 2016

TEPCO head blamed for late mention of 'meltdown'

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201606170001.html>

June 17, 2016 at 10:15 JST

An outside investigation team appointed by the operator of Japan's damaged Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant said Thursday that an instruction from the company's then-president to avoid using the term "meltdown" delayed the full disclosure of the status of three reactors.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. described the condition of the three reactors as less serious "core damage" for two months after a March 2011 earthquake and tsunami destroyed the plant.

The panel of three TEPCO-commissioned lawyers said the company used the milder term despite knowing that the damage far exceeded its meaning because of the instructions by then-President Masataka Shimizu. The report said he was apparently under pressure from the prime minister's office, but that the panel did not find direct evidence of that.

Naoto Kan, who was prime minister when the nuclear accident occurred, has issued a statement that he had never given any instruction for TEPCO to refrain from using the term.

TEPCO reported to the authorities on March 14, 2011, that the damage, based on a computer simulation, involved 25 to 55 percent of the fuel but did not say it constituted a "meltdown," the report said. The company's internal manual defined a "meltdown" as a core condition with damage exceeding 5 percent of the fuel.

In May 2011, TEPCO finally used the description after another computer simulation showed fuel in one reactor had almost entirely melted and fallen to the bottom of the primary containment chamber, and that the two other reactor cores had melted significantly.

TEPCO has been accused of softening its language to cover up the seriousness of the disaster. But the investigation found TEPCO's delayed acknowledgement did not break any law.

In the 70-page report, the lawyers said Shimizu instructed his deputy not to use the word "meltdown" during news conferences immediately after the crisis when officials were peppered with questions about the reactor conditions. TEPCO's vice president at the time, Sakae Muto, had used the phrase "possibility of meltdown" until March 14, 2011.

Video of a news conference that day shows a company official rushing over to Muto when he was about to respond to a question about the conditions of the reactors, showing him a memo and hissing into his ear, "The prime minister's office says never to use this word."

Yasuhisa Tanaka, the lawyer who headed the investigation, said interviews of 70 former and current TEPCO officials, including Muto and Shimizu, showed that Muto had planned to use the word "meltdown" until he saw the memo, which has since not been found.

"Mr. Shimizu's understanding was the term 'meltdown' could not be used without permission from the prime minister's office," Tanaka told a news conference at TEPCO headquarters. "The notion that the word should be avoided was shared company-wide. But we don't believe it was a cover-up."

The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, Japan's nuclear regulatory unit at the time of the accident, was also reluctant to use the word. Two spokesmen were replaced between March 12 and 13, 2011, after suggesting meltdowns had occurred.

Government and parliamentary investigations have suggested officials, seeking to play down the severity of the Fukushima nuclear crisis, resisted using the term. Tanaka said his investigation, which did not interview government officials, could not track down what exactly happened between Shimizu and the prime minister's office.

The prime minister's office has denied putting any pressure on TEPCO and the safety agency over language. But previous investigations of the accident show it demanded they coordinate with the office and unify approaches before making any announcement.

TEPCO has said the delay in confirming the meltdown didn't affect the company's emergency response at the plant. Although the reactors have been stabilized significantly, the company is still struggling with the plant's decades-long decommissioning.

Delays in the announcement of meltdowns surfaced earlier this year in a separate investigation in which TEPCO acknowledged that a company manual had been overlooked, reversing its earlier position that it had no internal criteria for a meltdown. TEPCO has eliminated the definition of a meltdown from the manual that was revised after the Fukushima accident.

June 16, 2016

Tepco chief likely banned use of 'meltdown' under government pressure: report

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/06/16/national/tepcO-chief-likely-banned-use-meltdown-government-pressure-report/#.V2L1NaJddLN>

by Kazuaki Nagata

Staff Writer

The president of Tokyo Electric Power Co. during the Fukushima nuclear crisis told employees not to publicly use the term "meltdown," apparently in response to government pressure, a third party report released Thursday said.

The report, compiled by three lawyers, said it is highly likely the government at the time pressured Masataka Shimizu, then Tepco's president when the monstrous earthquake and tsunami disabled the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant on March 11, 2011, about the utility's disclosures in the early stages of the crisis.

The report said someone in the government, then headed by Prime Minister Naoto Kan of the Democratic Party of Japan, was unhappy Tepco had revealed a photo of the blown-up building for reactor No. 1 on March 12 without telling the government in advance.

The Prime Minister's Office then called Shimizu the same day. After Shimizu returned to Tepco's Tokyo headquarters, he told his fellow executives that they needed to check with the Prime Minister's Office whenever disclosing information to the public, according to the report.

The report also said Shimizu sent a note on March 14 to Vice President Sakae Muto, who was overseeing the plant and holding a news conference, to warn him not to say meltdown.

"Considering this fact, it is presumable that the Prime Minister's Office requested Shimizu to be careful about admitting to a meltdown in public," the report said.

The panel thought this was a critical point that required further investigation but was unable to track down a specific bureaucrat who made such a request. Yasuhisa Tanaka, who headed the panel, said it conducted hearings with 60 Tepco employees but did not talk to anyone from the government side.

Tepco did not acknowledge that a reactor meltdown had occurred until May 15, 2011 — two months after the fact.

Asked whether Tepco was intentionally covering up the meltdowns, Tanaka said that was probably not the utility's intention at the time.

"Looking at the situation back then, we think it was difficult for Tepco to use the term meltdown because even the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency couldn't use it" due to apparent government pressure, Tanaka said.

The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency was Japan's nuclear watchdog at that time.

The panel spent about three months investigating why Tepco could not publicly reveal the meltdowns occurred earlier than it did.

In February, nearly five years after the crisis, Tepco announced it should have declared the meltdowns earlier, citing the existence of a company manual that listed what constitutes a meltdown. The manual says that meltdown is a state in which 5 percent or more of the fuel rods is damaged.

As of March 14, 2011, Tepco estimated that 55 percent of the fuel rod assemblies in reactor No. 1 and 25 percent of those in reactor No. 3 were damaged but did not declare that they had melted until May that year.

Niigata Prefecture has been pressuring Tepco to look into why it took about two months for the utility to admit to a meltdown.

Niigata hosts Tepco's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant, which the firm desperately wants to restart, but Niigata Gov. Hirohiko Izumida has stressed that he won't give the green light until the Fukushima crisis has been thoroughly investigated.

Tepco had explained to Niigata that it did not use the term meltdown because there was no clear definition of it. But it found the manual in February, which contradicted the explanation and led to the third-party investigation.

The report said that workers at the Fukushima plant were apparently following the manual but seemed to avoid using the term meltdown, presumably because there was a common understanding within the company not to use it.

Tokyo Electric changed its name in April to Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc

No cover-up, says Tanaka

June 17, 2016

Report stating TEPCO avoided use of term 'core meltdown' seen as limited

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160617/p2a/00m/0na/019000c>

June 17, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

The head of a third-party commission probing Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)'s handling of the Fukushima nuclear disaster said June 16 that he did not see the company's in-house ban on the term "core meltdown" following the outbreak of the disaster as part of a cover-up.

- **【Related】** What's behind TEPCO ban on term 'core meltdown' after Fukushima crisis?
- **【Related】** TEPCO head banned use of 'meltdown' in describing Fukushima crisis
- **【Related】** Japan lawmaker denies pressuring TEPCO not to say 'meltdown'

"I do not perceive that the company intentionally hid it," lawyer Yasuhisa Tanaka said in a news conference on June 16. "We have not deemed that there was a cover-up."

However, the commission questioned only about 60 TEPCO employees, and its report in many parts echoed the claims TEPCO had made, underscoring the limits of a probe within the company.

It was Niigata Gov. Hirohiko Izumida who grilled TEPCO over its delay in acknowledging that there had been meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Niigata Prefecture houses the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant operated by TEPCO, and debate continues over the possibility of bringing the plant's reactors back online. The Niigata Prefectural Government formed its own technical committee and sought an explanation from TEPCO. During this process, it emerged in February this year that there existed a manual at TEPCO providing standards for determining whether there had been a core meltdown. Instructions from then TEPCO President Masataka Shimizu to avoid using the term "core meltdown" also came to light.

Questions earlier arose over whether TEPCO intentionally hid the manual. The third-party panel's report stated that TEPCO employees responding to the Niigata Prefecture technical committee didn't realize that the manual contained standards for ascertaining a core meltdown, while employees who knew about it didn't know that this was an issue for the technical committee. The report said TEPCO's response was imprecise and insufficient, but judged it could not be accepted that the way TEPCO acted was intentional or deliberate.

In the June 16 news conference, Tanaka repeated statements siding with TEPCO, saying, "If (TEPCO's) report documents had stated that there had been a core meltdown, we may have ended up all over the place."

The third-party panel investigated whether there had been any pressure from the prime minister's office regarding TEPCO's avoidance of the term "core meltdown," but questioned only TEPCO employees and did not approach any official from the administration of then Prime Minister Naoto Kan or the now-defunct Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency.

"As opposed to Diet investigation committees, there was no binding force and we could only question people voluntarily," Tanaka said.

The third-party commission was formed by three lawyers including former public prosecutor Zenzo Sasaki, who recently investigated a money scandal involving Tokyo Gov. Yoichi Masuzoe.

Niigata University professor emeritus Masaaki Tateishi, a member of the technical committee of the Niigata Prefectural Government, said of the report, "I felt that it merely went along the lines of TEPCO's explanations to date, other than clarifying the responsibility of Mr. Shimizu. I wanted it to go deeper into the predisposition of TEPCO."

What's behind all this?

June 17, 2016

Questions remain about 'meltdown' ban

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160617_12/

Further investigations will be conducted to learn why the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant did not use the term "meltdown" soon after the March 2011 accident.

It took more than 2 months for Tokyo Electric Power Company to admit that the cores of 3 of the reactors had melted down.

A panel set up by TEPCO reported on Thursday that the utility's former president, Masataka Shimizu, had instructed employees not to use the term "meltdown."

The panel said this came after what the president said were instructions from the prime minister's office.

But the panel did not carry the investigation to the prime minister's office. It is not known who in the office issued the instructions.

Panel chairman Yasuhisa Tanaka told reporters that he can speculate that TEPCO faced difficulty using the term at the time, even when officials of the now-defunct Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency could not use the word. He added that he does not think TEPCO intentionally covered up the fact under such circumstances.

TEPCO says it will continue its joint investigation with a panel set up by Niigata Prefecture, which hosts another TEPCO nuclear plant.

Tama University Professor Yasuhide Yamauchi, a member of the Niigata panel, says he wants to find out why the term "meltdown," was avoided, its impact on society and whether the avoidance was intentional.

What's behind TEPCO ban on term 'core meltdown' after Fukushima crisis?

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160617/p2a/00m/0na/013000c>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO)'s then President Masataka Shimizu instructed staff not to use the term "core meltdown" when describing the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant in 2011, according to a report by a third-party investigative committee of TEPCO that was made public on June 16.

- **【Related】** Report stating TEPCO avoided use of term 'core meltdown' seen as limited
- **【Related】** TEPCO head banned use of 'meltdown' in describing Fukushima crisis
- **【Related】** Japan lawmaker denies pressuring TEPCO not to say 'meltdown'
- **【Related】** TEPCO exec says he knew standards for judging meltdown before Fukushima disaster
- **【Related】** Nuclear watchdog slams TEPCO over long overdue 'discovery' of meltdown manual

The report acknowledged that the instructions were conveyed widely within TEPCO by telephone and other means. It hinted that there had been "pressure" from the prime minister's office through a request for TEPCO to provide the content of announcements in advance, but it remained unclear whether the office had any involvement in clamping down on the use of "core meltdown."

What, then, prompted TEPCO to seal off the term? According to the report, the move was triggered by a hydrogen explosion at the building of the Fukushima nuclear plant's No. 1 reactor on the afternoon of March 12, 2011, the day after the plant was crippled by the massive Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The prime minister's office was aware of the explosion from TV images. But when TEPCO went ahead and held a news conference, publicly releasing a photograph of the explosion without contacting the prime minister's office for many hours, then Prime Minister Naoto Kan and other government officials got furious. Shimizu was called to the prime minister's office on March 13 and was told to contact the office in advance when announcing important accident information.

The removal of a senior official of the then Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency from a public relations position on March 13 after he acknowledged a core meltdown in a news conference without first contacting the prime minister's office is also thought to have influenced TEPCO.

On the evening of March 14, when then TEPCO vice president Sakae Muto was giving a news conference, a memo from Shimizu was passed to him by a company employee, saying, "By instruction of the prime minister's office, don't use 'core meltdown.'" Hints of pressure from the prime minister's office had emerged during a teleconference beforehand, with Shimizu saying reports to the prime minister's office should be made "properly, in advance."

Shimizu's position was conveyed within the company by phone and other means. The report concluded that "an understanding was shared within TEPCO that statements acknowledging a meltdown should be avoided."

After that Muto and TEPCO employees switched to the term "core damage." The report pointed out, "If the memo had not been passed over, vice president Muto may have responded differently."

The third-party investigative committee searched for the memo, which was said to be handwritten, but did not find it. The committee questioned Shimizu on two occasions over a period of about four hours, but the report concluded, "His memory has faded and clear facts could not be confirmed."

However, it quoted a TEPCO employee who was summoned in April by then Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Banri Kaieda as saying that Kaieda had told him, "There doesn't appear to be a clear definition of a core meltdown, so let's make it the melting of fuel pellets." After that, a fax was distributed within the company saying, "'Melting of fuel pellets' is to be used. This is because 'core meltdown' conveys the image that the whole core has melted, like the China syndrome."

This was in spite of a manual that was "discovered" at TEPCO in February this year, nearly five years after the meltdowns. The manual defined a core meltdown as having occurred when over 5 percent of the reactor core had been damaged. This being the case, TEPCO could have judged as early as March 14, 2011, three days after the outbreak of the disaster, that core meltdowns had occurred.

The third-party panel report stated that quite a few of some 55 TEPCO employees in charge of TEPCO external reports had checked the manual, and rejected TEPCO's claim that "nobody had noticed" it until its "discovery."

"It would have been natural to list 'core meltdowns' in reports, but the company avoided this," the report stated.

On June 16, Democratic Party Secretary-General Yukio Edano, who was Chief Cabinet Secretary at the time of the meltdowns, told reporters in Yokkaichi, Mie Prefecture, on June 16 that he had never issued any orders to avoid use of the phrase "core meltdown."

"Neither I or then Prime Minister Kan made any such request to TEPCO," he said, adding, "During news conferences at the time I myself acknowledged core meltdowns. Putting the brakes on (the use of the term) would have been out of the question."

Fukushima Pref. not happy with TEPCO's attitude

June 17, 2016

Fukushima Pref. protests TEPCO's actions

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160617_31/

Fukushima Prefecture has protested to Tokyo Electric Power Company after a panel found that the utility's former president ordered its employees not to use the word "meltdown" after the 2011 nuclear accident.

The head of TEPCO's nuclear power and plant division, Masaki Mori, reported the findings on Friday to the prefecture's nuclear safety section chief Nobuyuki Kanno.

Mori said the panel concluded that the utility should have informed municipalities and residents that a meltdown had occurred at the Fukushima Daiichi plant. He apologized for causing trouble and concern.

Kanno said he cannot help but think that TEPCO had a culture which repressed saying anything inconvenient.

He said the utility's attitude is extremely regrettable, as it ignored the residents' deep sense of anxiety.

Kanno urged TEPCO to explain what it plans to do to prevent a recurrence.

Questions remain

June 18, 2016

EDITORIAL: Extent of TEPCO cover-up over meltdown must be clarified

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201606180026.html>

A panel investigating Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s response to the triple meltdown during the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster revealed an unpardonable breach of trust by the operator of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

But there is still a lot more work to be done by the panel to uncover the full scope of the utility's apparent meltdown cover-up.

Immediately after the catastrophic accident at the Fukushima nuclear plant, then TEPCO President Masataka Shimizu instructed employees not to use the term "meltdown," leading to a delay in the official announcement, according to a report compiled by the investigation panel commissioned by the company. A reactor meltdown, or the melting of nuclear fuel in the core of a reactor, is about as bad as it gets.

The panel's report suggests that in the middle of this unprecedented nuclear disaster the top official of the plant operator was trying to conceal the severity of what was unfolding from the public, including people living in areas around the plant.

For four long years, TEPCO kept giving false explanations about the delay in the announcement of the reactor meltdowns to Niigata Prefecture, which was demanding the truth of what happened. The company claimed it did not have the criteria for defining and determining a meltdown. The firm also said no in-house instruction was given to employees telling them not to use the term.

In February this year, however, the company said it had "found" an in-house manual that spelled out such criteria and set up the third-party panel of legal experts to get to the truth about the delayed announcement of the meltdowns.

With the revelations made in its report, can the panel claim it has accomplished its mission?

We have to say the answer is "no," although the disclosure of the former TEPCO president's instruction concerning the meltdowns is definitely a step forward.

What is particularly baffling is the opinion about the president's instruction voiced by Yasuhisa Tanaka, the former president of the Sendai High Court who headed the investigation. "We cannot say for certain that there was a deliberate cover-up by the company," Tanaka said during a news conference.

At the time of the accident, a reactor meltdown was defined by the nuclear disaster special measures law as an emergency situation that must be reported. The conditions of the reactors at the Fukushima plant fulfilled TEPCO's criteria, which say a meltdown means that 5 percent or more of the core of a reactor has been damaged.

But the utility initially denied that a meltdown was happening, while the president instructed employees not to use the term. If this was not a cover-up, what was it?

Also questionable is the panel's suggestion that the TEPCO chief was probably acting on requests from the prime minister's office in giving the instruction. The panel interviewed about 60 former and current TEPCO officials, but no government officials or bureaucrats who were involved in dealing with the crisis. In explaining the panel's failure to interview key government officials, Tanaka said, "Our authority to investigate is limited, and it is difficult (to uncover the entire truth) in such a short time." But the panel didn't even request interviews with them.

Both Naoto Kan, who was then prime minister, and Yukio Edano, who was chief Cabinet secretary, rejected the allegations that the government told TEPCO not to declare a meltdown.

As for the related requests made by Niigata Prefecture, TEPCO says it will continue its joint efforts with the prefectural government to uncover the facts.

The company has a responsibility to clarify the broad picture of the accident and publish the findings of its probe. But the Diet has its own role to play.

Whether the prime minister's office actually asked TEPCO not to declare a reactor meltdown is not the only remaining mystery about the exchanges between the government and the company during the crisis. Only some fragments of information about the communications between the two sides have been revealed.

A Diet investigation committee has drawn up a report on its inquiry into the accident. But there are still many questions that the Diet should try to answer by using its right to investigate state affairs.

We need to learn all vital lessons from the devastating nuclear accident so as to avoid making the same mistakes.

That requires unearthing all the related facts first. It is our responsibility to tackle this challenge for future generations.

--The Asahi Shimbun, June 18

The strength of pro-nuclear lobbying

June 21, 2016

EDITORIAL: License renewal of aging reactors betrays promise, fuels concerns

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201606210041.html>

The Nuclear Regulation Authority on June 20 approved 20-year operating extensions for two reactors at the Takahama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture, both of which had been in service for more than 40 years.

Kansai Electric Power Co., which operates the plant, plans to restart the No. 1 and the No. 2 reactors as early as autumn 2019 after taking the required additional safety measures.

Following the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in 2011, Asahi Shimbun editorials have been arguing for phasing out nuclear power generation in two to three decades.

We believe high-risk or aging reactors should be decommissioned while allowing the minimum number of necessary reactors to continue operations.

The NRA's decision for the two aging reactors has raised serious concerns that license renewals could be approved for many reactors judged deemed capable of operating profitably by utilities. We are opposed to the decision.

One source of worry is the stance of the nuclear safety watchdog itself.

One challenge at the Takahama plant is making electric cables less vulnerable to fires. The NRA has accepted Kansai Electric Power's plan to cover cables with a fire-resistant sheet in places where it is difficult to replace them with flame-retardant cables.

The NRA has also allowed the utility to delay required earthquake-resistance tests that involve the actual shaking of important equipment within the containment vessels of the reactors.

The regulator has given the go-ahead to the company's plan to carry out such tests after taking the additional safety measures.

The licenses for reactor operations can be renewed only once for up to an additional 20 years. But this provision was introduced to prevent emergencies, such as serious power crunches.

The NRA itself described its permission for extended reactor operation as an "extremely exceptional" measure and "hard to obtain."

An even more serious problem is the stance of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government toward nuclear power generation.

In response to the Fukushima nuclear disaster, the Democratic Party of Japan-led government revised the law to set 40 years as the lifespan of nuclear reactors.

The revision was made amid broad public consensus on lowering the nation's dependence on nuclear power.

Initially, the Abe government, inaugurated in December 2012, also repeatedly promised to reduce Japan's dependence on nuclear power generation as much as possible.

But the Abe administration has since gradually switched its position to maintaining nuclear power generation. It has even designated nuclear power as one of the core energy sources for the nation.

The administration's recent refrain is: "Reactors that have been judged safe by the NRA will be restarted."

The NRA, for its part, emphasizes that its mandate is limited to assessing the safety of individual reactors.

The existence of an appropriate and workable evacuation plan is not a factor checked in the watchdog's safety inspections.

The NRA has also avoided directly addressing the risks involved in the concentration of nuclear power plants in certain regions, such as Fukui Prefecture, where the Takahama plant is located.

In March, the Otsu District Court issued an injunction to suspend operations of the No. 3 and the No. 4 reactors at the Takahama plant, which had just been restarted.

The court's decision reflects one important lesson from the Fukushima meltdowns: One key factor behind the accident was the tradition of leaving policy decisions about nuclear power regulation entirely to experts.

The revision to the law to establish the 40-year legal lifespan for nuclear reactors was based on an agreement among the DPJ, Abe's Liberal Democratic Party, now the ruling party, and the LDP's junior coalition partner, Komeito.

The government must not be allowed to betray its promise to the public to reduce Japan's reliance on nuclear power while using the NRA as a cover to obscure its policy shift.

The Abe administration should offer a clear and detailed explanation about its position on the 40-year life rule.

INSIGHT: 40-year safety principle erodes in pro-nuclear lobbying

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201606210073.html>

By MASANOBU HIGASHIYAMA/ Staff Writer

Cries of disapproval rang out from the spectators' gallery when Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA), announced the decision to allow two aging reactors to continue running for 20 more years.

"Don't you know that the operating period is 40 years, in principle?" someone shouted at Tanaka at the NRA meeting on June 20.

In the name of safety, the law on nuclear reactor regulations was revised after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster to limit the operating period of a reactor to 40 years, in principle. The idea was to phase out old reactors because of the difficulties in taking safety measures for such aging equipment.

When Tanaka assumed the post of NRA chairman in September 2012, he said at a news conference, "The designs (of reactors) of 40 years ago are insufficient to maintain their safety."

But through lobbying by pro-nuclear politicians, this 40-year cutoff point is now seen as the time when utilities should seek approval for extending their reactor operations.

The NRA even gave special treatment to Kansai Electric Power Co. in its application for the 20-year operating extensions of the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at the Takahama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture. These two reactors have already been in operation for 40 years.

When the law was revised, a stipulation was added over concerns that a continued decommissioning of 40-year-old reactors could lead to a shortage of electricity in Japan. The stipulation said the operating period of 40 years can be extended by up to 20 years--only once--if the NRA approves.

It was designed as an emergency measure against a possible energy crunch.

Then Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda of the Democratic Party of Japan-led government said, "The extension is limited only to exceptional cases."

However, the safety principle behind the law started to erode after the Liberal Democratic Party regained control of the government in December 2012.

At a Cabinet meeting in 2014, the LDP-led government decided on a basic energy plan, which read, "Nuclear power is an important baseload electricity source."

In summer 2015, the economy ministry said nuclear power will account for 20 percent to 22 percent of total electricity generation in fiscal 2030.

To achieve those percentage figures, operations of at least 10 nuclear reactors had to be extended because of the difficulties in building new reactors, expanding their power generation capabilities or replacing old reactors with new ones.

Under such circumstances, Kansai Electric Power applied to the NRA in April 2015 for extended operations of the Takahama plant's No. 1 and No. 2 reactors, whose operations started in 1974 and 1975, respectively.

Members of the LDP's project team and local government leaders pushed for the extensions. They asserted that they could not accept the decommissioning of two reactors just because the 40-year operation period has run out.

The NRA initially pushed back, saying it could halt the safety screenings of the two reactors, one of which was already more than 40 years old.

Yet the lobbying continued, and the NRA ended up putting top priority on the screenings.

During the screenings, Kansai Electric Power was given preferential treatment. For example, the NRA said that required quake-resistance tests on important reactor equipment can be done after the utility completes its construction work.

The NRA's approval came 14 months after Kansai Electric Power submitted the application for the extensions.

Tadahiro Katsuta, associate professor of nuclear power policies at Meiji University, suggested that these supposed "exceptional cases" could become the norm.

"Unpredictable problems could take place (at nuclear power plants). That's why the principle of 40 years was decided as a safety standard to protect human lives," Katsuta said. "But '40 years' has now become just a term on when to obtain approval for an extension of reactor operations."

One critic in the gallery at the June 20 meeting mentioned legal action against the NRA's decision.

"(Even if the extension is approved,) the operation will be suspended again by a court," the critic yelled.

At a news conference held later, Tanaka said: "Words such as 'in principle' or 'exception' are political messages. Society decides whether to decrease nuclear reactors or not."

T'was a cover-up

June 21, 2016

Editorial: Probe into Fukushima nuke plant's 'meltdown' cover-up lacks credibility

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160621/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

A third-party panel set up by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) to investigate a 2011 accident at its tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant has released a report that then TEPCO President Masataka Shimizu had ordered that the company never use the phrase, "reactor core meltdown."

- **【Fukushima & Nuclear Power】**

It is highly problematic for the head of a company that caused a serious accident, which could threaten the lives and health of people, to issue an order that could be taken as covering up the seriousness of the disaster. The vice president in charge of the nuclear power business and other executives, as well as some employees, deserve criticism that they followed such an instruction.

Considering that the cover-up allegations surfaced more than five years after the outbreak of the nuclear disaster, it is difficult to believe that TEPCO has regained the public's confidence in itself.

The term "Reactor core meltdown" is scientifically a vague phrase. Still, TEPCO's in-house manual on nuclear power generation states that if over 5 percent of the core of a reactor is damaged, it should be recognized as a meltdown. If TEPCO had followed this definition, the company could have deemed three days after the outbreak of the crisis that core meltdowns had occurred in the plant's No. 1 and 3 reactors. However, it was not until two months later that TEPCO officially admitted that meltdowns had occurred at the power station. Furthermore, it was as late as this past February that the existence of the in-house manual came to light.

TEPCO had initially claimed that it was unaware of the existence of the manual but a certain number of employees knew about the manual. The utility had also explained that the firm did not make a clear decision not to admit that meltdowns occurred at the Fukushima plant. However, since the president issued such an order, it is natural to suspect that the firm covered up the meltdowns.

Questions should also be raised over the way the third-party investigative panel conducted the probe. Its investigative report suggests that Shimizu issued the order under pressure from the prime minister's office. "It is assumed that the company understood that it had been asked by the prime minister's office to exercise caution about publicly acknowledging that reactor core meltdowns occurred," the report states. However, the panel had failed to even question the then prime minister or chief Cabinet secretary. The panel later explained that it had neither the authority nor the time to question these top officials.

It is extremely sloppy that the panel suggested that there was political intervention into TEPCO's response to the accident based only on presumptions, as it is an important point. It could give the public the impression that the panel shifted the blame away from TEPCO to the prime minister's office.

Moreover, the report says it cannot be recognized that the company had intentionally concealed the existence of the definition of reactor core meltdowns in the manual for five years, hinting that the panel sided with the power company. As such, it is difficult to trust the panel.

These problems apparently remind the public that there are limits to investigations by third-party panels, such as those conducted into money scandals involving former Tokyo Gov. Yoichi Masuzoe and House of Representatives member Yuko Obuchi. Even if these bodies are called "third-party" fact-finding panels, it is highly questionable how far they are independent since these are set up by those involved in scandals. Those involved in wrongdoing should not use third-party panels they set up to justify their practices or evade responsibility.

June 21, 2016

TEPCO: Delay in declaring 'meltdown' was a cover-up

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201606210075.html>

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The utility that ran the Fukushima nuclear plant has acknowledged its delayed disclosure of the meltdowns at three reactors was tantamount to a cover-up and apologized for it.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. President Naomi Hirose's apology Tuesday followed the revelation that an investigation had found Hirose's predecessor instructed officials during the March 2011 disaster to avoid using the word "meltdown."

TEPCO instead described the reactors' condition as less serious "core damage" for two months after the earthquake and tsunami wrecked the plant, even though utility officials knew meltdowns had occurred. An investigative report released last week said TEPCO's former president instructed officials to use the milder description under alleged pressure from the Prime Minister's Office, though it found no proof. Former officials at the Prime Minister's Office denied the allegation.

Safety: What costs?

June 20, 2016

Kansai Electric gets Takahama reactor life extension, but enormous costs remain

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160621/p2a/00m/0na/015000c>

The Nuclear Regulation Authority may have approved a 20-year operational life extension for the No. 1 and 2 reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture, but the utility's efforts to make nuclear energy its core business still faces many challenges.

- **【Related】** Japan nuclear regulator OKs additional 20-yr run for aging reactors
- **【Related】** Fukushima & Nuclear Power

For example, **upgrading safety measures for the aging reactors is projected to take more than three years and cost upwards of 200 billion yen, even if the price of improvements shared by the entire plant is subtracted. Meanwhile, there is a growing possibility that the units will be halted again by litigation.**

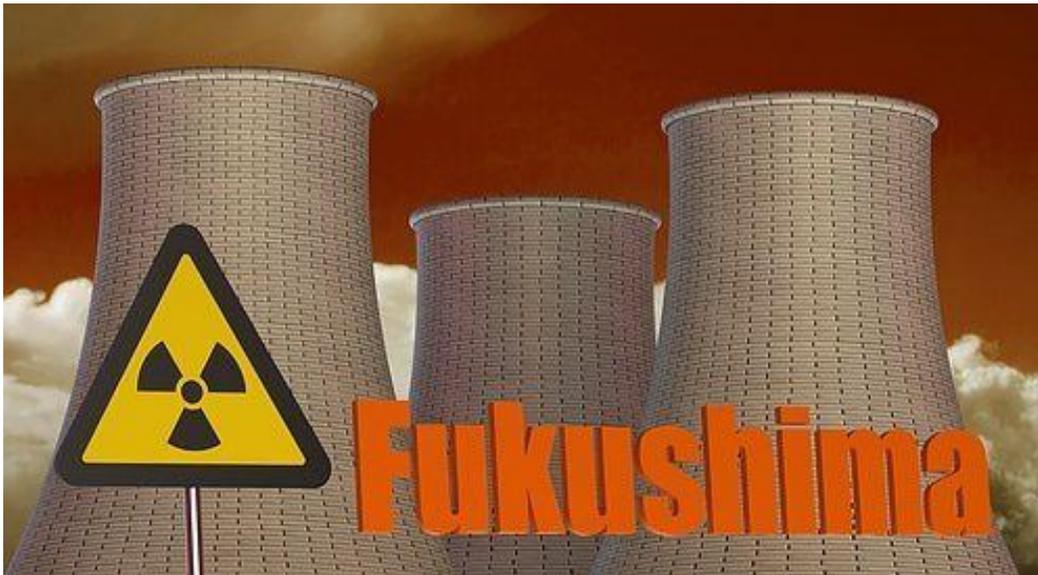
Construction of a quake-resistant emergency services building to house a disaster response team and the plant's emergency response office has already begun. Among the projects yet to get started are giant

reinforced concrete domes that would cover the reactor containment vessels to prevent radiation from escaping in case of an accident. Also on the construction list is replacing seawater pipes now running through earth to the No. 2 reactor with pipes running through bedrock.

However, the construction costs do not end there. Among counter-terrorism measures, Kansai Electric still needs to build a control room that will allow staff to manage cooling and decompression at a safe distance from the reactors. **Among the nine reactors the utility is looking to restart, the total cost for implementing safety measures for just seven is estimated at 730 billion yen. The costs will certainly increase further.**

Meanwhile, the Otsu District Court has already ordered provisional injunctions suspending the Takahama plant's No. 3 and 4 reactors, which are significantly younger than units 1 and 2. This has made litigation against operation of the aging reactors all the more likely. Residents of 14 prefectures, including Fukui and Aichi, in mid-April filed suit with the Nagoya District Court, demanding a halt to the operational life extension for the No. 1 and 2 reactors.

Cynicism and contempt



June 21, 2016

Fukushima 3/11 Breeds Cynicism

by Robert Hunziker

There's an old saying "disasters bring out the best in people," but Fukushima 3/11 of March 11, 2011 has put an exclamation point on cynicism rather than heartfelt concern.

Similar to America's experience of outright lies by its government about the Iraqi Massacre, the blowback of cynicism and contempt bring forth a strain of populism, rejecting establishment, attracting lowly dishonorable politics, as America gooses-up an abomination!

Fukushima's a horror story of hidden agendas, lies, scare tactics, and harsh secrecy laws, yet it's held up as a icon of safe nuclear power by clever mastery of pro-nuke Oceania Newspeak, which, in the novel 1984 penalized "rebellious thoughts" as illegal, similar to Japan's 2013 secrecy law wherein the "act of leaking itself" is bad enough for prosecution, regardless of what, how, or why, off to jail for 10 years. These decadent precepts are hard to accept with a straight face.

However, the day is fast approaching when the pro-nukie crowd, which claims Fukushima 3/11 caused few, if any, major radiation casualties, will be forced to "munch on their own words." As time passes, it becomes ever more obvious that pro-nuke arguments, supporting big fat cumbersome nuclear power plants, metaphorically, hang by fingertips on an electric fence.

As an aside, it is rumored, thru the grapevine in Japan, that hospitals have been instructed to categorize, and officially report, patients' radiation symptoms as "stress-related cases." Hmm!

As for pro-nuclear news:

"In spite of this whole theatrical drama the result was...nobody killed or injured, and no indication of long term negative radiation effects on people. So the lesson of Fukushima is that nuclear power is much safer than people thought," Kelvin Kemm, *The Lesson of Fukushima – Nuclear Energy is Safe*, Cfact, Feb. 16, 2015.

Another example:

"No one has been killed or sickened by the radiation — a point confirmed last month by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Even among Fukushima workers, the number of additional cancer cases in coming years is expected to be so low as to be undetectable, a blip impossible to discern against the statistical background noise," George Johnson, *When Radiation Isn't the Real Risk*, New York Times, Sept. 21, 2015

And, one more:

"There were no cases of radiation sickness among plant workers, because their radiation doses were too low to produce sickness," Georgetown Radiation Expert, *Author Reflects on 5th Anniversary of Fukushima Meltdown*, Georgetown University Medical Center, Newswise, Feb. 23, 2016.

Bunk! To the contrary, not only have several independent sources in Japan reported cover ups of Fukushima worker deaths, bodies incinerated with ashes hidden in Buddhist temples, and instances of hair falling out, nose bleeding, and assorted serious ailments unique to radiation poisoning, now several deaths of U.S. sailors may be closely linked to this disaster that a pro-nuclear crowd claims demonstrates how "safe" nuclear power really is.

Thus, begging the question: Are the pro-nukites liars and/or are they being lied to, or what's up? Who knows, and who really cares which, but their published articles, grandstanding nuclear power, are prominent throughout mainstream big time, and small time, magazines and newspapers and hyperspace, Oceania redux.

Whereas, in vivid contrast to this pro-nuke claptrap, one of Japan's most eminent former prime ministers Junichiro Koizumi (2001-06) declares support for the U.S. sailor's TEPCO lawsuit, more on this later. Additionally, PM Koizumi has repeatedly urged PM Abe to halt efforts to restart Japan's nuclear reactors. He is the second former Japanese prime minister, including PM Naoto Kan (2010-11), to plea for a halt to nuclear power. They claim nuclear power is not safe!

Luckily for the nuclear power industry, Abe is the prime minister.

Yet, there's a festering problem, prevalence of radiation-poisoned deaths:

“The ashes of half a dozen unidentified laborers ended up at a Buddhist temple in this town just north of the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant. Some of the dead men had no papers, others left no emergency contacts. Their names could not be confirmed and no family members had been tracked down to claim their remains. They were simply labeled “decontamination troops” — unknown soldiers in Japan’s massive cleanup campaign to make Fukushima livable again five years after radiation poisoned the fertile countryside,” Mari Yamaguchi, *Fukushima ‘Decontamination Troops’ Often Exploited, Shunned*, AP & ABC News, Minamisona, Japan, March 10, 2016.

And, here’s another:

“It’s a real shame that the authorities hide the truth from the whole world, from the UN. We need to admit that actually many people are dying. We are not allowed to say that, but TEPCO employees also are dying. But they keep mum about it,” Katsutaka Idogawa, former mayor of Futaba (Fukushima Prefecture), *Fukushima Disaster: Tokyo Hides Truth as Children Die, Become Ill from Radiation – Ex-Mayor*, RT, April 21, 2014.

And, one more:

Mako Oshidori, director of Free Press Corporation/Japan, investigated several unreported worker deaths, and interviewed a former nurse who quit TEPCO: “I would like to talk about my interview of a nurse who used to work at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) after the accident... He quit his job with TEPCO in 2013, and that’s when I interviewed him... As of now, there are multiple NPP workers that have died, but only the ones who died on the job are reported publicly. Some of them have died suddenly while off work, for instance, during the weekend or in their sleep, but none of their deaths are reported.”

“Not only that, they are not included in the worker death count. For example, there are some workers who quit the job after a lot of radiation exposure... and end up dying a month later, but none of these deaths are either reported, or included in the death toll. This is the reality of the NPP workers,” (*The Hidden Truth about Fukushima by Mako Oshidori*, delivered at the international conference Effects of Nuclear Disasters on Natural Environment and Human Health held in Germany, 2014 co-organized by International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War).

Still and all, PM Abe insists upon fireside chats with pro-nuke campers whilst reopening nuclear power plants even though Japan survived just fine for five years without. He appears to have ants in his pants, pushing hard to restart the ole nuke plants A-SAP.

Meanwhile, in another universe, former PM Koizumi supports the lawsuit of U.S. sailors aboard the USS Ronald Reagan that participated in Operation Tomodachi, providing humanitarian relief after the March 11th Fukushima meltdowns. Allegedly, they were assured that radiation levels were okay!

“There is no excuse for Tokyo Electric Power Co. not to give the 400 U.S. sailors and marines who are now suing the company the proper facts. Things are looking especially good for the plaintiffs now that former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi is backing the lawsuit over the Fukushima radiation,” *Support for U.S. Sailor’s Tepco Suit*, The Japan Times, June 17, 2016.

“Undoubtedly, Koizumi was convinced to help the sailors because they now suffer from radiation poisoning. He said: “Those who gave their all to assist Japan are now suffering from serious illness. I can’t overlook them,” Ibid.

According to lawyers representing the sailors, Charles Bonner & Cabral Bonner & Paul Garner, Esq., Sausalito, CA, seven sailors have already died, including some from leukemia.

With passage of time, the number of plaintiffs and numbers of deaths grows as the latency effect of radiation sets in. Thus, over time, the latency effect works against the pro-nuclear squawk talk that “all’s clear.”

Initially, the lawsuit represented less than 200 sailors but over time, the latency effect brings forward 400 sailors claiming radiation-poison complications, including leukemia, ulcers, gall bladder removal, brain cancer, brain tumors, testicular cancer, uterine bleeding, thyroid illness, stomach ailments, and premature deaths. These are youngsters.

The lawsuit process has been exacting for the young sailors: "Lindsey Cooper, for example. The woman who started the whole thing was torn apart on a CNN program by atomic energy experts and was later mocked on conservative radio shows," Alexander Osang, *Uncertain Radiological Threat: US Navy Sailors Search for Justice After Fukushima Mission*, Spiegel Online International, Feb. 5, 2015.

As it happens, it's not disasters that turn people's stomachs as much as cover-ups and lying, bringing forth cynicism, contempt, and ultimately populist blowback as people get fed up with establishment politics.

It is very likely that, similar to American populist blowback, Japan will meet the same fate.

On second thought:

"There is one thing that really surprised me here in Europe. It's the fact that people here think Japan is a very democratic and free country." (Mako Oshidori, director/Free Press Corporation/Japan, speech in Germany)

Join the debate on Facebook

Robert Hunziker lives in Los Angeles and can be reached at roberthunziker@icloud.com

Where does bribery start?

June 19, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

Fukushima village reaches out to single-parent families after evacuation order lifted

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160619/p2a/00m/0na/004000c>

KAWAUCHI, Fukushima -- The municipal government here, where an evacuation order, issued following the 2011 outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis, was lifted on June 14, is encouraging single-parent families in urban areas to move to the village in a bid to put the brakes on its population decline and aging.

- **【Related】** Evacuation order for Fukushima village to be lifted in June

To that end, the Kawauchi Municipal Government plans to provide up to 800,000 yen in subsidies to each single-parent family that moves to the village.

"It's possible to live more comfortably in the village than in Tokyo and other urban areas," says an official of the municipal government in charge of the program.

A total of 51 people in 19 households in the Ogi and Kainosaka districts in eastern Kawauchi were affected by the evacuation order that was lifted on June 14. Most of these people have no plans to return home.

Evacuation orders had been lifted in all areas in the village apart from Ogi and Kainosaka by October 2014. Nevertheless, only about 1,800 of some 3,000 residents who had lived in the village before the disaster had returned by April 1 this year.

Approximately 40 percent of those who have returned are elderly people aged 65 or over.

As countermeasures against population decline and aging, the Kawauchi Municipal Government has decided to offer financial incentives to encourage single-parent households outside the village, including those in urban areas, to move in.

Specifically, **the municipal government will provide 600,000 yen to each single-parent household that will live in the village to help them buy a car and move into their new home, and 50,000 yen per person (for up to four people) to cover miscellaneous expenses.**

The maximum amount of the subsidies is 800,000 yen for a family comprising a parent and three children. The municipal government will introduce full-time jobs at companies operating in the village to those who move there, and provide a subsidy to cover half of the rent of privately owned apartments (up to 20,000 yen).

The municipal government will organize a two-day tour for those who are interested in the program July 29-30, and will begin to accept applicants for the tour as early as this week.

The village will use grants from the national government, which are part of measures to revitalize local economies, to finance the program. Under the program, the municipal government is considering accepting five to 10 new residents a year through fiscal 2017, and about 15 residents per year beyond that.

Moreover, **a consultative council encouraging single-parent families to move into the village will be set up with the participation of a local women's association. Elderly women living in the village will support new residents' childrearing. Day care services are provided for free in the village.**

TEPCO's apologies for the umpteenth time

June 28, 2016

TEPCO chief apologizes to shareholders for cover-up

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160628_22/

The president of Tokyo Electric Power Company has apologized to shareholders for concealing reactor meltdowns at its Fukushima Daiichi plant in 2011.

The utility did not officially admit to the meltdowns until more than 2 months after the accident, which was caused by a massive earthquake and tsunami.

The firm's investigative panel revealed earlier this month that the then-president had instructed officials not to use the words "core meltdown."

Incumbent president Naomi Hirose on Tuesday spoke before about 1,200 people at the annual shareholders meeting in Tokyo.

He said he takes the results of the investigative panel seriously and thorough measures will be taken to prevent recurrences. They include performing drills to improve the effectiveness of emergency notification, and strengthening information-sharing.

Shareholders submitted 10 proposals to be taken up at the meeting. They include an early restart of offline nuclear reactors to lower electricity bills, and the abolition of the nuclear power business out of concerns of accidents.

A shareholder said that since the firm's nuclear reactors are undergoing safety screenings by the regulator, it would be safe to switch them back on.

Another said the firm's attitude regarding compensation toward Fukushima and the restart of nuclear reactors are showing no signs of improvement.

Press Release (Jun 21,2016)

TEPCO APOLOGIZES FOR PREVIOUS LEADERSHIP'S FAILURE TO ACKNOWLEDGE MELTDOWN DURING FUKUSHIMA ACCIDENT

http://www.tepco.co.jp/en/press/corp-com/release/2016/1300509_7763.html

Responding to recent report of an investigating committee, TEPCO restates its commitment to provide comprehensive, accurate and understandable information, while making safety the utmost priority to ensure a safe and secure society

TOKYO, June 21, 2016 In its first response to the June 16 report of the committee investigating the belated acknowledgment that a meltdown had taken place at Fukushima Daiichi NPS in March 2011, TEPCO said it is clear from the report that its previous leadership gave instructions not to use the word "meltdown" in public statements.

"We deeply regret that our previous leadership failed to live up to the standards of transparency and thoroughness that we strive to meet today," said TEPCO President Naomi Hirose (who was not the company's leader at the time of the accident). "We sincerely apologize for it," he said.

In more recent years, through the creation of the Nuclear Reform Monitoring Committee and many other changes, TEPCO has worked to improve the timeliness, thoroughness, and clarity of its communication with the public, both inside Japan and internationally. President Hirose stressed that TEPCO has been learning this lesson and breaking from its past, as it works to build trust with the public and with government through the implantation of its Nuclear Safety Reform Plan. Improvements in communication represent an important element of that Plan, which is overseen both by the company's Nuclear Safety Oversight Office and by an independent Nuclear Reform Monitoring Committee chaired by the former head of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

"We deeply regret the shortcomings of the past," President Hirose said, "but **it is important to recognize that they do not represent the TEPCO of today while making safety the utmost priority to ensure a safe and secure society.**"

Re-use of contaminated soil allowed by Environment Ministry

Ministry green-lights reuse of radioactive soil for public works projects

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160701/p2a/00m/0na/006000c>

July 1, 2016

The Ministry of the Environment formally decided on June 30 to allow limited use of radioactively contaminated soil in public works projects, but sidestepped estimates from a closed-door meeting that the soil may have to be monitored for up to 170 years.

- **【Related】** Reuse of radioactive soil approved despite 170-year safety criteria estimate

The ministry decided that soil could be reused for embankments as long as the radioactivity of cesium it contained did not exceed 8,000 becquerels per kilogram. Under the Act on the Regulation of Nuclear Source Material, Nuclear Fuel Material and Reactors, contaminated soil can be used freely if the level of radioactivity is 100 becquerels per kilogram or less.

It earlier emerged that the ministry calculated in a closed-door meeting that some soil would have to be monitored for 170 years -- well beyond the life of embankments. However, in its basic policy the ministry simply stated, "Safety and administration methods will be examined during verification processes in the future."

It is expected that up to around 22 million cubic meters of waste contaminated with radioactive material from the Fukushima nuclear disaster will end up piled up at an interim storage facility straddling the border between the Fukushima Prefecture towns of Okuma and Futaba. The central government plans to dispose of the waste for good outside the prefecture by March 2045, but hopes to reuse as much of it as possible to reduce the amount.

Under the ministry's basic policy, reuse of the soil will be limited to public works where the body in charge of administering it is clearly established, and the radiation dose at a distance of 1 meter is no more than 0.01 millisieverts per year. When using contaminated soil with a level of radioactivity of 8,000 becquerels per kilogram, it would be placed under at least 50 centimeters of cover soil, which would then be covered with sand and asphalt.

During the closed-door meeting, it was calculated that it would take 170 years for the radioactivity of tainted soil to naturally decrease from 5,000 to 100 becquerels per kilogram -- much longer than the durability of soil mounds, at 70 years.

Parties very vague on energy future of Japan

July 3, 2016

Parties vague on atomic power pledges in run-up to Upper House election

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/07/03/national/politics-diplomacy/parties-vague-atomic-power-pledges-run-upper-house-election/#.V3lba6Jdeot>

JJI

The election pledges issued by the top political parties show they are **divided and uninformed about how fast Japan should reduce its dependence on atomic power and what its energy goals for 2030 should be.**

As the pivotal July 10 Upper House election approaches, the parties clearly differ over the government's fiscal 2030 energy mix, which states that Japan will be procuring 20 to 22 percent of its electricity from nuclear reactors by that time.

Five years after the Fukushima disaster shattered Japan's nuclear safety myth, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party is promoting nuclear power as a stable, low-cost energy source, and says it intends to slowly reduce Japan's atomic dependency.

Komeito, its coalition ally, pledges to create a society that does not rely on nuclear power. Although it is opposed to building new reactors, it won't oppose the restarting of those idled in the wake of the triple core meltdown in Fukushima. Komeito also advocates a very gradual move away from nuclear energy. The ruling coalition parties' positions reflect the government's goal: to lower Japan's dependency on atomic power around 6 points from 28.6 percent — the level it was at before the Fukushima disaster hobbled the industry in March 2011.

Both aim to bring new and old reactors online if they pass the Nuclear Regulation Authority's safety screenings, because more than 30 will be needed to achieve the government's targeted energy mix. In the opposition camp, the Democratic Party has vowed to rid Japan of nuclear reactors by the 2030s. While the top opposition party will accept reactor restarts, its policy is to strictly maintain the 40-year basic operating limit on reactors. The DP believes its goal will be achievable if no new reactors are built. The Japanese Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party flatly oppose restarting any nuclear reactors.

Another, Osaka Ishin no Kai, says reactors should not be restarted unless local agreements are enshrined in law as a precondition.

All of the major parties, however, refuse to elaborate on how they will ensure the expansion of alternative energy sources, which are being choked off by Japan's old and divided power grid.

In line with the government's target, the LDP and Komeito have promised to almost double the proportion of renewable energy to 22 to 24 percent by fiscal 2030. The DP's goal is 30 percent and the JCP's goal is 40 percent.

Since no party has provided hard details on how to further the use of renewable energy and what that will cost, voters need to watch whether the parties will offer any convincing explanations about their pledges during the campaign for the Upper House election.

Risk of illegal dumping



Piles of black bags containing radioactive soil are seen at a temporary storage site in Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, on June 11, 2016. The Environment Ministry is set to conduct a demonstration experiment there possibly later this year, in which radiation doses will be measured on mounds using soil generated from decontamination work. (Mainichi)

July 5, 2016

Reuse of radioactive soil feared to trigger illegal dumping

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160705/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

An Environment Ministry decision to allow reuse of radioactively contaminated soil emanating from the Fukushima nuclear disaster in public works projects has prompted experts to warn against possible dumping of such soil under **fake recycling**.

- **【Related】** Ministry green-lights reuse of radioactive soil for public works projects
- **【Related】** Reuse of radioactive soil approved despite 170-year safety criteria estimate
- **【Related】** Photo Journal: Radioactive soil storage

The ministry formally decided on June 30 to allow limited use of soil generated from decontamination work after the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant disaster in mounds under road pavements and other public works projects, as long as the soil contains no more than 8,000 becquerels per kilogram of radioactive cesium. The decision was made despite questions raised during a closed meeting of the ministry over incompatibility with the decontamination criteria for farmland soil.

The Act on the Regulation of Nuclear Source Material, Nuclear Fuel Material and Reactors sets the safety criteria for recycling metals and other materials generated from the decommissioning of nuclear reactors at no more than 100 becquerels per kilogram, and requires materials whose radiation levels exceed that level to be buried underground as "radioactive waste." The figure of 100 becquerels is derived from the International Commission on Radiological Protection's standards that annual radiation exposure of up to 0.01 millisieverts poses negligible health risks.

However, **the Fukushima disaster has disseminated radioactive materials outside the crippled nuclear plant across far wider areas than expected.** Under the special measures law on decontamination of radioactive materials, which was fully put into force in January 2012, waste whose radiation levels top 8,000 becquerels per kilogram is called "designated waste" and must be treated by the government, while waste with radiation levels of 8,000 becquerels or lower can be treated in the same way as regular waste. The figure of 8,000 becquerels comes from the upper limit of annual radiation exposure doses for ordinary citizens under the reactor regulation law, which is set at 1 millisievert. Regarding the double safety standards of 100 becquerels and 8,000 becquerels, the Environment Ministry had earlier explained that the former is for "reuse" and the latter for "waste disposal."

However, **the recent Environment Ministry decision to allow the reuse of contaminated soil in public works projects runs counter to its earlier explanation.** The ministry is trying to reconcile that difference by insisting that the radiation levels of tainted soil could be kept under 100 becquerels if mounds using such soil were covered with concrete and other materials to shield radiation. During a closed meeting of the ministry that discussed the matter, some attendants raised questions over **inconsistencies with the decontamination criteria for farmland soil.**

In April 2011, in the aftermath of the Fukushima meltdowns, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries restricted rice planting in paddies whose radiation levels topped 5,000 becquerels per kilogram of soil. While the restriction was effective for just one year, the same criteria has been in place for ensuing decontamination, where surface soil of more than 5,000 becquerels is removed and surface soil under that level is replaced with deeper layers.

It is inconsistent to strip away soil of more than 5,000 becquerels while recycling soil with the same level of radiation. However, attendants of the closed meeting never discussed the matter in detail, nor did the issue come up for discussion at an open meeting.

The radioactivity concentration of contaminated soil is higher than that of earthquake debris, whose treatment caused friction across the country on the heels of the Fukushima crisis. Therefore, officials attending an open meeting of the ministry discussed the introduction of incentives for users of tainted soil, with one saying, "Unless there are motives for using such soil, regular soil would be used instead." Kazuki Kumamoto, professor at Meiji Gakuin University specializing in environmental policy, criticized the ministry's move, saying, "There is a high risk for inverse onerous contracts, in which dealers take on contaminated soil in exchange for financial benefits." There have been a series of incidents involving such contracts, in which waste was pressed upon dealers under the guise of "recycled materials," such as backfill material called ferrosilt and slag generated from iron refining.

"If contaminated soil was handed over under inverse onerous contracts, there is a risk that such soil could be illegally dumped later. Reuse of tainted soil would lead to dispersing contamination," Kumamoto said.

Nukes: People fear utilities - and Gov't - can't be trusted

July 6, 2016

As I See It: Has nothing been learned from TEPCO's 'meltdown' cover-up?

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160706/p2a/00m/0na/008000c>

The March 14, 2011 press conference at the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) head office in Tokyo in which then TEPCO vice president Sakae Muto (second from right) was reportedly told by then company president Masataka Shimizu not to use the expression "core meltdown." (Mainichi)

A third-party panel set up by Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) to investigate the company's cover-up of the core meltdowns that occurred at its Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant following the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami revealed in a report last month that then TEPCO president Masataka Shimizu had ordered the company not to use the term "meltdown" to describe what had occurred. The report also stated that the organizational cover-up took place against a backdrop of "what is presumed to be a request that came from the prime minister's office."

- **【Related】** TEPCO head apologizes for ban of term 'meltdown' in Fukushima crisis
- **【Related】** What's behind TEPCO ban on term 'core meltdown' after Fukushima crisis?
- **【Related】** TEPCO head banned use of 'meltdown' in describing Fukushima crisis

Then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano has objected to the report, saying that the very people who were involved, himself included, were not consulted by the panel before it drew its conclusion. Edano also said that he sent a letter of protest to TEPCO seeking an apology and a retraction of the report.

There are many missing pieces to the investigative report, but without a doubt, TEPCO acted irresponsibly toward local residents. A meltdown refers to a severe incident in which nuclear fuel melts and leeches out. If the facts had been revealed to the public, they could have fled further and avoided going outdoors. TEPCO bears a heavy responsibility for exposing local residents to risks more dangerous than they would have been otherwise.

On March 14, 2011, three days after the nuclear crisis broke out, then TEPCO vice president Sakae Muto was in the midst of a press conference when a company PR official passed him a handwritten note indicating that a core meltdown had taken place, and whispered into his ear that "the prime minister's office has instructed that this expression not be used." The third-party investigative panel concluded that this message was from then TEPCO president Shimizu. In accordance with the instructions, Muto and TEPCO used the term "core damage," a word with a less serious connotation than core meltdown, making the incident seem less severe than it actually was.

The residents of the Fukushima Prefecture town of Namie -- the northerly neighbor of the town of Futaba, one of the two towns that the stricken nuclear plant straddles -- were forced to evacuate without crucial information. According to the Namie Municipal Government, some 8,000 of the town's 21,000 or so residents evacuated on March 12, 2011, to the town's Tsushima district, further northwest of the nuclear plant. At the time, however, the wind had been blowing in that direction, putting the residents directly in the path of radioactive materials being emitted in massive amounts from the crippled nuclear plant. Local resident Hidezo Sato, 71, evacuated from the town center and stayed at a community center in Tsushima until March 15. "There were other evacuees who said we should be fleeing farther away, but I didn't think the situation was that grave," he recalls. "If we'd known there'd been a core meltdown, it would've determined how we evacuated." The community center where he was taking refuge was overflowing with people. Not knowing that he was downwind from the troubled nuclear plant, Sato sat by a fire outdoors. He also saw children going into grassy areas, where radioactive materials are known to collect.

"I would've avoided going outdoors had I known there'd been a meltdown," says Yoko Hashimoto, 64, who also evacuated to the Tsushima district. "Five years have passed since the disaster broke out, and I'm worried that I'll start seeing the health effects of radiation exposure. Why wasn't the meltdown

announced right away?" It is only natural for residents whose safety was all but ignored by TEPCO to feel anger toward the utility. **The power company had always emphasized the happy coexistence of its nuclear plants and local communities. Yet when a serious incident took place, the local residents were neglected. This more than explains why the residents are distrustful and angry.**

It wasn't until at least two months later that TEPCO admitted that core meltdowns had occurred. And even then, it was only because the then Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, which has since been disbanded, demanded an overall report on the disaster. Moreover, it wasn't until February of this year that TEPCO announced that it had discovered an internal company manual stipulating that damage to 5 percent or more of nuclear fuel be defined as a nuclear meltdown. Until then, the utility had cited the fact that it didn't have any standards by which to define nuclear meltdowns as its excuse for delaying the announcement that such a phenomenon had occurred. But indeed, according to the manual, then vice president Muto could have said at the press conference on March 14, 2011, that a nuclear meltdown had taken place.

Hirota Hirose, professor emeritus at Tokyo Woman's Christian University and an expert in disaster risk studies, says that **while local residents may have been thrown into confusion if information about the core meltdown had been made public, the merits of them evacuating farther away and reducing their exposure to radiation would have outweighed the possible risks of panic.** "The physical and psychological damage that residents have suffered because information was not provided to them are far greater." He adds, "Regardless of whether or not TEPCO actually received instructions from the prime minister's office (not to use the expression 'core meltdown'), it should have decided on its own to release accurate information. TEPCO lacks awareness and responsibility as the operator of nuclear plants that are at risk of creating serious crises."

There is still much more room for improvement in TEPCO's attitude toward its responsibilities. After the report on the meltdown cover-up was released, TEPCO President Naomi Hirose was asked at a press conference how the utility expected to work with the prime minister's office if another serious incident were to occur. He refused to respond in clear-cut terms, instead stating, "That's a difficult question to answer in general terms."

On the one hand, the third-party investigative panel should be praised for digging up the fact that then TEPCO president Shimizu instructed the cover-up. On the other hand, however, **the probe into the utility's relationship with the prime minister's office is insufficient.** Residents harbor distrust toward not just TEPCO, but the government as well. Local residents will remain unconvinced unless further investigation into the extent and the manner in which the government interfered with the nuclear crisis is conducted. Core meltdowns are not a problem specific to TEPCO. Whenever there's a problem surrounding a nuclear plant, it often turns out that similar things are taking place at other plants run by other utilities. Can we say that TEPCO's latest case is an isolated event? **There's a fear that when a nuclear accident takes place, we won't be able to trust the power companies involved to provide us with appropriate information that respects and reflects the needs of affected residents.** If utilities are going to restart halted nuclear reactors and extend the number of years its aging reactors are allowed to operate, they must take away important lessons from the Fukushima crisis and be prepared to disseminate information to the public from their standpoint. (By Mirai Nagira, Science and Environment News Department)

"Look... 20 years down the road"

July 6, 2016

EDITORIAL: The power of a vote can affect Japan's nuclear energy policy

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201607060033.html>

July 6, 2016 at 13:40 JST

With brutal heat forecast for this summer, the government is not calling for power-saving efforts this year. This is a break from tradition that started in summer 2011 after the disastrous accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co., in March that year.

Only two nuclear reactors are currently running in Japan, both at the Sendai nuclear plant operated by Kyushu Electric Co. But the government determined that the nation's power supply will not fall short this summer, largely because **energy-saving practices have become well-established in private homes and businesses over the last five years, including the widespread use of energy-efficient LED lighting.**

Japan appears to have become less dependent on nuclear power generation since the Fukushima disaster. Nowadays, the subject is debated less frequently, and anti-nuclear demonstrators have shrunk in number. In the campaign for the July 10 Upper House election, too, the nation's nuclear policy is hardly a hot topic of debate for the ruling and opposition parties.

But we need to re-examine whether the government is moving toward maintaining or abolishing its current nuclear policy.

Looking 20 to 30 years ahead, The Asahi Shimbun has consistently advocated a "zero nuclear power generation society" in its editorials. Our basic thinking is to approve the restart of offline reactors for the time being when urgent power needs exist. But at the same time, high-risk and antiquated reactors should be decommissioned, starting with the oldest and the most dangerous.

Abe administration's piecemeal restart of reactors

Since the current Abe administration was inaugurated in December 2012, its track record has made the direction of its nuclear policy quite clear.

The administration initially stressed a "decrease in reliance on nuclear power generation." But within less than six months, it put the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) in the forefront to justify a switch to the policy of "restarting nuclear reactors once their safety has been confirmed."

In the Basic Energy Plan of 2014, nuclear power is positioned as "an important base load power source." One year later, the administration announced its decision to formulate a policy that would make nuclear energy account for 20 to 22 percent of the nation's power supply in fiscal 2030. This target cannot be attained unless more than 30 nuclear reactors, out of the 54 that existed before the Fukushima disaster, are brought into operation.

In fact, starting with the Sendai reactors last summer, the government has been proceeding, bit by bit, with the restart of idle reactors. So far, four units have gone back on line. This month, the No. 3 reactor at the Ikata nuclear plant operated by Shikoku Electric Power Co. is scheduled to resume operations. Twenty reactors are currently under inspection.

Furthermore, the NRA has approved the extension of operations of the 40-plus-year-old No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at the Takahama nuclear plant, operated by Kansai Electric Power Co. Put plainly, even the "40-year rule," set for averting disasters by decommissioning old reactors, is about to lose teeth.

Abe stresses nuclear power as "a low-cost and stable energy source." But as deregulation in the power industry eliminates regional monopolies while electricity charges become less subject to rigid rate

structures, nuclear power generation could actually become a burden to operators for the huge costs needed to maintain safety and dismantle old reactors.

For this reason, the government is coming up with what may be called new initiatives to protect the nuclear power industry.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is working on a policy under which the government will buy electricity generated at nuclear power stations at a set price to encourage sustained investment in nuclear power generation.

Another plan under consideration is to decrease the financial responsibility of nuclear power plant operators for accident compensation and increase the government's responsibility instead. This goes in the opposite direction from industry deregulation.

Parties need to clarify positions on nuclear power

Many Upper House election candidates running on the ruling coalition ticket are keeping their opinions on nuclear power generation to themselves, leaving all policy decisions to the government. But some of the same candidates are also starting to call for the construction of new, safer reactors to counter the argument of people opposed to extended operations of old reactors.

Should the ruling coalition win the Upper House election, there is no doubt that it will add momentum to the Abe administration's move to return to nuclear power generation.

The opposition camp, with some minor exceptions, is united in opposing nuclear power generation. The Democratic Party and three other parties share the policy of "realizing a society that does not depend on nuclear power generation."

However, the parties differ in the method and speed with which they propose to reduce the nation's dependence on nuclear energy. While the parties are sharply focused on issues related to Abenomics, the national security legislation and constitutional revision, nuclear power generation tends to remain less discussed.

Will Japan keep relying on nuclear power? Or does it aim to eventually end this reliance by switching aggressively to sustainable energy development?

Because the answer spells a fundamental difference in the future of the nation's energy policy, every party owes it to the voting public to explain its position clearly and engage in serious debate.

In disaster-affected areas of Fukushima Prefecture, the government's evacuation orders are being lifted one by one, but there is a long way to go before the affected citizens can rebuild their lives. For them, the March 2011 disaster is still a dire reality they must face every day.

Looking at the future

For voters not directly affected by the nuclear disaster, five years may be enough time for their interest to wane.

But electricity is indispensable to everyone's daily life and work. An immediate and crucial political issue is how to secure the necessary infrastructure, and at what cost.

Since April, it has become possible for private households to choose their electricity supplier, giving people a greater chance to exercise their free will. Still, every ballot cast carries weight. The outcome of the Upper House election can either accelerate or put the brakes on the Abe administration's nuclear energy policy.

We need to look at 10 years and 20 years down the road, not just today and tomorrow, when we think about the nation's energy policy, especially regarding nuclear power.

--The Asahi Shimbun, July 6

Kagoshima gubernatorial election

July 6, 2016

VOX POPULI: As elections loom we must not be complacent over nuclear power

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201607060036.html>

The Tokyo gubernatorial election is getting a lot of media coverage, but I believe that Kagoshima's impending choice of governor deserves just as much attention.

The prefecture is home to Japan's sole nuclear power station currently in operation.

Yuichiro Ito, 68, who supported the restart of the Sendai nuclear power station, operated by Kyushu Electric Power Co., is seeking re-election as Kagoshima's governor.

Running against him is Satoshi Mitazono, 58, who is demanding the Sendai plant's "temporary suspension of operation" in his campaign pledge. This is Mitazono's first bid for the governorship.

Ito declared in his speech in late June, "The sort of situation that forces you all to evacuate will never arise."

But **Mitazono insists, "The plant's operation must be suspended while the active fault is being studied, and then we must review the current evacuation routes."**

According to an Asahi Shimbun opinion poll, Ito and Mitazono are "evenly matched in a dead heat."

However, this election is not really about nuclear power generation. **The key issue is whether the incumbent governor should be allowed to seek a fourth term.**

Even though Kagoshima voters recognize nuclear power generation as an important matter, it appears to have been eclipsed by more immediate, day-to-day concerns.

After the Fukushima disaster of March 2011, Koichiro Nakamuki, 66, who lives about three kilometers from the Sendai plant, organized an independent evacuation program with 20 other households in his community. The group conducts regular drills.

Nakamuki feels that drills organized by the local administrative authorities are only half-baked. He is hoping that the gubernatorial election campaign will help stimulate public debate on nuclear power generation.

But the subject is hardly a focal issue of the imminent Upper House election, either. **I don't know if that's because people have already begun to forget the Fukushima disaster, or if nuclear power generation is too much of a hot-button issue for candidates who want to play it safe.**

The government's policy of limiting the duration of nuclear power plant operations to 40 years is already becoming toothless, and procedures for restarting offline reactors are proceeding without much ado.

Who should decide the nation's nuclear power generation policy? It would be disappointing to leave the decision to experts and power companies alone.

I hope the upcoming elections will encourage voters to give serious thought to their energy needs in their daily lives.

--The Asahi Shimbun, July 6

Satoshi Mitazono wins governor race in Kagoshima

July 11, 2016

Advocate of halting atomic reactors wins Kagoshima governor race

July 10, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

KAGOSHIMA (Kyodo) -- Satoshi Mitazono, who has pledged to halt nuclear reactors operating in the prefecture, won the Kagoshima gubernatorial election Sunday, beating incumbent Yuichiro Ito, who agreed to the restart of a nuclear plant in the southwestern prefecture.

The 58-year-old Mitazono, a former TV Asahi Corp. commentator, was backed by the main opposition Democratic Party, the Social Democratic Party and some conservatives who typically support the ruling Liberal Democratic Party but were opposed to the incumbent.

Ito, 68, was seeking a fourth four-year term with the support of the LDP and its junior coalition partner Komeito. He admitted defeat.

The fate of Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai nuclear power plant in the prefecture was one of the contentious issues during the election campaign.

The Sendai plant's Nos. 1 and 2 units are the only reactors operating in Japan after the government imposed tougher safety rules following the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that triggered meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in northeastern Japan.

Mitazono claimed that the operation of the reactors should be temporarily halted for safety checks following a series of powerful earthquakes that hit the southwestern main island of Kyushu in April, while Ito argued that the plant's safety has been secured.

Mitazono told reporters, "It's the top leadership's role to create momentum toward a nuclear power-free society,"

"We cannot run a nuclear power station unless its safety is ensured," he said.

Voter turnout stood at 56.77 percent, up 12.92 percentage points from the previous election in 2012, according to the prefectural election management committee.

Nuclear-free society advocate set to win Kagoshima governor race

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/07/10/national/politics-diplomacy/nuclear-free-society-advocate-set-win-kagoshima-governor-race/#.V4Na4aJdeou>

Kyodo

- Jul 10, 2016

KAGOSHIMA – Anti-nuclear advocate Satoshi Mitazono was heading for victory in the Kagoshima gubernatorial race Sunday, beating incumbent Yuichiro Ito, who agreed to the resumption of reactors at a power plant in the prefecture, a projection showed.

The 58-year-old Mitazono is a former TV Asahi Corp. commentator. He ran as an independent backed by the main opposition Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Party as well as some conservatives who typically support the ruling Liberal Democratic Party but were opposed to the incumbent.

Ito, 68, with the support of the LDP and its junior coalition partner Komeito, was seeking his fourth four-year term.

One of the contentious issues in the race was the fate of Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai nuclear power plant in the prefecture.

The Sendai plant's No. 1 and No. 2 units are the only reactors operating in the country after the government imposed tougher safety rules following the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that triggered meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Mitazono demanded that plant operations be temporarily suspended for safety checks in the wake of a series of strong earthquakes that hit central Kyushu in April, while Ito argued that the plant's safety had been secured.

"We will not activate any reactors the safety of which is not guaranteed," he told reporters on Sunday.

And now "alarming" governor

July 12, 2016

New governor's Sendai plant shutdown pledge alarms utility

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201607120060.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai nuclear power plant in Satsuma-Sendai in Kagoshima Prefecture (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

Concern is growing among Kyushu Electric Power Co. and the central government over the new Kagoshima governor's pledge to request a reassessment of the Sendai nuclear plant's safety in light of the recent Kumamoto quakes.

Satoshi Mitazono, a former political reporter with TV Asahi Corp., was elected on his campaign pledge to build a "society without nuclear energy" in the July 10 gubernatorial race, defeating incumbent Yuichiro Ito.

Mitazono, 58, wants to suspend operations at the plant for a review of its emergency evacuation plan and to re-examine its safety features.

A top Kyushu Electric executive expressed bewilderment over Mitazono's proposal.

"A governor has no legal authority to order a halt," the official said. "On what legal basis can the plant be shut down?"

But Mitazono's calls reflect local residents' mounting concerns over the Sendai plant in Satsuma-Sendai, Kagoshima Prefecture, after a series of strong tremors rocked neighboring Kumamoto Prefecture starting in mid-April.

The company allows prefectural officials to inspect the nuclear plant site, and request for it to take corrective measures based on their findings under an agreement with the prefectural and Satsuma-Sendai city governments over safety issues.

Kyushu Electric, based in Fukuoka, would likely be forced to respond in one way or another when the governor asks for the suspension of the plant, regardless of legal authority.

With two reactors in operation, Sendai is the only nuclear power station back online in the nation after it cleared the new safety regulations implemented after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

After Mitazono emerged as the winner on July 10, Kyushu Electric's closing stock price dropped more than 7 percent, compared to July 8, reflecting the company's potentially gloomy prospects.

The two reactors at the Sendai plant are scheduled to be shut down in October or later for a regular check. An official with the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which oversees the nuclear industry, said it would take a prolonged period before the plant could be restarted if a review of the evacuation plan or other demands were made.

A senior Kyushu Electric official concurred that it would not be easy to go back online on a regular time schedule if such demands were made.

"It would be difficult to reactivate the reactors amid the opposition of the local government hosting the plant," the official said.

(This article was written by Shuhei Shibata and Toshio Kawada.)

Conflict of interest

July 13, 2016

NHK Board of Governors chair admits conservative lobby group, nuke power connections

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160713/p2a/00m/0na/002000c>

NHK Board of Governors Chairman Susumu Ishihara is seen at a news conference on June 28, 2016, in Tokyo's Shibuya Ward. (Mainichi)

NHK Board of Governors Chairman Susumu Ishihara said on July 12 that he needs to re-evaluate his outside commitments after admitting prominent roles in both a conservative group pushing for constitutional revision and a pro-nuclear power lobby.

Ishihara admitted to reporters after the public broadcaster's Board of Governors meeting that day that he is an honorary adviser to the Fukuoka chapter of the Nippon Kaigi (Japan Conference) conservative lobby group and also co-leader of the National Nuclear Union, an association for the promotion of nuclear power.

"If I look at the situation in its entirety, I can see that I need to re-evaluate things," Ishihara said in response to a reporter's question.

NHK President Katsuto Momii's term ends in January next year, and Ishihara also revealed that the Board of Governors would establish a committee at its next meeting on July 26 to nominate potential successors to head the public broadcaster.

Kansai Electric appeals

July 14, 2016

Kansai Electric files appeal against ruling on Takahama reactors

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/07/14/national/crime-legal/kansai-electric-files-appeal-ruling-takahama-reactors/#.V4fSM6Jdeot>

Kyodo

OSAKA – Kansai Electric Power Co. on Thursday appealed against a district court ruling that upheld an injunction on the operation of two reactors at its Takahama nuclear power plant.

After filing the appeal with the Osaka High Court, Kansai Electric said the Otsu District Court's decision on Tuesday to reject its request to suspend the injunction was "totally unacceptable" because it was made despite a detailed explanation on the safety of the reactors at the Fukui Prefecture plant.

In the decision, the district court rejected the utility's arguments, upholding the injunction it issued in March even though the No. 3 and 4 reactors had cleared a set of new safety requirements imposed after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The injunction, the first of its kind affecting operating reactors in Japan, dealt a blow to the government's renewed push for nuclear power generation despite lingering safety concerns among the public.

In both decisions, issued in March and on Tuesday, the court said meeting the new nuclear safety regulations did not necessarily guarantee the safety of the two reactors and that Kansai Electric should provide further explanation.

"We will make an all-out effort to prove the safety of the two reactors so the (injunction) is rescinded soon," Kansai Electric said in a statement.

Currently, only two reactors at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai plant in Kagoshima Prefecture are operating in Japan.

The Takahama plant's Nos. 3 and 4 reactors were reactivated in January and February, respectively, after the Sendai reactors resumed operation.

But the injunction forced the No. 3 unit to be taken offline on March 10, while the No. 4 unit had already been suspended due to equipment trouble.

July 14, 2016

Kansai Electric appeals against halt of reactors

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160714_38/

The Kansai Electric Power Company has appealed against a court injunction that blocks the restart of 2 reactors at its Takahama nuclear plant in central Japan.

On Tuesday the Otsu District Court in Shiga Prefecture issued a fresh injunction to suspend the operations of the No. 3 and No. 4 reactors at the plant in neighboring Fukui Prefecture.

In March, the Otsu District Court issued an injunction to suspend the operations of the 2 reactors. It was the first injunction for reactors in operation. Residents in Shiga Prefecture sought the injunction.

Kansai Electric then filed an objection to cancel the injunction.

But the district court on Tuesday pointed out that the utility had not given an adequate explanation that the regulations, which were introduced after the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident, will serve as a measure to prevent fatal accidents.

The court said that clearing new regulations does not necessarily guarantee the safety of the reactors.

The utility on Thursday filed an objection with the Osaka High Court.

The court will hold hearings to consider the opinions of Kansai Electric and Shiga residents.

A Kansai Electric official told reporters on Thursday that the company will do all it can to nullify the injunction, calling it extremely unreasonable.

The official said the district court demanded virtually a zero risk by citing the fears and anxieties about new regulations and the safety of the Takahama plant from the court's own point of view.

End of inquiry into leak of documents

July 15, 2016

NRA secretariat discontinues probe into leak of internal training documents

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160715/p2a/00m/0na/010000c>

The Secretariat of the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) has discontinued its probe into the leak of internal materials used in the training of newly recruited employees to outsiders without confirming how the information leaked, it has been learned.

- **【Related】** NRA secretariat doesn't know how nuclear files leaked

Although the materials do not contain any confidential information that affects the safety of nuclear plants, the NRA secretariat's lax attitude toward managing internal information as a key government organization that deal with nuclear technology will likely be called into question.

The leaked information is comprised of documents totaling about 3,800 pages, including a textbook used for a training session for new comers in April and May 2014, and the video footage of the session totaling about 74 hours.

It came to light in March 2015 that at least some of the information had leaked outside. In October that year, the Mainichi Shimbun confirmed the leakage and the secretariat acknowledged the incident. The NRA secretariat set up a fact-finding team, conducted an in-house investigation and probed a translation company that the organization commissioned to translate its documents into English, but failed to identify the route through which the information had leaked.

Govt. information belongs to the public

July 5, 2016

EDITORIAL: Parties should address Diet's inept oversight of state secrets

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201607050043.html>

In some cases, the government has good reason to keep certain pieces of information secret. But that doesn't change the fact that information gained by the government belongs in principle to the public. It is therefore important for the legislature to have adequate power to monitor the executive branch's activities concerning information it has acquired.

Unfortunately, we cannot say that the Diet, which represents the public, is sufficiently performing its responsibility as the people's watchdog of the government.

On Dec. 6, 2013, the Diet passed the Abe administration's controversial state secrets protection bill into law. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's initiative to ensure the secrecy of what the government deems sensitive information caused a bitter division among the public.

Two days before the law was enacted, Abe announced the establishment of two organs to monitor government operations related to state secrets: the Independent Public Records Management Secretary and a Cabinet committee responsible for checking the qualification assessments of government employees who deal with state secrets.

The following day, four parties--the Liberal Democratic Party and its junior coalition partner, Komeito, plus the Japan Restoration Party and Your Party--agreed to set up monitoring bodies within the Diet as well.

All these actions were taken immediately before the Upper House vote on the secrecy legislation. Their effectiveness is in serious doubt.

The two institutions set up within the government are actually internal organizations that are not independent of the government.

The Boards of Oversight and Review of Specially Designated Secrets of both Diet houses are intended as independent watchdogs, the only institutions that can monitor the implementation of the state secrets law from outside the government.

But their ability to monitor the government's moves to classify or declassify specific information is highly questionable if their first annual reports published at the end of March are any indication.

Most of the accounts contained in the government's record book about the designation of specific pieces of information as state secrets were too vague to help the boards judge whether the designation was appropriate or not. One typical description about classified information in the document is "information provided by a foreign country."

When members of the boards asked ministry officials for more detailed information, the officials often simply refused.

The boards' efforts to carry out their missions were also unsatisfactory.

The Lower House board failed to make any judgment about the government's decisions to classify specific information.

Instead, it only called for improvements in the way the law was implemented as its "opinion" without issuing more powerful "recommendations."

While pushing for the enactment of the state secrets protection law, the Abe administration also created the National Security Council and then led the Diet to pass national security legislation.

With these moves, the administration has sought to expand the government's discretion in making and implementing security policy decisions, including those related to the operations of the Self-Defense Forces, while concentrating related powers in the prime minister's office.

The Diet, which is supposed to check such government policy decisions, is dominated by the ruling camp. It is unacceptable to leave the Diet's ability to monitor the government's handling of information in such poor shape.

The situation raises concerns that the government could indefinitely expand the scope of discretionary security policy decisions made behind closed doors without being exposed to public scrutiny.

The Abe administration has put off important steps under the security legislation in an apparent attempt to prevent negative repercussions in the July 10 Upper House election.

If, for example, the government decides to deploy SDF troops overseas after the election, the Diet will unlikely be able to extract necessary information from the government to judge the appropriateness of the deployment.

The ruling and opposition parties should spend more time during the election campaign addressing the question of how to enhance the Diet's monitoring capabilities after the election.

Will Mitazono remain firm?

July 18, 2016

EDITORIAL: New Kagoshima governor must clarify stance on nuclear reactors

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201607180019.html>

Satoshi Mitazono, governor-elect of Kagoshima Prefecture, said during the election campaign, "Operations at the nuclear plant should be suspended temporarily for another (safety) check." The southern prefecture hosts the Sendai nuclear power plant, the only one currently operating in Japan.

The 58-year-old former TV Asahi Corp. commentator, who ran for office as a first-time, independent candidate, defeated incumbent Governor Yuichiro Ito, 68, who had approved the reactor restarts at the nuclear plant operated by Kyushu Electric Power Co.

Ito was seeking a fourth term. Many believe Mitazono won the election because of his criticism of how Ito had held the same office for so many consecutive terms.

But Mitazono's election pledge to temporarily halt the Sendai nuclear plant, in response to the recent series of strong earthquakes in neighboring Kumamoto Prefecture, was probably no less relevant, given the spreading anxiety among the public.

During the first week following the onset of the quakes, Kyushu Electric received 5,000 e-mails and phone calls asking for a halt to the Sendai reactor operations.

Immediately after he was elected, Mitazono reiterated that he will request a temporary suspension with Kyushu Electric, but he has yet to provide more details on the matter.

A temporary shutdown was certainly one of his election pledges, but he did not bring that to the fore during the campaign. Suspicion seems to be arising in the minds of Kagoshima Prefecture's public, including both proponents and opponents of nuclear energy.

The governor has no legal authority to shut down an active nuclear reactor. But the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors of the Sendai nuclear plant, which went back online in summer and autumn last year, are expected to go offline for routine inspections in autumn and winter.

Kyushu Electric does not need to obtain the governor's approval to reactivate the reactors once the checkups are over, but the utility cannot totally ignore the governor's intentions, which, therefore, will set higher hurdles for the reactor restarts.

Mitazono should continue to firmly talk about his own beliefs.

Some speculate he is probably working out strategies to deal with Kyushu Electric and the prefectural assembly, which upheld the nuclear restarts. But the first and most basic thing he must do is provide an explanation to the prefecture's public.

During the gubernatorial election campaign, Mitazono promised to shut down operations of the Sendai nuclear plant, conduct a check on its facilities and review the emergency evacuation plans. He also pledged to set up a panel of experts to discuss nuclear power issues.

The Kumamoto quakes, which caused many roads and bridges to collapse, were followed by aftershocks that gradually approached the Sendai nuclear plant. People in Kagoshima Prefecture were worried that an earthquake striking near the nuclear plant could tear up emergency evacuation routes.

Mitazono's pledge indicated a readiness to address those anxieties.

Niigata and Shizuoka prefectures are among the local governments that have already set up panels similar to the expert panel on nuclear power issues being floated by Mitazono.

Although the central government's Nuclear Regulation Authority is in charge of safety screenings of nuclear reactors being planned for restarts, **it is essential for local governments to play an active role in defending their own residents without leaving the matter up to experts.**

Given that Mitazono was elected after pledging to temporarily halt the nuclear plant, the incoming governor should explain his thoughts carefully and continue his efforts to ease the anxieties of Kagoshima Prefecture's residents.

TEPCO to pay for rumor-caused damages

July 21, 2016

TEPCO ordered to pay for 'false rumors' from Fukushima crisis

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201607210042.html>

A court ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. to pay compensation to a golf course operator for lost revenue caused by "false rumors" from the disaster at the utility's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Although TEPCO argued that the golf course in northern Tochigi Prefecture, 115 kilometers from the nuclear plant, was safe from radiation exposure, the Tokyo District Court on July 20 said TEPCO must still cover 19.6 million yen (\$183,000) of the golf course operator's losses in 2011.

"This is an epoch-making judgment that appropriately recognizes damages caused by false rumors," said Kiyohisa Arai, the lawyer who represented the golf course operator.

The plaintiffs, who demanded 86.4 million yen in compensation, argued that the triple meltdown at the Fukushima plant in March 2011 led to a prolonged decline in customers.

According to the ruling, sales at the golf course in March 2011 plummeted 62 percent compared with the figure for March 2010, and monthly revenues continued to decline year-on-year.

TEPCO argued that "the golf course was located far away from the power plant, and there were no concerns of being exposed to radiation there."

Tochigi Prefecture lies south of Fukushima Prefecture, where the stricken nuclear plant is located.

However, the court ruled that rumors were enough to keep customers away from the golf course in the six months following the nuclear accident.

"A significant number of users avoided visiting the facility because sufficient scientific knowledge on the amount of radiation and exposure from the accident was not available at the time," the ruling said.

The court held TEPCO responsible for covering 30 percent to 50 percent of the company's monthly losses from March to August 2011.

"Road damages from the Great East Japan Earthquake and the social atmosphere of the time that led people to refrain from taking part in leisure activities also had an effect on visitor turnout," the court ruled.

TEPCO ordered to pay for rumor-caused damages

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160721_01/

A Japanese court has ordered Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, to compensate a golf course operator for damages caused by rumors after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident in 2011.

This is the first ruling in Japan that recognizes rumor-caused damages related to a nuclear accident.

The golf course operator's suit claimed that revenues from its course in Tochigi Prefecture, north of Tokyo, dropped due to harmful rumors related to the nuclear accident.

TEPCO argued that there was no danger from radiation because the golf course is more than 100 kilometers from the nuclear plant.

In the ruling on Wednesday, Tokyo District Court presiding judge Tetsuro Nakayoshi said the public did not have sufficient knowledge about radiation around the time of the accident.

He noted that it was not unreasonable for ordinary people to worry about health risks.

The court determined that harmful rumors were responsible for 30 to 50 percent of the decline in

revenue for more than 5 months following the accident.

The court ordered the utility to pay about 180,000 dollars in compensation.

TEPCO says the company will deal with the matter sincerely after studying the ruling.

In Chiba radioactive is no longer radioactive...

July 22, 2016

Designation of radioactive waste to be lifted

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160721_30/

Japan's Environment Ministry plans to lift the designation of radioactive waste for some ash and sludge tainted by the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident.

The ministry says the radioactivity of the waste in Chiba City near Tokyo has dropped below the government-set level 5 years after the crisis.

The case is the first among municipalities storing radioactive waste from the accident's fallout.

Many municipalities, mostly in eastern Japan, store waste with radioactivity levels above the government-set level of 8,000 becquerels per kilogram. The waste includes ash from incineration plants, rice straw and sewage sludge.

More than 5 years after the crisis, the government decided to allow waste with radioactivity levels below the threshold to be dumped as ordinary waste.

At the end of June, Chiba City applied for the lifting of the designation for some 7 tons of waste in the city.

State Minister of the Environment Shinji Inoue is to meet Chiba City Mayor Toshihito Kumagai on Friday to formally announce the change.

Gov't to lift special designation on 7.7 tons of radioactive waste in Chiba

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160722/p2a/00m/0na/021000c>

The Environment Ministry will lift the designation of 7.7 metric tons of waste stored in the city of Chiba that is contaminated with radioactive materials from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant as "specified waste," **allowing it to be disposed of as regular trash**, ministry officials said.

- **【Related】** Reuse of radioactive soil feared to trigger illegal dumping

The decision, which is to be executed on July 23, comes after the level of radioactive cesium in the waste dropped below the government's standard of 8,000 becquerels per kilogram. It will be the first time for the ministry to lift the "specified waste" designation from waste tainted with radioactive substances from the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Though the move will enable waste to be disposed of as ordinary trash, **the Chiba Municipal Government is likely to store the waste, as it fears that disposal would cause anxiety to local residents and disposal businesses.**

State Minister of the Environment Shinji Inoue met with Chiba Mayor Toshihito Kumagai on July 22 to notify him of the decision.

The Chiba Municipal Government retains 3.5 tons of zeolite and 4.2 tons of incinerated ash at a waste disposal facility in the city's Mihama Ward. The amount of radioactive cesium contained in the waste was above the government-set standard as of March 2014. However, measurements conducted by the municipal government in June show that the radioactive cesium levels in the zeolite and ash had fallen to 6,100 becquerels and 4,020 becquerels per kilogram, respectively.

The Environment Ministry worked out rules this past April under which the designation of radioactively contaminated waste is lifted based on the level of radioactive cesium in the waste.

The city of Chiba asked the ministry to lift the designation in June.

The ministry intends to build a specified waste disposal facility in each prefecture, and the city of Chiba hosts one candidate site for Chiba Prefecture. **The municipal government urged the lifting of the designation, partly to make it easier for the city to refuse to host such a facility, as it would be without the designated waste in the city.**

Luring people back

July 24, 2016

Fukushima banks hope to lure nuclear evacuees back by reopening branches

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/07/24/business/fukushima-banks-hope-to-lure-nuclear-evacuees-back-by-reopening-branches/#.V5SVwaJdeov>

JJI

FUKUSHIMA – Regional banks in Fukushima Prefecture are reopening outlets in radiation-contaminated areas to help lure residents back more than five years after the triple core meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant laid waste to the region in March 2011.

Residents have been slow to return despite the phased lifting of evacuation orders in cleaned-up areas, so regional banks are eager to play a trailblazing role by allowing residents to use their branches as places to socialize.

Abukuma Shinkin Bank, based in Minamisoma, reopened its Odaka branch there in March 2013 and the branch in the town of Namie on July 12.

The evacuation order for the central part of Namie is expected to be lifted by the end of next March, but there are still structures that collapsed from the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake.

“We’ll put the light on in the town where people do not live,” said Yoshihiro Ota, president of Abukuma Shinkin, stressing the significance of reopening the Namie branch.

Abukuma Shinkin became the first financial institution to reopen a branch in Namie, which sits next to the town of Futaba, one of the two municipalities that host the crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant, which lost all power after being swamped by tsunami spawned by the temblor. The plant is run by Tokyo Electric Power Co. Holdings Inc.

“We hope our branch, where local people can stop by freely and enjoy chatting, will become a place that can console them,” said Takahiro Abe, chief of the Namie branch.

“Being the first to reopen a branch in the town will hopefully allow us to attract people and see rises in deposits and loans,” Abe added.

In April, Toho Bank, based in the city of Fukushima, restarted its branch in Naraha, another town close to the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Although the evacuation order for Naraha was lifted last September, only 8.1 percent of its residents had returned as of July 4.

“Financial institutions are indispensable regional infrastructure,” said Hiroshi Yamaka, chief of Toho Bank’s Naraha branch. “Regional banks have a major role to play in helping residents return home.”

But it is not easy to achieve industrial revival in contaminated areas neglected by the long evacuation.

A male business owner who visited Abukuma Shinkin’s Namie branch on the day it reopened said, “The bank told me that they will lend me money, but I can’t decide on new investment because I’m old and there’s no one I can hand over my business to.”

Trust in NRA has been shaken

July 25, 2016

Editorial: Doubts about nuclear plant's quake resistance shake trust in NRA

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160725/p2a/00m/0na/006000c>

Trust in Japan's nuclear watchdog, the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA), has been jolted. At hand is an issue raised by Kunihiro Shimazaki, former acting chairman of the NRA. Shimazaki pointed out that Kansai Electric Power Co. underestimated the maximum shaking that could occur during an earthquake at its Oi Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture.

- **【Related】** NRA to scrap recalculated quake ground motion data for Oi nuclear plant
- **【Related】** Ex-NRA bigwig demands recalculation of Oi nuclear plant quake estimate
- **【Related】** Nuclear authority says Oi plant's quake hazard not underestimated

Shimazaki is an authority on seismology, having formerly served as president of the Seismological Society of Japan. While serving in the NRA, he handled screening of power companies' earthquake predictions for nuclear power plants including the Oi nuclear plant.

After he stepped down two years ago, he re-examined data and found the method of calculating standard ground motion (the maximum shaking that would occur during an earthquake) was inappropriate in some cases, depending on the type of fault. This could lead power companies to underestimate figures, he apparently found in his research.

If Shimazaki's argument is correct, the Oi Nuclear Power Plant could come under pressure to provide even greater reinforcement against quakes.

The NRA had for the most part accepted Kansai Electric's data, but following the claim by Shimazaki, a new calculation on ground motion was performed using a method differing from that adopted by the power company. As the figure was below that presented by Kansai Electric, it determined that the utility had not underestimated the shaking, and during a regular meeting on July 13, it decided against revising Kansai Electric's figure.

Shimazaki, however, objected, saying that the recalculated figure should have greatly surpassed the original figure for standard ground motion. The reason is that during screening, the outcome of calculations is normally multiplied by 1.5 to provide an added element of safety, but this wasn't done. The new calculation was performed by the secretariat of the NRA. A member of the secretariat who talked with Shimazaki admitted that the renewed calculation was repeatedly stretched, and had "no accuracy." The member added, "It's not known how much leeway should be given." It couldn't be helped if the secretariat were accused of adopting its approach to avoid criticism that the estimate for envisaged damage was too low. The fact that the NRA accepted without questions its secretariat's explanation that Kansai Electric's estimate was sufficient raises doubts about its competence.

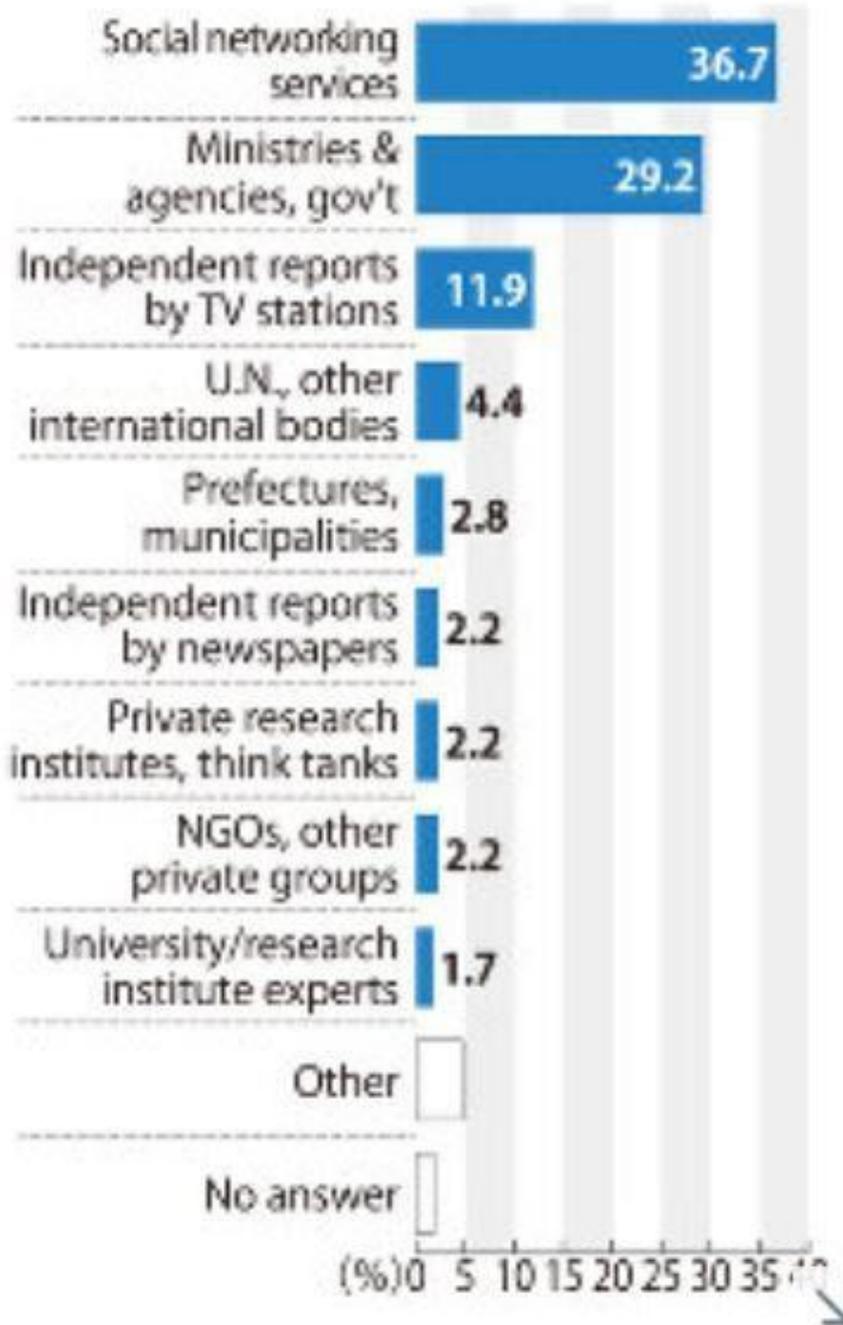
There are no experts on seismology among the NRA's five commissioners. NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka has expressed the opinion that the calculated figure for standard ground motion at the Oi Nuclear Power Plant doesn't have to be reviewed. We worry whether quake resistance has been calculated properly. Shimazaki has suggested to the NRA that it listen to a wide range of opinions from experts in seismology and incorporate the good ones into its screening. Even if experts differ in their evaluations of Shimazaki's research results, his suggestion to the NRA itself is appropriate.

Tanaka, however, commented, "We don't have the leeway to do that and it's not our job to do it either." We can only be skeptical about such a stance.

The NRA is supposed to be the final fortress in ensuring nuclear safety. We hope that it will try to make improvements to methods of calculating quake resistance of its own accord.

Credibility of government very low

Least reliable source of information on nuclear accidents



July 26, 2016

Gov't cited as second-least reliable source of info on nuclear accidents: survey

Respondents to a survey in Shizuoka Prefecture, which houses Chubu Electric Power Co.'s Hamaoka Nuclear Power Plant, have cited the government as the second-least reliable source of information on nuclear accidents.

A total of 29.2 percent of respondents in the survey by Hirotsada Hirose, a professor emeritus at Tokyo Women's Christian University, cited the central government and its ministries and agencies as the least reliable source of information in the event of a nuclear accident. The figure was topped only by "social networking services (SNS), at 36.7 percent, highlighting deep-rooted mistrust in the government as a source of information.

Conducted between May and June, the survey targeted the city of Omaezaki, where the Hamaoka Nuclear Power Plant stands, and 10 municipalities within a 31-kilometer radius of the plant, designated as urgent protective action planning zones (UPZs). A total of 360 people between the ages of 18 and 79 were interviewed directly by researchers.

The respondents were asked to choose from nine sources of information, not including nuclear power companies, which would be responsible for the incidents. Besides SNS and the central government and its ministries and agencies, the next most commonly cited unreliable sources of information were "independent reports by TV stations" at 11.9 percent, and "international organizations such as the United Nations," at 4.4 percent. "Independent reports by newspapers" came in at 2.2 percent.

When asked for the "most reliable" source, respondents' top answer was "prefectures and municipalities," at 41.4 percent, while "the government, its ministries and agencies," was selected by 11.7 percent of respondents.

"If the credibility level of the government is this low, it could have a negative effect during evacuations. If the government is moving to restart nuclear reactors, then it first should make an effort to clear away the sense of mistrust," Hirose said.

Business attitudes shifting regarding nukes

Japan business lobby says Abe govt can't rely on nuclear energy

TOKYO, July 22 | By Osamu Tsukimori and Aaron Sheldrick

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/japan-energy-idUKL4N19N1D4>

Japan's use of nuclear power is unlikely to meet a government target of returning to near pre-Fukushima levels and the world's No.3 economy needs to get serious about boosting renewables, a senior executive at a top business lobby said.

Under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's energy policies, nuclear is supposed to supply a fifth of energy generation by 2030, but Teruo Asada, vice chairman of **the Japan Association of Corporate Executives**, said Japan was unlikely to get anywhere near this.

The influential business lobby has issued a proposal urging Tokyo to remove hurdles for renewable power amid the shaky outlook for nuclear power after the 2011 Fukushima disaster.

The move shows how business attitudes are now shifting as reactor restarts get held up by legal challenges, safety issues and public scepticism.

"We have a sense of crisis that Japan will become a laughing stock if we do not encourage renewable power," said Asada, who is also chairman of trading house Marubeni Corp.

Long dependent on imported fossil fuels, Japan's government and big business actively promoted nuclear energy despite widespread public opposition.

The government wants nuclear to make up 20-22 percent of electricity supply by 2030, down from 30 percent before Fukushima. So far, however, only two out of 42 operable reactors have started and the newly elected governor of the prefecture where they are located has pledged to shut them.

Renewables supplied 14.3 percent of power in the year to March 2016 and the government's 2030 target is 22-24 pct.

"In the very long term, we have to lower our dependence on nuclear. Based on current progress, nuclear power reliance may not reach even 10 percent," said Asada, adding the association wanted measures to encourage private investment in renewables and for public funding of infrastructure such as transmission lines.

The influential business lobby has a membership of about 1,400 executives from around 950 companies. Andrew DeWit, a professor at Rikkyo University in Tokyo focusing on energy issues, said the push signaled "a profound change in thinking among blue-chip business executives."

"Many business leaders have clearly thrown in the towel on nuclear and are instead openly lobbying for Japan to vault to global leadership in renewables, efficiency and smart infrastructure."

When asked about the association's proposals, an industry ministry official said the government was maintaining its nuclear target.

"The Japanese government will aim for the maximum introduction of renewable energy but renewable energy has a cost issue," said Yohei Ogino, a deputy director for energy policy.

But three sources familiar with official thinking told Reuters in May that Japan will cut reliance on nuclear power when it releases an updated energy plan as early as next year.

Following the nuclear reactor meltdowns at Fukushima in 2011, Japan has had some success in overcoming one of the world's worst peacetime energy crises, partly due to lower oil prices and liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices.

Japan has also promoted renewables but most investment has been in solar and in recent years it has cut incentives.

"There are **too many hurdles for other sources of renewable power**," Asada said.

(Editing by Ed Davies)

Sendai shutdown: Mitazono ready for fight

July 29, 2016

New Kagoshima governor ready for Sendai plant shutdown fight

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201607290046.html>

KAGOSHIMA--Satoshi Mitazono repeated his assertion that operations at Sendai nuclear power plant in the prefecture should be suspended at his first news conference as Kagoshima governor on July 28.

He said that he will make the request to Kyushu Electric Power Co., the operator of the plant, “between late August and early September.”

“As long as residents in the prefecture are feeling anxious due to the Kumamoto earthquakes, I strongly urge Kyushu Electric to temporarily halt the operations of the reactors and conduct another inspection,” Mitazono, a former TV journalist, said.

The new governor raised his voice as he made the remarks in response to a question about the suspension of the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at the Sendai plant in Satsuma-Sendai, the only units in Japan currently in service.

Mitazono was elected as Kagoshima’s governor on July 10. The suspension of the Sendai plant’s operation for additional safety checks was one of his campaign pledges.

Although a governor has no legal authority to order a halt, Mitazono said, “Whether or not a governor has that authority and making a request to a utility are a separate issue.”

Regarding the method for how he will make the request and its contents, Mitazono said, “I will sum up the ideas while exchanging opinions with various people.”

Mitazono also referred to the possible decommissioning of the two reactors at the Sendai plants, which have been in operation for more than 30 years.

He plans to establish an expert panel to discuss nuclear plant-related issues in the near future including the decommissioning of the aging reactors.

The governor also expressed his view that “the construction of a new reactor would be difficult,” in reference to the proposed No. 3 unit that Kyushu Electric is planning to add at the plant.

During the news conference, he also said that he plans to increase the number of radiation monitoring posts around the Sendai plant from 73 to about 100.

The devices measure radiation levels near the plant and serve as a barometer for issuing an evacuation order to residents at the time of a nuclear accident.

“I want to install many high-performance ones,” Mitazono said.

Liberalisation: Profitable for whom?

July 27, 2016

The fraud called retail electricity liberalization

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/07/27/commentary/japan-commentary/fraud-called-retail-electricity-liberalization/#.V5nDpqJdeou>

Sentaku Magazine

Three months have passed since the retail sale of electric power was fully liberalized. Approximately 300 companies have since entered the business of generating and selling electricity, and more than 1 million consumers have signed contracts with them, switching from the major power companies that have monopolized each region.

Some of those consumers may be feeling satisfied with new lower power rates, but their satisfaction could be short-lived. They may well end up shouldering the huge cost of the liberalization program.

There are hidden costs related to generating and supplying electricity that consumers never catch sight of because they are not listed on their monthly bills. These hidden costs are so huge that they could erase any benefits to consumers.

The Organization for Cross-Regional Coordination of Transmission Operations (OCCTO) issues weekly reports on how the liberalization of electricity retail is proceeding. It says that as of June 10, about 1.11 million consumers had concluded contracts with new power suppliers. Though this number may seem impressive, it accounts for a mere 2 percent of the total number of the nation's households. If this percentage figure is taken as a yardstick, the liberalization of power retail can be termed a total failure. How much savings have accrued to those 1 million plus consumers as a result of changing their power suppliers? It is still too early to come up with an exact answer because electricity bills usually go up sharply in the winter and summer months. But assuming the new contracts have resulted in an annual average saving of ¥10,000, as indicated by many websites' comparison of differences in power charges, the total savings come to about ¥11.1 billion.

But this figure is only an illusion, because huge investments were made in preparation for liberalization and the money needed for those investments is being collected from all of the power consumers in the name of fees for using transmission lines.

One case that illustrates such big investments is the installation of what is known as a "smart meter," a device that measures the amount of electricity consumed in real time and communicates the data to a power company for monitoring and billing. This device had been on the market even before liberalization but is now a must-have. A smart meter must be installed in every household in principle when its electricity supplier is changed. Tokyo Electric Power Co., which serves 20 million households, initially budgeted ¥21.9 billion for three years from 2012 to 2014 to install smart meters. Although a regulatory body reduced the sum by ¥6.5 billion, the balance still means that Tepco spent around ¥5 billion annually in the name of liberalizing the retail of electricity.

Other major power companies also invested huge sums to install smart meters. The total sum budgeted by the nine other regional power companies for that purpose averaged ¥62 billion a year. Even if it is assumed that 10 percent of that was slashed by the regulatory body, it still leaves a total of some ¥55 billion a year. When the amount spent by Tepco is added, as much as ¥60 billion has been spent every year for installing smart meters.

This sum more than offsets the cost effectiveness of liberalization. The estimated savings of ¥11.1 billion accruing to consumers is an overblown figure if various marketing devices to lure consumers are taken into account. This figure is likely to dwindle from next year on, showing that it is difficult for consumers to benefit.

Worse still, smart meters have become an impediment to, rather than a necessary tool for, the liberalization of electricity retail. The meters were originally meant to accumulate data, which then would be transmitted to power retailers via the major regional power monopolies. Only through this process will it become possible to calculate charges for individual customers.

After the liberalization got underway, however, it surfaced that it is impossible to collect the necessary data. The regional monopolies blame the manufacturers of the smart meters for supplying faulty products. But the monopolies, which bought the smart meters, aren't free of blame. They will have to bear the cost of parts replacement and repairs, which in turn will be passed on to consumers in the form of increased expenses for transmitting electricity.

Since their installation will continue beyond 2020, there will be no limits to rising costs related to smart meters. Any savings accruing to consumers by switching suppliers will easily be wiped out by this increased cost.

The smart meter is not the only thing causing a huge waste of money in connection with the liberalization. For example, in preparation for the liberalization program, OCCTO purchased an exchange system built by Hitachi Ltd. for use in the power wholesale exchange. The cost was low at about ¥1.6 billion, but when transactions started, the system proved to be unworkable, necessitating major repairs.

OCCTO also functions as a new provider of jobs for ex-bureaucrats of the Ministry of Economy, Industry and Trade (METI) who are seeking post-retirement jobs. An ex-METI official already secured the post of OCCTO secretary-general — a position from which the official can intervene in OCCTO's personnel affairs. The body is staffed by about 150 people, including those seconded from the major power companies. It is difficult to say that the body is functioning properly because former METI officials are in powerful positions. An insider says OCCTO is made up of an undisciplined group of people with no coordination among them and that experts originally from the power companies, who are the only professionals in the body, have proven useless.

OCCTO's annual budget stands at a whopping ¥4.5 billion, including the salaries of its personnel. The budget is expected to surge because the body plans to spend an additional ¥3.5 billion to develop a new exchange system. All these sums, of course, are to be shouldered by consumers.

The government has spent huge sums of taxpayer money in connection with the liberalization of electricity retail. While the sum spent on publicity has remained less than ¥100 million, the government has earmarked ¥2.2 billion in the current fiscal year for subsidies to renovate hydroelectric plants and ¥12 billion for technological development of next-generation thermal power plants. These types of funds are used almost exclusively by major power companies, as if they are being rewarded for cooperating with the liberalization.

When all the figures cited above are added together, the total comes to around ¥80 billion and is bound to keep on rising every year. And this money is charged to consumers while they are unaware of it. Compared with the large amounts of money thus collected from consumers, an annual saving of ¥10,000 resulting from changing one's power supplier is just a mirage.

This is an abridged translation of an article from the July issue of Sentaku, a monthly magazine covering political, social and economic scenes. English articles of the magazine can be read at www.sentaku-en.com.

How much will it cost to restart?

July 31, 2016

Extra safety precautions balloon costs to restart reactors

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201607310028.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Eleven operators of nuclear power plants expect to spend more than 3 trillion yen (\$32 billion) to safeguard their facilities, revealing the continuing skyrocketing costs, an Asahi Shimbun survey has found. The overall costs will likely grow even further in the coming years as many of the plants applying for a restart did not include expenses to build centers to deal with a terrorist attack, required under the new regulations set after the 2011 Fukushima disaster.

The latest survey, conducted in June, found the combined spending on safety precautions totaled 3.32 trillion yen, up about 935 billion yen from a similar survey a year ago.

The estimate was partly updated to implement measures to continue to operate reactors past the 40 years of their lifespan.

Some companies had to bolster their plants to withstand an earthquake more powerful than the one previously forecast to hit the sites, in line with the Nuclear Regulation Authority's recommendation. The survey covered 10 regional utilities operating nuclear power plants and Electric Power Development Co., known as J-Power, which is building a nuclear plant in Oma, Aomori Prefecture.

The first of the series of cost studies was conducted in January 2013, followed by one done annually.

The results of the studies showed that the cost to update safety precautions soared between 600 billion yen and 900 billion yen annually to meet the new regulations, which took effect in 2013.

Kansai Electric Power Co.' spending grew by 2.5-fold to 730 billion yen from last year's 285 billion yen, the most of all surveyed.

The surge resulted from the company's plan to operate three reactors at two of its nuclear plants beyond their 40-year lifespans.

As for the construction of anti-terrorism facilities, only five of 16 plants that have filed their applications to restart with the NRA include figures for such facilities in their estimate.

A terrorism response center is expected to cost tens of billions of yen per plant, likely pushing up the overall costs into the hundreds of billions of yen.

Although companies believe that they can recoup their investments once their plants go back online after the NRA's examination, it is unclear whether events will transpire as envisioned.

Kansai Electric has been ordered to suspend the operation of reactors at its Takahama plant in Fukui Prefecture following a court injunction in March.

Unforeseen problems could force operators to shut down their reactors for a prolonged period, experts say.

(This article was written by Takashi Sugimoto and Masanobu Higashiyama.)

Storage facilities & Government promises

August 5, 2016

Japan's new environment minister pledges to build trust, contaminated waste storage facility in Fukushima

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/08/05/national/japans-new-environment-minister-pledges-build-trust-contaminated-waste-storage-facility-fukushima/#.V6WC-KJdeos>

by Kazuaki Nagata
Staff Writer

Newly appointed Environment Minister Koichi Yamamoto said Friday he will further efforts to build trust with people in Fukushima Prefecture to facilitate a stalled project to build a temporary nuclear storage facility.

The 2011 triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has contaminated a large part of the prefecture while massive amounts of radioactive waste have been generated by decontamination work.

The government is planning to construct a huge temporary storage site near the Fukushima plant, but needs more than 2,300 landowners to agree to use their property for the project. So far it has only secured about 4.9 percent of the 1,600 hectares of land needed, owned by 234 people.

Although the government says it plans to store the waste for 30 years, no other areas have volunteered to host a final disposal site, leading many local residents to fear that the Fukushima site will end up being permanent.

"I'm aware that getting landowners' consent is a very tough issue," said Yamamoto, 68, a veteran Liberal Democratic Party lawmaker, during a media interview.

Yamamoto has learned from ministry officials that the situation is improving, and hopes to accelerate the momentum.

Storing contaminated waste at the site is crucial for Fukushima's reconstruction work, which is currently stalled due to large amounts of waste piling up around the prefecture.

Meanwhile, some landowners are reportedly questioning the government's commitment on this matter, as environment ministers have already changed four times since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe took office in December 2012.

But Yamamoto said the ministers have handled affairs properly. "This administration has been led by the LDP, so of course we have continuity and even (if) the minister changes (often), we share the same thoughts," said Yamamoto.

He said 99 percent of the handover information he received from his predecessor, Tamayo Marukawa, was about Fukushima-related issues. "I have to make efforts to go to Fukushima often to make stronger connections than Marukawa did," he said. Yamamoto plans to visit the temporary storage facility on Tuesday.

The government hopes to begin construction of the temporary storage site in October, the ministry said.

TEPCO in court

August 5, 2016

TEPCO in court fight vs. family of dementia patient missing in Fukushima nuke crisis

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160805/p2a/00m/0na/003000c>

Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) has declared at the Tokyo District Court it has no responsibility to pay compensation to the family of a dementia patient who went missing during the opening days of the crisis at the utility's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

TEPCO has generally admitted responsibility for the deaths of hospital patients during the evacuation of the areas around the nuclear plant in March 2011. However, in the case of the woman, who went missing at the age of 88, the utility has stressed that it "cannot recognize that the nuclear accident led to the disappearance." The family insists that the woman would not have gone missing if the nuclear accident had not occurred. A ruling is expected on Aug. 10.

According to the family's suit and other sources, the missing woman is originally from the former town of Odaka (now part of the city of Minamisoma), Fukushima Prefecture, and was admitted to Futaba Hospital in the prefectural town of Okuma after being diagnosed with dementia in 2006.

In-patients at Futaba Hospital were evacuated by March 16, 2011 following the nuclear accident five days before, but the woman could not be found. Staff returned to the hospital briefly in April when the exclusion zone around the plant was opened for temporary visits, and confirmed four patients had died in the facility. However, the missing woman was not among them.

Based on a statement submitted by the woman's family, the Soma branch of the Fukushima Family Court declared that she had "left the hospital alone after the earthquake, ended up wandering through a virtually uninhabited landscape, and encountered deadly dangers." The court ruled she had disappeared, and was legally dead. The family filed a suit against TEPCO in February 2014 demanding 44 million yen in compensation.

In court, TEPCO has asserted that the woman likely "wandered out of the hospital due to the earthquake itself," not the nuclear crisis. The utility pointed out that the electronic locks in the hospital wing where the woman was living all opened right after the quake, allowing her to wander away. However, attorney for the plaintiffs Fumio Shinkai responded, "The town of Okuma was vacated and a search could not be conducted because of the (nuclear) accident. It's impossible to say that the accident had nothing to do with the woman's disappearance."

Shinkai also represents six other families pursuing lawsuits against TEPCO over the deaths of family members at Futaba Hospital. The utility has broadly recognized it has a responsibility to pay compensation for these deaths, but is disputing the amounts.

According to the 71-year-old niece of the missing dementia patient, the woman moved to Tokyo when she was young to work as a dressmaker, and returned to her hometown in Fukushima Prefecture about 20 years ago. She was admitted to Futaba Hospital after her dementia progressed, but she was otherwise healthy when the nuclear disaster struck.

"It's very sad that she still hasn't been found," her niece told the Mainichi Shimbun. "I can't agree with what TEPCO is asserting."

Reuse of radioactive soil intended to cut costs

August 3, 2016

Reuse of radioactive soil could cut costs by 1.5 trillion yen: ministry estimate

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160803/p2a/00m/0na/014000c>

Behind the Environment Ministry's controversial decision to allow reuse of highly radioactive soil emanating from the Fukushima nuclear disaster in public works projects was an estimate that the reuse could cut the costs of reducing radiation levels of such soil by over 1.5 trillion yen, it has been learned. The estimate in question was presented during a closed-door meeting of the ministry in January and stated that reuse of radioactive soil generated from Fukushima decontamination work could cut the cost for purifying such soil from 2.9127 trillion yen in case the levels of radioactive cesium are reduced to 100

becquerels per kilogram to 1.345 trillion yen in case the cesium levels are cut down to 8,000 becquerels per kilogram. The estimate calls the latter option "reasonable from economic and social points of view." The Environment Ministry decided in June to allow reuse of soil with radioactive cesium of no more than 8,000 becquerels per kilogram in mounds under road pavements and other public works projects. The decision sparked criticism that it runs counter to the safety standards of 100 becquerels or less for recycling metals generated from the decommissioning of nuclear reactors under the Act on the Regulation of Nuclear Source Material, Nuclear Fuel Material and Reactors. The ministry has insisted that the radiation levels of tainted soil used in road mounds can be held down from 8,000 becquerels to around 100 becquerels by covering those mounds with concrete among other measures.

A ministry working group on safety evaluation of radiation effects held **closed-door meetings** over the issue on six occasions between January and May this year. In June, the Mainichi Shimbun reported that an estimate presented to one of those meetings stated, "For example, it will take 170 years for radiation levels to reduce to 100 becquerels if tainted soil of 5,000 becquerels is put to reuse," sparking controversy. In response, **the ministry on Aug. 1 released the minutes of the closed-door meetings and other documents on its website.**

At the second meeting of the working group on Jan. 27, the copies of a document titled "About reasonable radioactivity concentrations of recycled materials" were handed out to attendants. The document, which was drawn up by the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, includes an estimate that the cost for reducing the radiation levels of tainted soil to 100 becquerels for recycling would reach 2.9127 trillion yen, with a volume reduction rate of 40 percent, adding that 40 percent of contaminated soil could not be put to reuse. Meanwhile, the estimate says it would cost 2.1185 trillion yen to drop the radiation levels of tainted soil to 3,000 becquerels, with a volume reduction rate of 0.5 percent, while it would cost 1.345 trillion yen to decrease the radiation levels of soil to 8,000 becquerels, with a volume reduction rate of 0.2 percent. The latter option could make 99.8 percent of tainted soil available for reuse, the estimate says.

"Considering economic and social factors, it is appropriate to set the radioactivity concentration of recycled materials at several thousand becquerels," the document stated. A note of caution in the document states, "Apart from this, it is necessary to project the cost for final disposal (of tainted soil)." A ministry official in charge of the issue told the Mainichi Shimbun, "The document was produced in response to a request by a member of the working group. As the document states, it is difficult to (set the standards for reusing tainted soil) at 100 becquerels from a realistic point of view."

Researching psychological effects of nuclear disaster

August 7, 2016

Japanese researchers to study Chernobyl disaster

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160807_15/

NHK has learned that a Japanese research team will study the psychological impact of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident.

The team wants to use the findings to help those affected by the nuclear accident in Fukushima Prefecture, as they are likely to have been exposed to stress for a long time.

Researchers from Fukushima, Nagoya and Hiroshima Universities will begin a survey later this month. They plan to interview about 2,000 people in Ukraine about their stress and anxiety levels.

They will ask 54 questions, including how worried people were about the impact of radiation at the time of the accident, and how concerned they are now.

The researchers will compare the findings with the results of a similar study in Fukushima Prefecture.

Fukushima University Professor Yuji Tsutsui says the Ukraine survey may indicate what kind of measures will be needed to help people who have been **psychologically affected** by the Fukushima nuclear accident.

Mihama: What happened to 40-year rule?

August 4, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

40-year rule for Japan's nuclear reactors sidelined as Mihama unit passes screening

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160804/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

The aging No. 3 reactor at Mihama Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture, which Kansai Electric Power Co. is attempting to keep running beyond a designated 40-year lifespan for Japan's reactors, has cleared government screening under new safety standards.

- **【Related】** NRA's Takahama reactor approval a blow to 40-year lifespan rule
- **【Related】** 4 utilities to form alliance over nuclear crisis management, safety measures
- **【Related】** Editorial: 40-year reactor life rule must prevail over profitability

The idled reactor, which started operating in December 1976, needs two additional sets of approval by the end of November before it can be restarted, but it has cleared the first hurdle in a process that could see the reactor kept in operation up until 2036.

It is the third time a reactor has effectively been given a pass for operating beyond the 40-year limit, indicating that the 40-year rule is being hollowed out.

In the wake of the meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant following the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, a change to Japanese law set the life of Japan's nuclear reactors at 40 years in principle. Under legislation, it is possible to extend the life of each reactor once for an additional 20 years, but such a move is designated as an "exception."

It had been thought that extending the life of the Mihama reactor would be difficult due to its old design and the deadline for screening, but Kansai Electric set apart 165 billion yen for safety measures and overcame these difficulties.

The power company raised the estimate for standard ground motion at the No. 3 reactor -- a measure of the maximum level of shaking that it would be subjected to during an earthquake -- to 993 gals, 1.3 times higher than the original figure. A gal is a unit of acceleration, with 1 gal defined as 1 centimeter per second squared. The company also announced major design changes, including the conversion of a storage rack for spent nuclear fuel at the reactor, whose design was old and was deemed unable to endure the maximum level of shaking, into a movable system, and the renewal of structures supporting nuclear fuel within the reactor.

There are no movable racks at other nuclear power plants in Japan, but the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) judged that the design was suitable. Work to confirm whether new structures within the reactor would be able to withstand shaking was delayed until after the screening deadline.

Extended operation of the Mihama No. 3 reactor will be permitted by the end of November, and the power company hopes to restart the reactor as early as the spring of 2020. Shunichi Tanaka, chairman of the NRA, has stated, "If power companies are prepared to make any level of investment, then 40 years is not an issue."

His comment indicates that the extension of the operating life of reactors as an "exception" would be permitted if the utility spent money on safety measures.

Lifespan of ageing reactors should not be extended

August 8, 2016

Editorial: Japan should phase out aging nuclear reactors

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160808/p2a/00m/0na/009000c>

Moves by the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) to give the green light to the extension of operations at aging nuclear reactors have raised serious questions about the safety of atomic power plants. The extension of the lifespan of nuclear reactors, which had been regarded as an exception, now happens regularly.

The recent moves represent a departure from the new safety regulations on atomic power stations, which were enforced by drastically reviewing older regulations by learning lessons from the crisis at the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

The NRA approved a draft screening document that effectively recognizes the No. 3 reactor at the Mihama Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture -- which its operator Kansai Electric Power Co. (KEPCO) intends to continue running even after its 40-year lifespan -- meets new safety standards. If the reactor passes additional screening tests by the end of November 2016, KEPCO can continue operating the reactor until 2036 at the latest.

This is the third aging nuclear reactor for which the NRA has approved the extension of operations

following the No. 1 and 2 reactors at KEPCO's Takahama plant for which the authority gave the green light in June.

Following the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis in March 2011, legislation was amended to limit the lifespan of nuclear reactors to 40 years, in principle, with the aim of reducing the risks of accidents involving aging reactors. By the time of the outbreak of the nuclear disaster, about 35 to 40 years had passed since Fukushima No. 1 plant's No. 1, 2 and 3 reactors, where meltdowns occurred, began operations.

The then administration led by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) explained that the 40-year lifespan was set based on the time it is estimated to take before the reactor pressure vessel has deteriorated after being exposed to neutrons.

Apart from the DPJ, which was subsequently reorganized into the Democratic Party earlier this year, the then opposition Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Komeito voted for a bill to revise the relevant legislation. A clause allowing for the lifespan to be extended only once by up to 20 years as an exception upon the NRA's approval was incorporated into the law.

Since Japan is an earthquake-prone country and has numerous volcanos, it is highly risky to continue relying on nuclear plants. Therefore, many members of the public apparently deemed that the 40-year rule was reasonable.

To enhance the safety of nuclear plants and phase out nuclear power, the government and electric power companies that operate atomic power stations should stick to the 40-year rule.

Experts have pointed out that there are limits to enhancing the safety of aging nuclear reactors, noting that it is technically difficult to change the basic design of the facilities and their arrangement although their parts can be replaced with new ones. The need to hand over maintenance techniques from generation to generation also poses a serious challenge.

If the risks involving such aging reactors are taken seriously, screenings of applications for the extension of operations at aging nuclear plants should be far stricter than those for the younger nuclear plants.

However, the NRA appears to have helped KEPCO pass the screening for the extension of the lifespans of the utility's Takahama and Mihama plants.

July 2016 was the deadline for permitting the extension of the lifespan of the Takahama plant, and late November is the deadline for the Mihama power station shortly before the 40th year will have passed since the start of its operation.

Since the screening periods for the Takahama and Mihama nuclear plants were limited, the NRA prioritized inspections on these plants over other power stations, concentrating its personnel on the screening of these power stations.

Moreover, the NRA postponed experiments of exposing key devices at these power stations to vibrations to test their quake resistance until after the permission of the extension of their lifespan is granted in order to prevent time from running out for the screening.

The NRA says that it would not revoke its permission even if the experiments were to find that the plants were not sufficiently quake resistant, and instead reconfirm their safety after their operator takes additional safety measures. Some members of the NRA criticized the move saying that redoing the safety confirmation would damage the public's understanding of the NRA.

It has been pointed out that cables that are easy to burn are used in aging nuclear plants. The new regulatory standards require nuclear plant operators to make all cables fire retardant. However, it takes a long time and costs much money to replace all cables at atomic power stations with flame-retardant cables. The NRA requires KEPCO to cover cables that are difficult to be replaced with flame-retardant ones

with fire-proof sheets. However, questions remain as to whether the measure will ensure the same level of safety as the use of flame-retardant cables.

NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka had said when he assumed his post that it's "extremely difficult to extend" the operation of aging reactors beyond the 40-year limit. However, he has since changed his view to the effect that "**technical challenges can be overcome if necessary money is spent.**" **He appears as if he were speaking on behalf of power companies.**

It has been decided to decommission six aging reactors following the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011, in addition to those operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the crippled Fukushima plant. However, all these nuclear reactors are small-scale ones, each with an output of approximately 300,000 to 500,000 kilowatts.

In contrast, Mihama's No. 3 and Takahama's No. 1 and 2 reactors have an output capacity of about 800,000 kilowatts, larger than those that are set to be decommissioned. KEPCO estimates that it will spend over 200 billion yen for the Takahama reactors and 165 billion yen for the Mihama reactor as funds to implement safety measures. Despite such huge costs, KEPCO is determined to extend the lifespans of these plants because the plants will be effective in increasing the company's profitability since fuel costs for nuclear plants are far lower than those for thermal power stations. If Takahama's No. 1 and 2 reactors are put online, it is estimated to push up the company's profits by about 9 billion yen a month.

Fifteen reactors across the country, including Mihama's No. 3 reactor, are to surpass their 40-year lifespan over the next decade. Utilities are likely to apply for permission to extend the lifespan of many of these reactors if they deem that the extension will be profitable for the companies even if safety measures cost the operators massive amounts of money. The extension of the lifespans of the Mihama and Takahama plants will serve as role models for such efforts.

As such, decisions on whether to decommission aging reactors will be effectively left to the discretion of power companies based on economic principles, reducing the exceptional clause in the law to a mere facade.

The provision for the 40-year lifespan was incorporated in the legislation to prioritize the safety of nuclear plants over power companies' profits.

Furthermore, the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has established a goal of setting the ratio of nuclear power to Japan's entire power supply at 20 to 22 percent in fiscal 2030. If the 40-year rule were to be thoroughly observed, the ratio would be around 15 percent even if all the existing reactors and those under construction were to be fully in operation. This will encourage power companies to extend the lifespans of their nuclear plants

Such a policy cannot respond to the wishes of numerous members of the general public to build a society that will not rely on atomic power at an early date. As a country that has experienced a severe nuclear accident, Japan should phase out nuclear power rather than extending the lifespan of aging reactors.

Listen to anti-nuke calls

August 6, 2016

EDITORIAL: If Abe is serious, he should listen in earnest to anti-nuke calls

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201608060027.html>

August 6, 2016 at 16:50 JST

“(We can choose) a future in which Hiroshima and Nagasaki are known not as the dawn of atomic warfare, but as the start of our own moral awakening.” That was how Barack Obama wound up his 17-minute-long public address during his historic visit to Hiroshima on May 27.

He was the first sitting U.S. president to visit the city leveled by the world's first atomic bombing. The 71st anniversary of that event fell on Aug. 6. Nagasaki suffered the same fate as Hiroshima three days later, on Aug. 9, 1945.

Obama's visit to Hiroshima was a benchmark event. Even so, nuclear stockpiles around the world are still in excess of 15,000 warheads. A world without nuclear weapons remains a distant dream.

Action is needed to carve out the future. In this regard, there are particularly high expectations for the role of Japan, which experienced the ravages of atomic bombings.

But the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are increasingly suspicious of the central government's intentions. In their view, the government seems to be obstructing the global trend for trying to eradicate nuclear weaponry.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who accompanied Obama during his Hiroshima visit, pledged that he would “continue to make incessant efforts” toward realizing a world without nuclear weapons.

But what precisely is he determined to do, we wonder. The key question here is that of a concrete vision.

TOKYO EMBARRASSED BY TALK OF ‘NO FIRST USE’

The Washington Post reported last month that the Obama administration is considering changes in its nuclear policy.

Notably, a declaration of “no first use” is reportedly being weighed as an option. The term refers to a country's pledge that it will not be the first to use nuclear arms unless it comes under nuclear attack from another nation. China and India, among the world's nuclear weapon states, have adopted that policy.

“No first use” is expected to significantly reduce the role of nuclear arms in security policy. It is also believed to be highly effective in urging other nuclear weapon states to engage in nuclear disarmament.

Ten U.S. Democratic senators have called on Obama to declare “no first use.” The mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have sent a letter to Obama to express their support for the potential nuclear policy changes, saying such moves would “mark an important step toward realizing a world without nuclear weapons.”

But Tokyo appears to be embarrassed by this. Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida said only that Japan and the United States “should remain closely in touch” over the matter. When the Obama administration reviewed its nuclear policy in 2010, it stopped short of declaring “no first use” out of consideration for Japan and other U.S. allies.

At the United Nations, meantime, there is growing momentum to outlaw nuclear arms, which are inhumane weapons, under international law.

A U.N. working group, which has been discussing the matter since February in Switzerland, is holding its final session this month. The working group's chairman has worked out a draft report that says, “A majority of States expressed support for the commencement of negotiations ... in 2017.”

Japan is one country that is not part of that “majority of States.” Tokyo has reiterated at the working group's sessions that the time is not ripe for declaring nuclear weapons illegal in view of the current security climate.

Seventy-one years after the A-bombings, the very country that suffered the nuclear attacks is trying to block the trend for nuclear disarmament.

PERSISTENT DEPENDENCE ON NUCLEAR UMBRELLA

The backdrop here is Japan's dependence on the "nuclear umbrella," under which it relies on the nuclear arsenal of the United States to deter attacks from other countries.

Tokyo believes Japan must stay under the nuclear umbrella, not the least because it has to face up to China, which is pursuing a rapid military buildup, and to North Korea, which has repeatedly conducted nuclear tests and test-firings of missiles.

No approval can be given to a "no first use" policy and a prospective treaty to ban nuclear weapons, both of which would erode the deterrent potential of the nuclear umbrella, according to Tokyo's position. Let us remember, however, that nuclear deterrence theory is a relic of the Cold War period. The government of Japan has not ruled out a possible use of nuclear weapons by the United States. That is broadly at odds with the sentiment of the Japanese public, which does not want a repeat of the ravages of a nuclear attack.

As long as deterrence theory is adhered to, other nuclear weapon states will also stick to their reliance on nuclear arsenals, which means the risk of a nuclear war would never diminish.

It goes without saying that the security climate should be taken into account from a tough viewpoint. Many experts believe, however, that conventional war potential--basically that of Japan and the United States--alone is functioning as a sufficient deterrent on North Korea and China.

"We must have the courage to escape the logic of fear, and pursue a world without (nuclear weapons)," Obama said in his Hiroshima address.

Kazumi Matsui, the mayor of Hiroshima, cited that passage in his Aug. 6 Peace Declaration, and added, "We need to fill our policymakers with the passion to ... create a security system based on trust and dialogue."

Courage and passion: These qualities are probably expected from the government of Japan more than anything else. Tokyo should start striving to seek a security policy that does not rely on the nuclear umbrella and begin holding talks with Washington to achieve that goal.

Abe has attended the peace ceremonies in Hiroshima and Nagasaki every year. He has also had opportunities to hold dialogue with representatives of A-bomb survivors.

But the residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki strongly distrust Abe. The prime minister has not only rushed through policies that undermine the pacifist principles of the Constitution, such as lifting Japan's self-imposed ban on the right to exercise collective self-defense and enacting new security legislation. He has been less than willing to listen to earnest pleas. In 2014, for example, he used the phrase, "It's a matter of opinion," to dismiss concerns expressed by an A-bomb survivor.

POIGNANT CALLS FROM A-BOMBED CITIES

The Nagasaki Peace Declaration to be released Aug. 9 is expected to include, for the first time in two years, a demand for enacting a law to set down Japan's three non-nuclear principles--not possessing, not producing and not permitting the introduction into Japan, of nuclear weapons.

Sumiteru Taniguchi, an 87-year-old A-bomb survivor, strongly called, during a drafting committee meeting, for the inclusion of that passage.

"Those who never experienced that abominable war are trying to have the (pacifist) Constitution amended," Taniguchi said. "As a survivor of the A-bomb, I have to continue calling out loud as long as I am alive."

Poignant calls from the A-bombed cities represent the starting point of efforts to realize a world without nuclear arms. If Abe wishes, as he says he does, to lead initiatives to have nuclear weapons abolished, the first thing he should do is to face up in earnest to the calls of people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and seek out a way to go hand in hand with them.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Aug. 6

"Unreasonable cancer diagnosis"

<https://www.ippnw.de/atomenergie/gesundheit/artikel/de/unvernuenftige-krebsdiagnosen-in-f.html>

"Unvernünftige Krebsdiagnosen" in Fukushima

Wie die Fukushima Medical University ihre eigene Studie sabotiert [in German]

In the last bulletin of IPPNW, Dr. Alex Rosen describes how the Fukushima Medical University – who is in charge of the survey on thyroid cancers among Fukushima children – is sabotaging its own work. A manoeuvre of manipulation. A professor of the University is going round schools in the Prefecture, carrying this message : “It is important to offer options to participate or not participate in the examination, after parents and children reach the understanding about the meaning and limitations of the examination.”

See [in english] : **【Thyroid Cancer in Fukushima】 How the Thyroid Examination Should Be: “Respecting a Wish Not to Participate in the Examination”**

<http://fukushimavoices-eng2.blogspot.fr/2016/06/thyroid-cancer-in-fukushimahow-thyroid.html?m=1>

« ...The article describes how Midorikawa is "accommodating" wishes of those children who do not want to participate in the thyroid examination that might lead to "unreasonable diagnosis of thyroid cancer." The "unreasonableness" is apparently based on the opinion of Fukushima Medical University that the thyroid cancer cases found during the first 4 years after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident are *not* due to radiation effects but simply a result of mass screening. In other words, these diagnoses are considered "unreasonable" because these cancers might never have been found until later in life without the mass screening. »

Ikata restart: Serious concerns remain

August 17, 2016

Editorial: Grave concerns remain over restart of Ikata nuclear plant

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160817/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

Shikoku Electric Power Co. has restarted the No. 3 reactor at its Ikata Nuclear Power Plant in Ikata, Ehime Prefecture, and begun generating and transmitting electric power. It is the fifth reactor that has been reactivated after passing safety screenings by the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) -- following the No. 1 and 2 reactors at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai plant in Kagoshima Prefecture and the No. 3 and 4 reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama plant in Fukui Prefecture.

- **【Related】** Ikata nuclear plant's No. 3 reactor begins generating power
- **【Related】** Shikoku Electric restarts reactor under post-Fukushima regulations
- **【Related】** 4 radiation protection shelters near Ikata nuke plant located in landslide risk areas

Ehime Gov. Tokihiro Nakamura told a news conference, "The best possible safety measures have been taken at the plant. An accident similar to that in Fukushima will never happen." His remarks appear to signify that the myth of the infallible safety of atomic power stations, which had been prevalent in the electric power industry and the government until the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis in March 2011, have been revived.

In particular, serious concerns remain about the Ikata plant from the viewpoint of preventing a nuclear disaster.

The biggest problem is that the power station is situated at the base of the Sadamisaki Peninsula, which is 40 kilometers long from east to west and about 800 meters wide at its narrowest location. Approximately 4,700 people live in areas west of the nuclear plant, but should a nuclear accident occur at the station, the escape route for local residents could be blocked.

Moreover, the median tectonic line fault, one of Japan's largest active faults, is situated only about six to eight kilometers off the nuclear plant. A powerful Nankai Trough quake is feared to hit Shikoku Island where the power station is located. A complex disaster of a powerful earthquake and a nuclear accident could happen. The ground in some areas of the Sadamisaki Peninsula is fragile.

Under evacuation plans worked out by the prefectural and municipal governments, residents of areas west of the plant would escape from the peninsula in cars or boats if a nuclear accident were to occur. However, if a complex disaster were to hit the peninsula, there are fears that residents might not be able to flee by land or sea. In such a situation, residents would be required to stay indoors at home or in evacuation shelters to avoid being exposed to radiation.

However, if the area were to be hit twice by a temblor registering 7 on the 7-point Japanese intensity scale just like in the Kumamoto Earthquake, it would be difficult to continue staying indoors.

Public evacuation shelters are not absolutely safe. There are seven radiation proof facilities in the town of Ikata. However, four of them are located in landslide caution zones.

The Ikata plant is Japan's only nuclear plant using mixed oxide (MOX)-fuel consisting of plutonium and uranium since operations at the Takahama Nuclear Power Plant have been suspended in response to a court order. It has been pointed out that MOX-fuel makes control rods more ineffective than conventional nuclear fuel. Furthermore, specifically how to dispose of spent MOX-fuel has not yet been determined.

Local bodies hosting nuclear plants are obligated to work out evacuation plans for local residents in case of a nuclear accident. Even if such plans are inadequate, the NRA still approves reactivation of nuclear plants because such plans are neither subject to screening by the NRA nor a precondition for restarting atomic power stations. A system under which a third-party organization would check the efficacy of evacuation plans before restarting nuclear plants needs to be established.

Shikoku Electric Power estimates that the operation of Ikata plant's No. 3 reactor will increase the company's annual profits by some 25 billion yen. However, power companies across the country have leeway to supply electricity to households and businesses this summer. There is no need to make haste to restart idled nuclear plants from the viewpoint of ensuring a stable supply of electric power.

The government and power companies' attempts to rely on nuclear plants while indefinitely postponing countermeasures against a possible complex disaster are unacceptable.

Five years to get rid off radioactivity...

August 18, 2016

LDP sets goal of lifting evacuation orders near Fukushima plant in 5 years

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160818/p2a/00m/0na/021000c>

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) on Aug. 17 decided on a target of lifting evacuation orders for radioactively contaminated areas near the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant in the next five years, with the goal to be combined with proposals from Komeito and put forward to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe within the month.

The plan would create "recovery bases" in each of the municipalities that are currently still off-limits due to contamination from the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant meltdowns. Until this month no policy had been put forward by the national government on how to handle the decontamination of the so-called "difficult-to-return" areas and the return of evacuees, but on Aug. 5 the LDP and Komeito gave a draft of the policies to the governments of these municipalities.

Under the policies, the parties propose that the municipal governments meet with the prefectural government and create plans for setting up the recovery bases. The national government would then evaluate the plans. The current "difficult-to-return" areas would not be redefined before having their evacuation orders lifted.

A draft outline of the proposal that will be made to the prime minister was also shown. It included a suggestion to transfer to interim storage facilities an amount of contaminated soil equivalent to the amount at homes and schools in affected areas by fiscal 2020.

Mysteriously missing fuel

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August 16, 2016

The Mysteriously Obtuse Case Of The Missing Fukushima Fuel

<http://www.activistpost.com/2016/08/mysteriously-obtuse-case-missing-fukushima-fuel.html>

By Richard Wilcox, PhD



“Nature knows no indecencies; man invents them.” – Mark Twain

As the world forever hurtles toward Armageddon, the Fukushima nuclear disaster has largely faded from the front pages. But the issue is far from resolved. Radiation from nuclear accidents is not easily dispelled with estimates of clean-up time at Fukushima ranging from 40 to 500 years, and nearly six years have already passed. Even safely stored nuclear material is dangerous for 100,000 years (1).

Elvis Has Left The Building

The major question regarding the situation at Japan’s Fukushima Dai-ichi (no.1 nuclear power plant) regards the location of the melted fuel at reactor units 1, 2 and 3.

Recent evidence of the location of the fuel in unit 2 was disputed, with Tokyo Electric Co. (Tepco) and the mainstream media taking one view and independent scientists taking another. Is the melted fuel still inside the container in the reactor building, or has it leaked out and is now penetrating in scattered areas laterally and vertically into the ground?

Large amounts of melted fuel could reach the ground water, and even the aquifer which is ultimately connected to the Tokyo water supply.

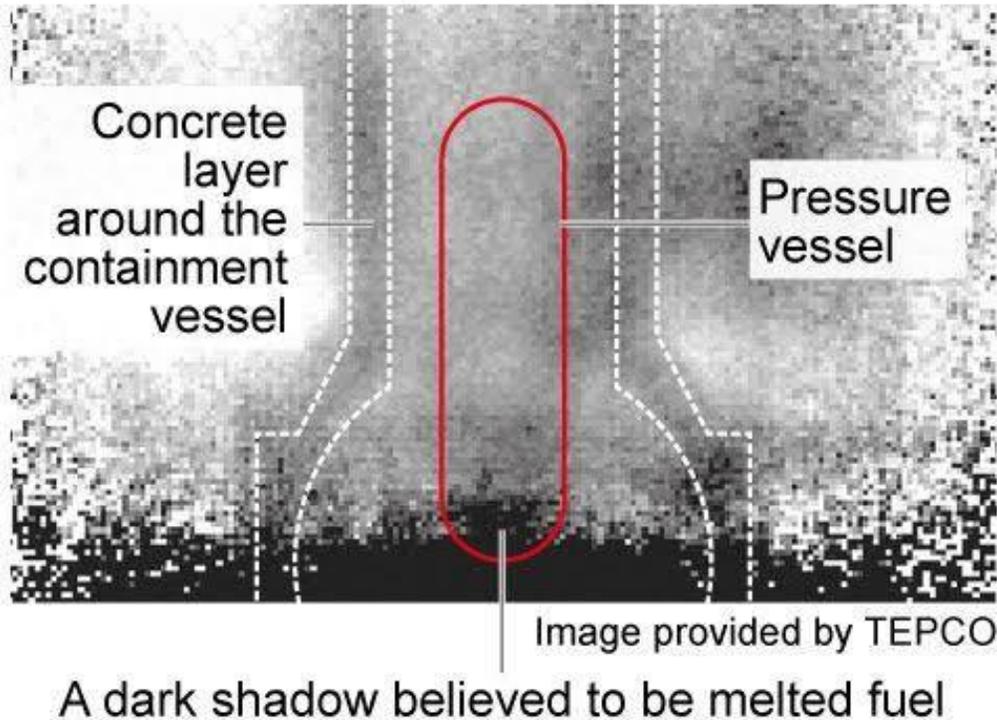
Let’s compare two assessments on this important issue based on the use of “Muon tomography”:

According to the *Asahi Shimbun* (newspaper) version of reality which relies solely on the Tepco report: Most of the nuclear fuel inside the No. 2 reactor at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant apparently did not melt through the pressure vessel (2).

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Let’s compare two assessments on this important issue based on the use of “Muon tomography”:

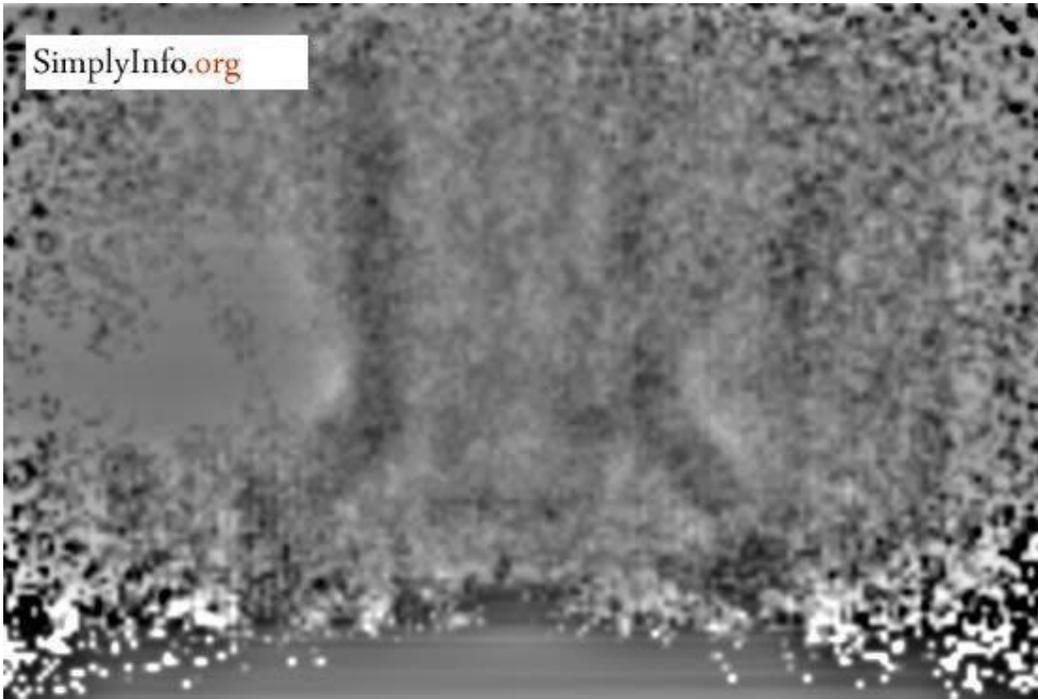
A tomographic image of the No. 2 reactor at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant



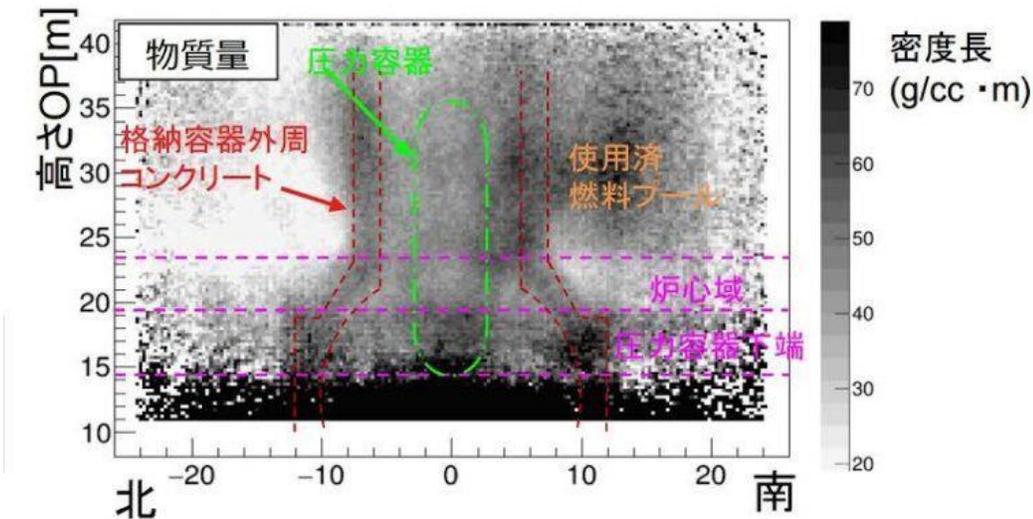
Is it that simple? Tepco's record of reliability has become rather tarnished over the years.

Note that in the graphic image above, the word "believed" is used, which reinforces the word "apparently" used in the text of the article referring to the uncertainty of the location of the melted fuel. However, the title of the article is more confident, stating that "most fuel was contained." The title is blatantly misleading and since most readers just skim the news, that will be what they take away from the report. On the other hand, the independent scientists at the *Simply Info* website differ about the location of the fuel in relation to the container, the "Reactor Pressure Vessel" (RPV):

Tepco's superimposed mask demarcates the bottom head too low including fuel inside the rpv which according to the refined image is clearly shown below the bottom head...." **there is no fuel in the bottom of the RPV in any significant amount**" (3).



This graphic indicates that a different method was used by these scientists to view the location of the melted fuel.



In this graphic the Simply Info scientists argue that the container drawing was placed too low in the Tepco version, whereas in their version, it is higher, making it less obvious that the fuel is in the container. Careful reading of this article reveals that Tepco's analysis, as so glibly presented by the mainstream media, was based on technological smoke and mirrors, clearly intended to deceive. Tepco and the media should report on the range of plausible possibilities, not only the small slice of reality they wish the public to see (4; 5).

So will the *Asahi Shimbun* correct their fallacious reporting? Both the *Japan Times* and the *Asahi Shimbun* are heavily owned and controlled by foreign investors and media. The *Asahi* shares offices with the *New York Times* in Tokyo and many Japanese English dailies rely on Western news wires such as the agenda driven, oligarchic news sources, *Reuters* and the *Associated Press* (6).

Decommissioning Or Out Of Commission?

In fact, in over five years much progress has been made to control the situation at the destroyed Fukushima nuclear plant. Much of the rubble has been cleaned up and fresh coats of paints are on the buildings, but the place is still intensely radioactive, and no human can approach the specific reactor meltdown sites.

The second major issue at Dai-ichi concerns the future plans for the decommissioning of the plant. All along Tepco has said they will retrieve the melted fuel and complete decommissioning within 40 years. In fact the technology to retrieve the fuel has not yet been invented. Not only is it impossible for human workers to approach the area, but even robots break down due to the radiation short circuiting their wires.

It was recently revealed that Japan is still considering an option that many people feel would be very dangerous in the long term, and that is the “sarcophagus” solution (7). The only time this has been tried is at Chernobyl — it looks like a high-tech barn placed over the site (8). Unlike Chernobyl where the ground is rock hard, at Fukushima the ground is akin to a wet sponge with soft topsoil, so while covering it will reduce radioactive atmospheric fallout, the radiation will continue to leak downwards to the aquifer and outwards to the ocean unless appropriate engineering measures are taken.

Nevertheless, progress is slow with efforts “underway to develop the equipment needed to retrieve corium (melted fuel) samples from inside the containment structures of units 1-3 at the plant. No solid time frame” has yet been mentioned (9).

The Nuclear Story

In an interesting aside, the best documentary film on Fukushima I have seen so far, *Fukushima: A Nuclear Story* was released in 2015 (10). It is an Italian production but with English narration and subtitles. The plot follows journalist Pio d’Emilio during the nuclear crisis as he tries to uncover the real situation in Fukushima. The film is engaging and educational at the same time, covering new ground and combining dramatic events as they unfold at the time with scientific explanations done in an entertaining, “manga” comic book style.

The film emphasizes the near catastrophe of Tepco’s panic during the accident, and the courage and wisdom of then prime minister Naoto Kan, and the Fukushima 50, led by the plant manager Masao Yoshida whose snap judgement literally “saved the world.”

The film raises one very interesting piece of information that I did not know about which is that it was only the luck of the pool fuel gate at unit 4 *not closing*, in other words, malfunctioning, which allowed water in to cool the scorching fuel rods. Had that not occurred, the fuel rods could have caught fire spreading massive radiation for hundreds of miles.

Note that had the Fukushima accident happened at night or on the weekend there would have been far fewer workers at the plant to tackle the problem, possibly leading to a completely out-of-control situation.

The Ice Wall Cometh...

The “ice wall” that Tepco built in order to freeze the ground around the plant to block water flow in and out of the plant, continues to have problems. It is a very expensive operation to build and maintain, prone to technical problems and no one really knows when or if it will ever be fully implemented (i.e., taxpayer boondoggle) (11; 12). Even if the ice wall operates as intended it will not stop all of the water flow allowing some to be contaminated (13).

Is this why the sarcophagus option is still on the table? Critics have argued that the ice wall was poorly conceived from the start because it did not address dealing with the source of water flow which is at the water shed above the plant in the nearby mountains (Tepco balked at the project due to the high cost).

Japan Nuke News

Various nuclear related issues pop up from time to time around country. Since the nuclear accident in 2011, the overwhelming public sentiment has been strongly anti nuclear, despite efforts by the Abe administration to downplay the accident and restart as many of the reactors around the country as possible. The logic of the restarts against public opinion is in order to satisfy the big banks who have financed Japanese utility company operations while reactors have remained idle (expensive but not profit producing) over the past years.

Ever since the hugely destructive earthquakes earlier in 2016 on the island of Kyushu, nuclear plant restarts along the path of the fault line, which basically travels through the middle of the entire country, have been in doubt. Still we see for example in Shikoku that nuclear reactors are restarting despite local opposition (14).

Although prime minister Abe keeps pushing for resumption of nuclear operations, he probably would not want to work at the Fukushima nuclear disaster clean up site himself. It was recently reported by Japanese scientists that insoluble radioactive cesium has been detected in workers exposed to high levels of radiation at the plant (15).

Indeed, the wildlife in Fukushima prefecture has long been reported to be contaminated with radiation, recently a wild boar was detected with massive levels of radiation in its body (16). This is an indication of the general contamination of the environment there.

This doesn't stop the Fukushima tourist board from advertising how safe and wonderful life is there. In order to drum up tourist dollars the national government has carried out a massive public relations campaign despite the lingering possibility of numerous radioactive hotspots in the area (17; 18).

Trump Threatens Nuclear Cartel

Maybe things will change a bit if Donald Trump can be elected president in the United States. Trump has promised to reduce US military presence in Japan and let them sort out their own military affairs. This does not bode well for the US-Japan military racket which siphons off billions of dollars in tax revenue to satisfy the greed of both country's military industrial complexes, which are intensely tied up with the nuclear weapons and power industries (20).

Isn't it ironic that the bogeyman of North Korea which is constantly conjured by Japan to justify its own growth in militarism, obtained its original nuclear weapon technology from Britain, a supposed Japan ally (21).

Funny old world ain't it.



Nuclear pollution is not healthy for children and other living things

** Special thanks to the Simply Info website for their continuous work on the Fukushima issue; and to Activist Post for their continued reporting.*

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TEPCO apologises

August 25, 2016

TEPCO apologizes to Niigata for meltdown cover-up

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160825_21/

A top official of the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has apologized to the Niigata Prefecture governor for having concealed the 2011 reactor meltdowns for more than two months.

Takafumi Anegawa, Managing Executive Officer of the Tokyo Electric Power Company, met Niigata Governor Hirohiko Izumida on Thursday.

In February this year, TEPCO admitted the utility could have ascertained there was a meltdown three days after its occurrence if utility workers had followed an in-house manual. It was also later found that TEPCO's then-president had instructed officials not to use the words "core meltdown."

The prefecture, which hosts another TEPCO nuclear power plant on the Japan Sea coast, has put together a panel of experts to study the utility's handling of the Fukushima accident.

Anegawa told the governor that TEPCO apologizes for not having presented a report based on an adequate investigation.

Izumida said information on meltdowns is critical for residents living near nuclear power plants to decide whether to flee or not. He said the prefecture expresses regret that TEPCO has not admitted its meltdown cover-up for five years.

Later this month, a joint panel set up by Niigata Prefecture and TEPCO plans to begin a detailed investigation.

Governor Izumida said additional probes are necessary to find out what in-house problems TEPCO had.

The governor said it is too soon to discuss resuming operations at the nuclear plant in his prefecture without a complete review of the Fukushima accident.

Is Japan's nuclear industry really back on its feet?

Japan's big 'nuclear restart' overtaken by conservation and renewables

http://www.theecologist.org/News/news_analysis/2987971/japans_big_nuclear_restart_overtaken_by_conservation_and_renewables.html

Jim Green

12th August 2016

For all Japan's talk of 43 'operable' nuclear reactors, only two are actually running, writes Jim Green, as renewables and a 12% fall in demand eat into the power market. And while Japan's 'nuclear village' defends safety standards, the IAEA, tasked with promoting nuclear power worldwide, has expressed deep concerns over the country's weak and 'fragmented' safety regulation.

As renewables continue to become cheaper and more ubiquitous, customers will be increasingly tempted by Japan's extremely high electricity prices to make and store their own electricity and to drop off the grid altogether.

According to the World Nuclear Association, Japan has 43 'operable' power reactors (they are 'operational' according to the IAEA), three under construction, nine 'on order or planned', and three 'proposed'.

The numbers suggest that Japan's nuclear industry is finally getting back on its feet after the Fukushima disaster - but nothing could be further from the truth.

Before considering the industry's current problems, a little historical context from the World Nuclear Industry Status Report 2016:

"[I]t has been 17 years since Japan's nuclear output peaked at 313 TWh in 1998. The noticeably sharp decline during 2002-2003, amounting to a reduction of almost 30%, was due to the temporary shutdown of all 17 of Tokyo Electric Power Company's (TEPCO) reactors - seven at Kashiwazaki Kariwa and six at Fukushima Daiichi and four at Fukushima Daini.

"The shutdown was following an admission from TEPCO that its staff had deliberately falsified data for inclusion in regulatory safety inspections reports. During 2003, TEPCO managed to resume operations of five of its reactors.

"The further noticeable decline in electrical output in 2007 was the result of the extended shutdown of the seven Kashiwazaki Kariwa reactors, with a total installed capacity of 8 GWe, following the Niigata Chuetsu-oki earthquake in 2007. TEPCO was struggling to restart the Kashiwazaki Kariwa units, when the Fukushima earthquake occurred."

How many of Japan's reactors are really 'operable'?

Nuclear power accounted for 29% of electricity generation in Japan in 2010, down from the historic peak of 36% in 1998, and plans were being developed to increase nuclear's share to 50%. But all of Japan's reactors were shut down in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster. Reactors didn't power a single light-bulb from September 2013 to August 2015.

Japan had 55 operable reactors before Fukushima (including the ill-fated Monju fast reactor). In addition to the six reactors at Fukushima Daiichi, the permanent shutdown of another six reactors has been confirmed - all of them smallish (<559 MWe) and all of them ageing (grid connections between 1969 and 1977): Kansai Electric's Mihama 1 and 2, Kyushu Electric's Genkai 1, Shikoku's Ikata 1, JAPC's Tsuruga 1, and Chugoku Electric's Shimane 1.

So Japan now has 43 'operable' or 'operational' reactors, and it isn't hard to identify some with little or no prospect of ever restarting, such as the four Fukushima Daini reactors (or Monju for that matter).

Two reactors at Sendai in Kagoshima Prefecture were restarted in August and October 2015. And that's it - only two of Japan's 43 'operable' or 'operational' reactors are actually operating. Moreover an anti-nuclear candidate, Satoshi Mitazono, was elected governor of Kagoshima Prefecture in early July 2016 and he announced that he will seek the shut-down of the two Sendai reactors - he can prevent their restart after they shut down for inspection later this year.

As of 1 July 2016, 11 utilities had applied to the Nuclear Regulatory Authority (NRA) for safety assessments of a total of 26 reactors, including seven reactors that have completed the assessment process. Apart from whatever hurdles the NRA might put in their way, there are other obstacles: citizen-led lawsuits; local political and public opposition; economic factors, in particular the questionable economics of large investments to upgrade and restart aging reactors; and the impact of electricity deregulation and intensified market competition.

It's anyone's guess how many reactors might restart, but the process will continue to be drawn out - the only strong candidate for restart this year is the Ikata 3 reactor in Ehime Prefecture.

The government's current energy policy calls for a 22-24% nuclear share of electricity generation by 2030. That is less than half of the pre-Fukushima plans for future nuclear growth (the 50% target), and considerably lower than the 29% nuclear share in 2010. Currently, nuclear power - the two Sendai reactors - account for less than 1%.

To reach the 20-22% target would require the operation of around 35 reactors by 2030, which seems highly improbable.

Cheap renewables picking up high-level support

The use of both fossil fuels and renewables has increased since the Fukushima disaster, while energy efficiency has made the task considerably easier - national power consumption in 2015 was 12% below the 2010 level.

The *World Nuclear Industry Status Report* comments on energy politics in Japan:

"Japanese utilities are insisting on, and the government has granted and reinforced, the right to refuse cheaper renewable power, supposedly due to concerns about grid stability - hardly plausible in view of their far smaller renewable fractions than in several European countries - but apparently to suppress competition. The utilities also continue strenuous efforts to ensure that the imminent liberalization of the monopoly-based, vertically integrated Japanese power system should not actually expose utilities' legacy plants to real competition.

"The ability of existing Japanese nuclear plants, if restarted, to operate competitively against modern renewables (as many in the U.S. and Europe can no longer do) is unclear because nuclear operating costs are not transparent. However, the utilities' almost complete suppression of Japanese wind power suggests they are concerned on this score.

"And as renewables continue to become cheaper and more ubiquitous, customers will be increasingly tempted by Japan's extremely high electricity prices to make and store their own electricity and to drop off the grid altogether, as is already happening, for example, in Hawaii and Australia."

The Japan Association of Corporate Executives, with a membership of about 1,400 executives from around 950 companies, recently issued a statement urging Tokyo to remove hurdles holding back the expansion of renewable power - which supplied 14.3 percent of power in Japan in the year to March 2016.

The statement also notes that the outlook for nuclear is *"uncertain"* and that the 20–22% target could not be met without an improbably high number of restarts of idled reactors along with numerous reactor lifespan extensions beyond 40 years.

Andrew DeWit, a professor at Rikkyo University in Tokyo, said the push signalled *"a profound change in thinking among blue-chip business executives."* DeWit added:

"Many business leaders have clearly thrown in the towel on nuclear and are instead openly lobbying for Japan to vault to global leadership in renewables, efficiency and smart infrastructure."

Safety concerns - the case of Takahama

The restart of the Takahama 3 and 4 reactors in Fukui Prefecture is indicative of the nuclear industry's broader problems. Kansai Electric Power Company (KEPCO) first applied to the NRA for permission to restart the reactors in July 2013. In February 2015, the NRA gave its permission for KEPCO to make the required safety upgrades. The restart process was delayed by an injunction imposed by the Fukui District Court in April 2015, but the ruling was overturned in December 2015.

Takahama 3 was restarted in late January 2016, and TEPCO was in the process of resolving technical glitches affecting the start-up of Takahama 4, when the Otsu District Court in neighbouring Shiga Prefecture ruled on 9 March 2016 that the reactors must be shut down in response to a petition by 29 citizens.

The court found that investigations of active fault lines and other safety issues were not thorough enough, it expressed doubts regarding the plant's ability to withstand a tsunami, and it questioned emergency response and evacuation plans. Citizens and NGOs also questioned the use of arbitrary figures in KEPCO's safety analysis, and fire protection.

Nuclear Engineering International reported on 2 February 2016:

"While there are plans on paper to evacuate some Fukui residents to Hyogo, Kyoto, and Tokushima prefectures, many municipalities there have no detailed plans for receiving evacuees. Kyoto Governor Keiji Yamada said he did not feel adequate local consent had been obtained, citing concerns about evacuation issues. Shiga Governor Taizo Mikazuki said there was a lack of sufficient disaster planning."

On July 12, the Otsu District Court rejected KEPCO's appeal and upheld the injunction preventing the operation of Takahama 3 and 4. KEPCO plans to appeal the decision to the Osaka High Court.

Meanwhile, KEPCO is considering whether it is worth investing in upgrades required for the restart of the Takahama 1 and 2 reactors. The NRA controversially approved 20-year lifespan extensions for the two reactors (grid connected in 1974 and 1975), but citizens have initiated a lawsuit to keep them shut down.

Japan's 'lax' and 'inadequate' regulatory regime

While safety and regulatory standards have improved in the aftermath of Fukushima, there are still serious problems. Citizens and NGOs have raised countless concerns, but criticisms have also come from other quarters.

When the NRA recently approved lifespan extensions for two Takahama reactors, a former NRA commissioner broke his silence and said *"a sense of crisis"* over safety prompted him to go public and urge more attention to earthquake risks. Kunihiro Shimazaki, a commissioner from 2012 to 2014, said: *"I cannot stand by without doing anything. We may have another tragedy ..."*

Professor Yoshioka Hitoshi, a Kyushu University academic who served on the government's 2011-12 Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations, said in October 2015: *"Unfortunately, the new regulatory regime is ... inadequate to ensure the safety of Japan's nuclear power facilities. The first problem is that the new safety standards on which the screening and inspection of facilities are to be based are simply too lax. While it is true that the new rules are based on international standards, the international standards themselves are predicated on the status quo.*

"They have been set so as to be attainable by most of the reactors already in operation. In essence, the NRA made sure that all Japan's existing reactors would be able to meet the new standards with the help of affordable piecemeal modifications - back-fitting, in other words."

Even the IAEA has slammed the feeble NRA

An International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) review in early 2016 made the following recommendations (among others) regarding the NRA:

- To attract competent and experienced staff, and develop competencies relevant to nuclear and radiation safety.
- To amend relevant legislation with the aim of allowing NRA to improve the effectiveness of its inspections. The NRA inspection programme *"needs significant improvement in certain areas. NRA inspectors should be legally allowed to have free access to any site at any time. The decision process for initiating reactive inspections should be shortened."*
- To strengthen the promotion of safety culture including a questioning attitude.
- To give greater priority to the oversight of the implementation of radiation protection measures.
- To develop requirements and guidance for emergency preparedness and response in relation to radiation sources.

The IAEA further noted that the NRA's enforcement provisions are inadequate:

"There is no clear written enforcement policy in place at the NRA. There is no documented process in place at NRA for determining the level of sanctions. NRA inspectors have no power to enforce corrective actions if there is an imminent likelihood of safety significant event. They are required to defer to NRA headquarters. ... NRA processes for enforcement are fragmented and some processes are not documented.

"NRA needs to establish a formal Enforcement Policy that sets forth processes clearly addressing items such as evaluation of the severity level of non-conformances, sanctions for different levels of non-conformances, processes for issuance of Orders, and expected actions of NRA inspectors if significant safety issues develop."

As the industry declines, expect new safety cutbacks

The narrative from government and industry is that safety and regulatory standards in Japan are now adequate - or they soon will be once teething problems with the new regime are sorted out. NRA Chair Shunichi Tanaka claims that Japanese regulatory standards are *"the strictest in the world."*

But Japan's safety and regulatory standards aren't strict. Improvements are ongoing - such as NRA actions in response to the IAEA report, and reports that legislation will be revised to allow unscheduled inspections of nuclear sites. But improvements are slow, partial and piecemeal and there are forces pushing in the other direction. An Associated Press report states that nuclear laws will be revised in 2017 but not enacted until 2020.

Reactor lifespan extensions beyond 40 years were meant to be *"limited only to exceptional cases"* according to then Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, speaking in 2012. Extensions were considered an emergency measure against a possible energy crunch. But lifespan extensions have been approved in the absence of an energy crunch, and more will likely follow.

If Japan's nuclear history is any guide, already flawed safety and regulatory standards will be weakened over time. Signification elements of Japan's corrupt 'nuclear village' are back in control just a few years

after the Fukushima disaster. Add to that aging reactors, and utilities facing serious economic stress and intense competition, and there's every reason to be concerned about nuclear safety in Japan.

Tomas Kåberger, Professor of Industrial Energy Policy at Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden, noted in the foreword to the latest edition of the World Nuclear Industry Status Report:

"A nuclear industry under economic stress may become an even more dangerous industry. Owners do what they can to reduce operating costs to avoid making economic loss. Reduce staff, reduce maintenance, and reduce any monitoring and inspection that may be avoided.

"While a stated ambition of 'safety first' and demands of safety authorities will be heard, the conflict is always there and reduced margins of safety may prove to be mistakes."

Dr Jim Green is the national nuclear campaigner with Friends of the Earth Australia and editor of the Nuclear Monitor newsletter, where this article was originally published. Nuclear Monitor, published 20 times a year, has been publishing deeply researched, often critical articles on all aspects of the nuclear cycle since 1978. A must-read for all those who work on this issue!

Sometimes referendums do work

August 18, 2016

Former town mayor recalls town referendum that booted plans for nuclear plant

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/08/18/national/former-town-mayor-recalls-town-referendum-booted-plans-nuclear-plant/#.V7WdM6jdeos>

JJI

NIIGATA – Residents of the town of Maki, Niigata Prefecture, made the right decision 20 years ago, according to Takaaki Sasaguchi.

The town was Japan's first ever to hold a referendum over a plan to build a nuclear power plant and firmly knocked it down.

"I'm proud that we opened our future through the referendum," the former town mayor, 68, said in an interview. "Our choice not to allow a nuclear plant to be built in our town was not wrong."

Maki no longer exists as a discrete entity as it has since been absorbed into the city of Niigata.

But memories run strong of what people power achieved, and in light of the Fukushima disaster what it may have prevented.

In 1971, Tohoku Electric Power Co. unveiled plans to construct a nuclear plant in the town. The facility was to generate electricity from a central 825,000-kw reactor of boiling-water design.

But as land appropriation and other work got underway, opposition strengthened.

Sasaguchi and his colleagues set up a group aimed at holding a referendum so that residents could decide for themselves.

He was elected mayor in January 1996, and the Maki government then established a municipal ordinance for a referendum.

Referendum day was Aug. 4 that year, and 12,478 residents voted against the plan. Those in favor totaled 7,904.

Voter turnout was 88.29 percent in Japan's first local referendum over a nuclear power station. Following the result, Mayor Sasaguchi decided to reject the nuclear plant construction, and a plot of land that the town owned within the proposed site was sold off to residents who had opposed the plans. Those in favor of the plant sued, but in December 2003 they lost the case and later that month Tohoku Electric threw in the towel.

Sasaguchi accuses Japan's government of not encouraging respect for local voices back then.

A pro-nuclear push made it difficult for Maki residents to speak up.

"The most important thing in the referendum was that residents showed their intentions and made a choice," Sasaguchi recalls.

The referendum result drew heavy media coverage, and the town was praised for choosing the democratic process.

Sasaguchi says it also brought the town together.

"I think Maki residents probably wanted to bring their town, which had been upset by the nuclear project, back to being a normal community," he said.

The town was merged into the city of Niigata in 2005, and the referendum began to be forgotten.

However, the March 2011 nuclear crisis in neighboring Fukushima Prefecture reminded ex-Maki residents of the significance of their vote back in 2006.

They told Sasaguchi the same tragedy could have happened to them if they had allowed a nuclear plant to be built.

Meanwhile, Sasaguchi notes that Tokyo Electric Power Co. has filed for Nuclear Regulation Authority safety checks for two of the seven reactors at its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power station in Niigata Prefecture.

"Even if the NRA endorses the safety, the issue of the nuclear waste disposal site remains unresolved," he said.

The central government still has not identified a long-term disposal site for high-level waste.

"The Japanese government should put into force a policy that doesn't depend on nuclear power plants as soon as possible," he said.

Tourism as usual

A guide to Japan's prefectures and major cities

JAPAN SHOWCASE|Tokyo

Tokyo to Fukushima: Route to enjoy modern, old Japan

July 29, 2016

<http://showcase.japantimes.co.jp/tokyo/news/?key=tokyo1>

Known as the gateway to the great northeastern Tohoku region of Japan, Fukushima Prefecture features natural landscapes wholly different from those of Tokyo. Rather than neon and skyscraper dominated skylines, rugged peaks, crater lakes and ancient forests define Fukushima, an area that is especially picturesque in autumn. After seeing the sights in the capital, a trip north to see a different side of Japan is well worth the journey.



Seeing Tokyo on foot is a real pleasure as the city boasts a vast array of greenery from verdant parks to manicured gardens, and atmospheric old neighborhoods dotted with centuries-old temples. The Tokyo retail experience is unlike any other, with something for every budget and taste, including the well-heeled, vintage goods hunters, trendsetters and traditional arts and crafts lovers.

One popular Tokyo destination is Miraikan (The National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation), where visitors can learn about cutting-edge technology, space science and many other things related to science and innovation. The museum, in the Odaiba bay-front area, is like a sophisticated amusement park, entertaining children and adults alike.

Known for their cleanliness, efficiency and punctuality, dozens of shinkansen depart Tokyo daily for Fukushima. From Tokyo, take the Tohoku Shinkansen for about 80 minutes to Koriyama Station, Fukushima Prefecture, and change to the Ban-etsu West Line to Aizu-Wakamatsu Station. The city of Aizu-Wakamatsu is blessed with a rich natural environment that includes the nearby Mount Bandai and Lake Inawashiro. It's a city where samurai influences remain strong today.

The city's samurai spirit centers around Tsuruga-jo Castle, otherwise known as Aizu-Wakamatsu Castle. The original structure was built in the 14th century and, after suffering damage in various conflicts, has been rebuilt by many different lords, as Aizu is an important central location from which to rule the Tohoku area.

After sightseeing, relaxing in an *onsen* hot spring at a *ryokan* traditional Japanese-style inn is a great way to end the day and begin the evening. The Higashiyama Onsen area in Aizu is believed to have healing waters and is considered one of the three best onsen areas in Tohoku.

Just 30 to 40 minutes from Higashiyama Onsen, Ouchi-juku was once an area full of inns during the Edo Period. It contains many Edo-style houses with straw rooftops, transporting tourists back in time. Ouchi-juku was in 1981 designated by the state as a preservation area to maintain these important traditional structures. Today, it is a popular tourist destination with many small inns, souvenir shops, as well as soba and other traditional Japanese restaurants. The people in the area have a custom of eating soba with *negi* leeks in place of chopsticks.

For more information about tours from Tokyo to Tohoku, www.tohokuandtokyo.org.

Anything for tourism

August 10, 2016

Japan's disaster-hit regions look to 'Pokemon Go' to draw tourists

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/08/10/national/japans-disaster-hit-regions-look-pokemon-go-draw-tourists/#.V6weCKJdeos>

Kyodo

Four disaster-hit prefectures are counting on the frenzy sparked by "Pokemon Go" to draw more tourists. Officials from Kumamoto, Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures said Wednesday they will use the popular augmented-reality game to encourage more people to visit and thereby spur reconstruction. The four prefectures plan to work out details with the Japanese unit of U.S. game developer Niantic Inc. They hope that tourist destinations in their regions will serve as "Pokestops," where players collect items, as well as "gyms," where they battle their Pokemon characters.

"I hope young people will have the opportunity to understand the reality facing the disaster-hit prefectures," Miyagi Gov. Yoshihiro Murai told reporters.

"Pokemon Go" entices players to hunt down Pokemon superimposed on real sites, in a system that uses GPS to determine players' locations.

Murai contacted the developer over potential collaboration.

Iwate Gov. Takuya Tasso expressed hope that domestic and foreign tourists will visit coastal areas that were damaged by the tsunami.

Since the game was released in July, Japanese fans have downloaded it in large numbers, braving the scorching summer heat outdoors to play.

But “Pokemon Go” has also led the government to issue safety warnings amid concerns about injuries and accidents among fixated players.

Separately, the Tottori Prefectural Government is trying to capitalize on the game as a way to rejuvenate the local economy.

It is encouraging players to visit the Tottori Sand Dunes, touting the site as a “safe place” to enjoy the game.

How will Kyushu Electric respond?

August 27, 2016

EDITORIAL: Kyushu Electric in spotlight after governor calls for shutdown

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201608270026.html>

Newly elected Kagoshima Governor Satoshi Mitazono on Aug. 26 asked Kyushu Electric Power Co. to immediately shut down two reactors at its Sendai nuclear power plant for a fresh safety inspection. The two reactors at the Sendai plant in Satsuma-Sendai, Kagoshima Prefecture, are the only ones online in Japan.

Mitazono asked the utility to expand its support for the local government's plans for emergency evacuations during severe nuclear accidents while rigorously inspecting the plant equipment and systems.

Mitazono's move was a response to public concerns about the safety of the plant following a series of earthquakes that rocked neighboring Kumamoto Prefecture in April.

A prefectural governor has no power to order the suspension of the operation of an online reactor. But while stumping for the July election, Mitazono promised a temporary halt to the Sendai reactors. The incumbent had allowed the reactors to be restarted.

Kyushu Electric ought to embrace the safety concerns that the governor has raised.

Mitazono cited seven priority items for the inspection of the equipment he requested, including the reactor pressure vessel and the containment vessel. He also called on the utility to investigate active faults around the nuclear plant and provide accurate information with regard to the safety of the reactors in a timely manner so as to prevent any erosion of trust between local residents and the operator.

In asking the utility to step up its support for the evacuation plans, Mitazono referred to the views and opinions he heard during his inspection of roads and medical and welfare facilities around the plant.

The steps envisioned by Mitazono are necessary for preventing nuclear accidents and minimizing damage when an accident does occur.

Kyushu Electric responded to Mitazono's requests by saying it will “carefully check their content and deal with them.”

But the company has shown no sign of changing its position that the safety concerns are groundless, as the reactors were **brought back on stream after clearing safety checks by the Nuclear Regulation Authority.**

But the situation changed dramatically after a string of earthquakes in Kumamoto Prefecture, including two powerful temblors that registered a maximum of 7 on the Japanese seismic intensity scale.

The company should realize that this created huge anxiety among local residents and prompted Mitazono to make his request.

Even though Mitazono is not empowered to make the utility accept his requests, both central authorities and the electric power industry are sufficiently alarmed that the head of the government of a prefecture where a nuclear plant is located has called for a halt to the operations of reactors.

The prevailing view is that Kyushu Electric will refuse to shut down the reactors right now and continue operating them until their next regular inspections, which are slated for October and December, respectively.

After the regular inspections, however, the utility will find it difficult to restart the reactors if the governor refuses to approve it because of the company's unsatisfactory response to his requests.

It seems the only option for Kyushu Electric is to offer convincing answers to the safety concerns Mitazono has raised.

Mitazono is not alone in voicing concerns about the safety of nuclear reactors. Niigata Governor Hirohiko Izumida has taken a critical view of Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s plan to restart two of the seven reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture.

It is still fresh in our memory that the Otsu District Court in March ordered Kansai Electric Power Co. to shut down two reactors at its Takahama plant that had just been brought back online.

Is the electric power industry willing to make sincere responses to these warnings about nuclear safety from local government and the judiciary?

How Kyushu Electric responds to Mitazono's requests will be a litmus test of the industry's attitude.

See previous articles:

August 26, 2016

Governor to call on Kyushu Elec. to halt nuclear plant operation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160826/p2g/00m/0dm/049000c>

FUKUOKA (Kyodo) -- The governor of Kagoshima Prefecture on Friday afternoon is set to request Kyushu Electric Power Co. suspend two reactors at its Sendai nuclear plant in the southwestern Japan prefecture, sources close to the matter said.

Gov. Satoshi Mitazono, who was elected on an antinuclear platform last month, is expected to make the request regarding the plant's Nos. 1 and 2 reactors -- two of only three reactors currently operating in the country -- at his meeting with the utility's President Michiaki Uriu, slated at the prefectural government office at 3 p.m.

The former TV commentator is likely to call on the utility to re-examine safety measures for the complex, citing increasing concerns among citizens about nuclear power security after huge earthquakes hit nearby prefectures in April, according to the sources.

Kyushu Electric is expected to prepare its answer to the request by early September.

Governors have no legal power to suspend operation of nuclear power plants.

Regardless of the governor's request, the Nos. 1 and 2 reactors are scheduled to be taken offline for regular checks on Oct. 6 and Dec. 16, respectively.

See also : <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201608260058.html>

Governor to seek suspension of nuclear reactors

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160826_05/

Kagoshima Prefecture's new governor on Friday will ask the operator of a nuclear power plant to suspend its operation in order to re-check its safety.

The 2 reactors at the plant in southwestern Japan went online last year for the first time under the government's new regulations.

Satoshi Mitazono plans to request the suspension of the Sendai plant in his meeting with senior officials of Kyushu Electric Power Company.

He will also ask the utility to fully disclose information in the event of an accident and promote renewable energy.

Mitazono won in the election last month. He insisted on the campaign trail that the plant should be temporarily halted for safety re-checks as worries among residents have been growing since the April earthquakes in neighboring Kumamoto Prefecture.

After taking office, Mitazono visited Satsumasendai City, where the plant is located, to check evacuation measures to be implemented for residents in the event of a nuclear disaster. He also studied the timing to ask for the plant's suspension and the specific content of his request.

Kyushu Electric Power currently plans to suspend the 2 reactors for regular inspections. Number One will go offline in October and Number Two in December.

Governors have no legal authority to order reactors offline. Attention is focused on how the firm will react to Mitazono's request.

Icewall: Japan's "Hail Mary play"

August 30, 2016

Japan's 'Hail Mary' at Fukushima Daiichi: An Underground Ice Wall

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/30/science/fukushima-daiichi-nuclear-plant-cleanup-ice-wall.html?emc=edit_th_20160830&nl=todaysheadlines&nid=32427321&r=0

By MARTIN FACKLERAUG. 29, 2016

FUKUSHIMA DAIICHI NUCLEAR POWER STATION — The part above ground doesn't look like much, a few silver pipes running in a straight line, dwarfed by the far more massive, scarred reactor buildings nearby. More impressive is what is taking shape unseen beneath: an underground wall of frozen dirt 100 feet deep and nearly a mile in length, intended to solve a runaway water crisis threatening the devastated Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station in Japan.

Officially named the Land-Side Impermeable Wall, but better known simply as the ice wall, the project sounds like a fanciful idea from science fiction or a James Bond film. But it is about to become a reality in an ambitious, and controversial, bid to halt an unrelenting flood of groundwater into the damaged reactor buildings since the disaster five years ago when an earthquake and a tsunami caused a triple meltdown. Built by the central government at a cost of 35 billion yen, or some \$320 million, the ice wall is intended to seal off the reactor buildings within a vast, rectangular-shaped barrier of man-made permafrost. If it becomes successfully operational as soon as this autumn, the frozen soil will act as a dam to block new groundwater from entering the buildings. It will also help stop leaks of radioactive water into the nearby Pacific Ocean, which have decreased significantly since the calamity but may be continuing.

However, the ice wall has also been widely criticized as an expensive and overly complex solution that may not even work. Such concerns re-emerged this month after the plant's operator announced that a section that was switched on more than four months ago had yet to fully freeze. Some also warn that the wall, which is electrically powered, may prove as vulnerable to natural disasters as the plant itself, which lost the ability to cool its reactors after the 45-foot tsunami caused a blackout there.

The reactor buildings are vulnerable to an influx of groundwater because of how the operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., or Tepco, built the plant in the 1960s, by cutting away a hillside to place it closer to the sea, so the plant could pump in water more easily. That also put the buildings in contact with a deep layer of permeable rock filled with water, mostly rain and melted snow from the nearby Abukuma Mountains, that flows to the Pacific.

The buildings managed to keep the water out until the accident on March 11, 2011. Either the natural disasters themselves, or the explosive meltdowns of three of the plant's six reactors that followed, are believed to have cracked the buildings' basements, allowing groundwater to pour in. Nearly 40,000 gallons of water a day keep flooding into the buildings.

Once inside, the water becomes highly radioactive, impeding efforts to eventually dismantle the plant. During the accident, the uranium fuel grew so hot that some of it is believed to have melted through the reactor's steel floors and possibly into the basement underneath, though no one knows exactly where it lies. The continual flood of radioactive water has prevented engineers from searching for the fuel. Since the accident, five robots sent into the reactor buildings have failed to return because of high radiation levels and obstruction from debris.

The water has also created a waste-management nightmare because Tepco must pump it out into holding tanks as quickly as it enters the buildings, to prevent it from overflowing into the Pacific. The company says that it has built more than 1,000 tanks that now hold more than 800,000 tons of radioactive water, enough to fill more than 320 Olympic-size swimming pools.

On a recent visit to the plant, workers were busily erecting more durable, welded tanks to replace the temporary ones thrown up in a hurry during the early years after the accident, some of which have leaked. Every available patch of space on the sprawling plant grounds now appears to be filled with 95-foot tanks. “We have to escape from this cycle of ever more water building up inside the plant,” said Yuichi Okamura, a general manager of Tepco’s nuclear power division who guided a reporter through Fukushima Daiichi. About 7,000 workers are employed in the cleanup.

The ice wall is a high-technology bid to break that cycle by installing what might be the world’s largest freezer. Pipes almost 100 feet long have been sunk into the ground at roughly three-foot intervals, and filled with a brine solution supercooled to minus 30 degrees Celsius, or minus 22 Fahrenheit. Each pipe is supposed to freeze a column of soil about a foot and a half in radius, large enough to reach the ice column created by its neighboring pipes and form a seamless barrier.

Engineers with the wall’s builder, the construction giant Kajima Corp., estimate that it will take about two months for the soil around a pipe to fully freeze. Solidifying the entire wall, which consists of 1,568 such underground pipes, will require 30 large refrigeration units and consume enough electricity to light more than 13,000 Japanese homes for a year.

The technique of using frozen barriers to block groundwater has been used to build tunnels and mines around the world, but not on this scale. And certainly not on the site of a major nuclear disaster.

Since the start, the project has attracted its share of skeptics. Some say buried obstacles at the plant, including tunnels that linked the reactor buildings to other structures, will leave holes in the ice wall, making it more like a sieve. Others question why such an exotic solution is necessary when a traditional steel or concrete wall might perform better.

Some call the ice wall a flashy but desperate gambit to tame the water problem, after the government and Tepco were initially slow to address it. Adding to the urgency is the 2020 Olympics, which Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan helped win for Tokyo three years ago by assuring the International Olympic Committee that the water troubles at Fukushima Daiichi were under control.

“It’s a Hail Mary play,” said Azby Brown, a Japan-based researcher for Safecast, an independent radiation-monitoring group. “Tepco underestimated the groundwater problem in the beginning, and now Japan is trying to catch up with a massive technical fix that is very expensive.”

Supporters and skeptics alike will soon learn if that gambit will succeed. After two years of work, Kajima finished installing the pipes and refrigerator units to create the ice wall in February. At the end of March, it switched on part of the ice wall for the first time — roughly half a mile that runs between the reactor buildings and the Pacific. Most of the other, uphill side of the wall was activated in mid-June.

Kajima is freezing the wall in stages under orders from the Nuclear Regulation Authority, Japan’s nuclear watchdog. The authority is concerned that cutting off the groundwater too suddenly might lead to a reversal of flows, causing the radioactive water accumulated inside the reactor buildings to start pouring out into the surrounding soil, possibly reaching the Pacific. It has told Kajima to leave a half-dozen “gateways” in the uphill side that will not be closed until much of the contaminated water is drained from the buildings.

This month, Tepco told the nuclear agency that the seaside segment of the ice wall had frozen about 99 percent solid. It says a few spots have failed to solidify because they contain buried rubble or sand left from the plant’s construction a half-century ago, which now allow groundwater to flow through so quickly that it will not freeze.

Tatsuhiro Yamagishi, a spokesman for Tepco, said the company was trying to plug these holes in the ice wall with quick-drying cement. “We have started to see some progress in temperature decrease,” he said. Even if the cement helps make the ice wall watertight, skeptics question how long it can last. They point out that such frozen barriers are usually temporary against groundwater at construction sites. They say the brine solution used to chill the pipes is highly corrosive, which could make them break or leak. It is also unclear whether the system could break down under the stresses of operating in a high-radiation environment where another earthquake could lead to another power loss.

“Why build such an elaborate and fragile wall when there is a more permanent solution available?” said Sumio Mabuchi, a former construction minister who has called for building a slurry wall, a trench filled with liquid concrete that is commonly used to block water.

Isao Abe, a Kajima engineer overseeing the ice wall, said his company had made the wall more durable by installing underground pipes that are easy to replace if they corrode. He also said the ice wall was self-sealing, meaning that if another earthquake caused cracks, any incoming water would freeze right away, restoring the wall. He also said it would take months for the wall to thaw, giving engineers ample time to restore power even if the plant has another outage.

Mr. Abe said the wall was intended to operate until 2021, giving Tepco five more years to find and plug the holes in the reactor buildings, though skeptics say this difficult task will require more time. Mr. Abe also pointed out that the ice wall was part of a broader strategy for containing the radioactive water. Before installing the ice wall, Kajima also built a conventional steel wall underground along the plant’s border with the Pacific last year.

Tepco says that wall has already stopped all measurable leaks of radioactive materials into the sea.

However, some scientists say that radioactive water may still be seeping through layers of permeable rock that lie deep below the plant, emptying into the Pacific far offshore. They say the only way to eliminate all leaks would be to repair the buildings once and for all.

Even if the ice wall works, Tepco will face the herculean task of dealing with the huge amounts of contaminated water that have accumulated. The company has installed filtering systems that can remove all nuclear particles but one, a radioactive form of hydrogen known as tritium. The central government and Tepco have yet to figure out what to do with the tritium-laced water; proposals to dilute and dump it into the Pacific have met with resistance from local fishermen, and risk an international backlash.

For now, the only visible sign that the freezing has begun are silver-dollar-size patches of ice that have formed on top of the aboveground, silver pipes. At one spot, the No. 4 reactor building loomed, an enormous cube six stories tall with concrete sides that showed large gashes left by the tsunami.

“The water is here, just three meters beneath our feet,” said Mr. Okamura, the Tepco general manager, who stood near the pipes wearing a white protective suit, goggles and a surgical mask. **“It still flows into the building, unseen, without stopping.”**

Icewall & unwarranted optimism

August 30, 2016

EDITORIAL: Is Fukushima ice wall project still viable despite early failure?

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201608300031.html>

A government-backed, large-scale project to reduce the amount of contaminated water produced daily at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has become bogged down.

The project involves creating a frozen wall of soil around reactor buildings at the plant to stop the flow of groundwater into the facilities.

The Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, part of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, and Tokyo Electric Power Co., which operates the nuclear plant, have adopted this approach as the centerpiece of the efforts to reduce the volume of polluted water.

But the project has failed to produce the expected results.

The work to build a frozen soil wall around the No. 1 to No. 4 reactor buildings was completed in June. Nearly three months on, however, there remain unfrozen parts through which groundwater enters the facilities.

The total daily amount of groundwater, which becomes contaminated with radioactive materials within the reactor buildings, has remained unchanged at about 400 cubic meters.

At the Nuclear Regulation Authority's meeting to assess the effectiveness of the approach, some outside experts even said the project has failed.

Still, TEPCO didn't change its plans to proceed with the project, taking additional steps such as **injecting cement into the unfrozen parts.**

At a recent news conference, Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Hiroshige Seko said that the work to freeze soil around the reactor buildings had been progressing. He stressed he would keep "instructing" TEPCO.

On the assumption that the envisioned frozen soil wall will be successfully constructed, TEPCO has estimated the daily production of contaminated water will fall to about 250 cubic meters in September and decline further to about 150 cubic meters in January.

If the amount fails to decrease as expected, there will be serious effects on eliminating most of the radioactive materials from contaminated water and installing tanks to store processed water. That means the entire plan for solving the problem of contaminated water will be in a precarious state.

Is the frozen wall of earth project really still viable?

To date, some 34.5 billion yen (\$337 million) of taxpayer money has been poured into the project. Daily freezing costs additional money.

It is unacceptable to continue spending human and financial resources as well as time to keep the project running without a solid prospect of success.

The Agency for Natural Resources and Energy and TEPCO should determine by a certain deadline whether the project has succeeded or failed.

They should also work out an alternative plan in the event the project fails, as the NRA has repeatedly called for.

There has been no instance of building such a large frozen soil wall in Japan. But the energy agency and TEPCO dared to attempt this approach at the site of one of the biggest nuclear accidents in world history. While the approach has the advantage of a relatively short construction period, **many experts, including NRA officials, have warned from the outset about utilizing it at the Fukushima plant.**

Some experts pointed out that completely freezing soil would be difficult because an enormous amount of groundwater is flowing fast around the plant.

Others said building an impermeable wall through civil engineering work would be a more reliable way to reduce the groundwater entering the buildings.

The energy agency decided to allow the frozen wall method in the face of such skepticism.

The proposed frozen soil wall is only a means to reduce the amount of contaminated water. But the energy agency and TEPCO seem to be viewing the success of this method as the goal.

What is the most effective and reliable way to prevent a second environmental pollution catastrophe by contaminated water containing large amounts of radioactive materials?

The agency and the utility should address this question with a broad perspective that is not distorted by unwarranted optimism.

The Fukushima shock

Background: August 31, 2016

Sometimes, when politicians are out of government, they seem to see things with clearer eyes. Here are Stéphane Dion's striking comments about the Fukushima tragedy in October 2014, when his party (the Liberal Party of Canada) was in opposition -- and not even the "official" opposition! No mention of Canadian or American reactors, though. Or that Japan's reactors were of American design,

Gordon Edwards.

The Fukushima Shock

By Stéphane Dion, National Newswatch, Oct 24 2014

<http://tinyurl.com/zghov4t>

Stéphane Dion was Canada's Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs between 1996 and 2003, and Minister of Environment for 2004-2005. He is currently [August 2016] Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs (since November 4, 2015).

Seeing Fukushima's evacuated area is quite a shock. It is one thing to imagine it, another to see the consequences of the nuclear disaster with your own eyes.

Imagine: your home, your car, your property, your neighbourhood suddenly becoming forbidden areas.

You are not allowed to go there except perhaps for an hour or two, from time to time. Although the surrounding woods are as green and the ocean as blue as ever, an invisible blanket of death covers everything. You can't feel it, you can't smell it but it is there and will be for decades, perhaps longer.

Going back home would put your health at risk. You are not even sure you escaped the danger zone in time. You fear for your family's as well as your own health. The specter of cancer haunts you constantly.

What does the future hold for you? Leukemia? Thyroid cancer? A deformed baby?

If you are allowed to stay home – because your neighbourhood is deemed to be distant enough from the danger zone – you are warned to not let your children play outdoors. Arenas are being built and designated for that purpose.

Your daughter is heartbroken: she was going to marry a young man from another area but the wedding has been cancelled – an irradiated mother-to-be is not wanted.

You are a farmer but are not allowed to sell your produce, now unfit for human consumption.

You are a fisherman but the area where you once casted your nets is now banned.

Those are but a few of the multiple aspects of the nightmare being lived by the denizens of Fukushima Prefecture, Northern Japan. On March 11, 2011, a magnitude 9 earthquake triggered a huge tsunami that threw fifteen meter waves at the region, claiming 1,599 lives, destroying everything in its path and causing a nuclear accident of a magnitude unequalled since the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. Three reactors suffered a catastrophic meltdown and a fourth was damaged, spewing radiation in the atmosphere and ocean and contaminating a 30,000 square kilometer area – 8 percent of Japan's total land area. As a result of that nuclear disaster, 300,000 Fukushima Prefecture residents were evacuated. 130,000 are still forbidden to go home.

I met some of those families while in Japan from September 30 to October 8, 2014, when I was invited by the Swiss section of the Green Cross to take stock of the consequences of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. The Green Cross was founded in 1993 by Mikhail Gorbachev, following the Rio Summit. It is active in some thirty countries and one of its many noteworthy features is the attention it pays to environmental safety and security – including victims of nuclear accidents. The Green Cross is very involved in Fukushima, helping the displaced families as best it can.

The Swiss section of the Green Cross gathered some thirty environmentalists and political figures from America, Europe and Asia to study the consequences of the Fukushima disaster. We travelled to a section of the evacuated area, the *Resident Restriction Zone*, taking all necessary precautions. The most dangerous area, the *No Return Zone*, cannot be visited – no decontamination has been done there. On a supposedly decontaminated street in the small town of Tomioka, we were told to get back on the bus after ten minutes because the radiation level was too high. We visited abandoned houses and businesses and witnessed the ongoing decontamination work which employs five to six thousand workers every day. Safety and security rules are two to five times stricter than those that were put in place by the Russian, Bielorrussian and Ukrainian authorities following the Chernobyl accident. Cancer cases have been identified but direct causal links with the nuclear accident may not even be identifiable before 2016. The scientists who spoke to us on the health impacts of radiation are not all of the same mind on the issue, even though these impacts have been studied since the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. But assuming we accept their most optimistic assessments, what does it change? Even if you are told that the radiation might be less harmful, less likely to induce cancer in the long term than what had previously been believed, **would you wholeheartedly accept to live in an irradiated region?**

When the authorities distribute pamphlets in schools explaining that radiation is not that much of a problem, they raise more controversy than they provide reassurance. So people seek information on their own. They talk about the relative harmfulness of caesium 137, cobalt 60, plutonium 239, strontium 90... However, as it stands, psychosocial impacts have killed more people than radiation: some 1,660 lives have been lost to posttraumatic stress disorder, chronic anxiety, depression, family dislocation, precarious living conditions, displacement and suicide resulting from evacuation.

We met with the Fukushima region local authorities and Members of Parliament from the ruling party in Tokyo. We were told about the measures that have been taken to help and compensate displaced persons, and to carry out food and drinking water inspection, site decontamination, radiation level monitoring and management of fast accumulating radioactive wastes and contaminated soil.

The cooling water used in the Daiichi plant reactors needs to be stored somewhere. It is estimated that if all goes well, some thirty years will be needed to remove the radioactive fuel from the reactors. In the meantime, a way must be found to prevent the fuel from leaking again into the ground and ocean. All that calls for highly trained personnel and huge expenses including, paradoxically, for electrical power. But to what avail? **Some municipal representatives told us that the technology is not up to par and that radioactive leaks continue to happen, contaminating the Pacific Ocean waters and fish stocks.**

Interim solutions are still being applied to a problem that will be around for decades and risks affecting many neighbouring populations in Japan and elsewhere.

Following the Fukushima accident, Japan shut down its 54 nuclear reactors. These accounted for over a quarter (29 percent) of Japan's electrical power production. This energy source had to be replaced with wind and solar energy but above all, by imported hydrocarbons – natural gas and coal. A consequence of this increased reliance on hydrocarbons is that Japan, which had committed to a 25% *reduction* of its greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 compared to 1990 levels, now forecasts a 3 percent *increase*. The Members of Parliament I met told me that the Japanese Government will not commit to a new reduction target for 2030 until the future of nuclear energy is settled.

It costs almost as much to keep the nuclear plants dormant as when they were running. For the time being, the government is thinking of restarting two nuclear reactors in Southern Japan, based on what it believes to be an extremely prudent and thorough scientific assessment. But quite understandably, that perspective raises much resistance and apprehension in the population.

One of the most unfortunate consequences of the Fukushima disaster is a weakening, in a large segment of Japan's population, of the trust between the people and their government. The Japanese appeared to me as I imagined them: smiling, courteous, hardworking, inventive, disciplined and very respectful of authority. Historically, in previous occurrences of the type of natural disaster that regularly strikes the country – typhoons, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions – they have viewed the government as a protective father or mother figure. But after the Fukushima nuclear accident, for the first time, the government's good faith has been cast into doubt. Hadn't it promised that such an accident would never happen? The failures of Japan's Nuclear Safety Commission and the now proven falsifications perpetrated by the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) – owner of the power plant – have been pointed out. To avert a panic, the government kept making reassuring statements which were cast into doubt and perceived as a form of manipulation, generating a feeling of resentment and bitterness that is still very strong today.

Yet even in adversity, humour – or at least bitter irony – finds its place. Some Japanese will tell you the story of the TEPCO scientist who, in an attempt to reassure the population, went as far as to declare: "Smiling people are not affected by radiation. Only worried people are. That has been proved in animal testing."

It would be hard to find a country that combines, better than Japan, strong organization skills, individual and collective discipline, social cohesion and technological expertise. Japan thought it was immune to nuclear disaster. Yet it happened, albeit as a result of an unprecedented natural disaster. What country can feel assured that it would have dealt better with the consequences of such a crisis than Japan? When you think that some much less organized or politically stable countries than Japan also want their own nuclear plants, how can you not think that we are rolling the dice? Explosive dice!

Fukushima is here to testify to the damage an overly reckless humankind can inflict on itself. Will we know how to draw the right conclusions?

Izumida will not run in gubernatorial election

August 31, 2016

Niigata Pref. nuclear power opponent governor won't stand for re-election

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160831/p2a/00m/0na/008000c>

NIIGATA -- Gov. Hirohiko Izumida has retracted his announcement that he will run in the upcoming gubernatorial election to seek a fourth term.

- **【Related】** Nuclear watchdog finds 3 nuclear plants guilty of 'malicious' safety violations

Since Izumida has adopted a cautious stance toward the restarting of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant in Niigata Prefecture, **his decision not to run in the election will likely have a huge impact on the issue.** All seven reactors at the power station, owned by Tokyo Electric Power Co., have been idle since March 2012 in the wake of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and the ensuing crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The campaign for the Oct. 16 Niigata gubernatorial election is to kick off on Sept. 29.

Izumida's decision not to run in the election is linked to his criticism of a report in the Niigata Nippo regional daily over a dispute involving a subsidiary of a shipping company funded by the prefectural government.

In an interview with news organizations, Izumida said, "It's important to have prefectural residents know the facts, but I feel my appeal never reached the residents. Even if I requested the newspaper to correct its report, the daily would never do so, which prompted me to abandon running in the race."

At a prefectural assembly session in February this year, Izumida announced that he would run in the gubernatorial election to seek a fourth four-year term. However, his retraction of his candidacy leaves Nagaoka Mayor Tamio Mori, 67, who heads the Japan Association of City Mayors, as the only person who has announced his candidacy.

It came to light this past July that Japan Shipping Exchange Inc., an arbitration organization, had ordered a shipping company's subsidiary funded by the prefectural government to pay 160 million yen to a South Korean company following a dispute over the purchase of a ferry.

The Niigata Nippo published a series of articles holding the Niigata Prefectural Government responsible for the case.

In response, the prefectural government has dismissed the accusations saying, "The daily's coverage is incorrect," and repeatedly urged the newspaper to correct its reports.

The Niigata Nippo is set to release a statement to express its views on the case.

Dave Klein finds excuses for TEPCO not to have used the word meltdown in early days

September 3, 2016

Expert plays down Tepco president's order not to use the term 'meltdown' in 2011 nuclear crisis

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/09/03/national/expert-plays-tepco-presidents-order-not-use-term-meltdown-2011-nuclear-crisis/#.V8wTNaJdeos>

Kyodo

The **head of a panel of international nuclear experts** Friday played down the importance of the decision by Tokyo Electric to not use the term “core meltdown” in describing the situation at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear complex in the early days of the March 2011 disaster.

“They were trying to bring the reactor into a safe situation,” Dale Klein, head of the panel of five experts called the Nuclear Reform Monitoring Committee, which is overseeing Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.’s nuclear safety efforts, said at a new conference.

“Their focus was on safety or safe operation, not necessarily a choice of words,” he said.

Klein, a former U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission chairman, referred to the instruction by then-President Masataka Shimizu to not use the term “core meltdown,” which was revealed in June by a third-party commission that had investigated the utility’s handling of the nuclear disaster.

Klein said that U.S. nuclear regulators also “typically do not use the word meltdown.”

On March 11, 2011, a powerful earthquake and tsunami crippled the seaside power station in Fukushima Prefecture, leading to nuclear meltdowns at three of the six reactors due to a loss of power.

Kyushu Electric will not halt plant

September 5, 2016

Kagoshima governor expresses regret

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160905_21/

The Governor of Kagoshima Prefecture Satoshi Mitazono has called Kyushu Electric Power Company's position extremely regrettable.

Mitazono had asked the operator of the Sendai nuclear power plant to suspend its 2 reactors and conduct another safety check after powerful earthquakes hit neighboring Kumamoto Prefecture in April.

Mitazono said he will soon make another request to the power company, after discussing the matter with officials and experts.

Kyushu Electric nixes governor's request to halt nuclear plant

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201609050044.html>

KAGOSHIMA--Kyushu Electric Power Co. on Sept. 5 knocked back a request by Kagoshima Governor Satoshi Mitazono to immediately shut down its Sendai nuclear power plant in light of recent earthquakes in the region.

Mitazono, who was elected in July on a campaign pledge to suspend the reactor operations for a safety review, submitted his request to Kyushu Electric on Aug. 26, citing concerns about active faults around the facility.

Michiaki Uriu, president of Kyushu Electric, delivered the company's response to Mitazono in person at the Kagoshima prefectural government office.

He said the two reactors at the Sendai nuclear plant would continue to generate electricity until mandatory safety inspections are carried out later this year.

The utility did, however, promise to give stronger backing to the prefectural government's review of evacuation plans and provide more information about the plant to local residents in the event of a natural disaster or nuclear accident.

Uriu told Mitazono, "We understand your concerns in all seriousness and plan to take steps to reduce the anxiety felt by Kagoshima residents."

Mitazono expressed dismay at Kyushu Electric's decision and indicated he may submit another request to shut down the plant "if the need arises."

"I strongly requested that in the wake of the earthquakes in Kumamoto the nuclear plant should be stopped for another inspection," Mitazono said. "I wish you could abandon the mind-set that nuclear plants are infallibly safe."

In his August request, Mitazono called for an immediate suspension of the nuclear plant operations and a further safety examination on grounds that residents of Kagoshima had become more concerned after a series of earthquakes from April hit Kumamoto Prefecture bordering Kagoshima to the north.

Kyushu Electric argued that the prefectural governor does not have the legal authority to suspend nuclear plant operations, which the utility said were vital for stable corporate performance.

The company also feared that if it went along with the request it could jeopardize operations at other nuclear plants around Japan.

The Sendai plant's No. 1 reactor will undergo a periodic safety inspection from Oct. 6, and the No. 2 reactor from Dec. 16.

Kyushu Electric said the inspections will incorporate seven factors asked for by Mitazono, including the reactor pressure vessel.

The utility also said it will undertake special additional inspections covering aspects not included in the governor's request, such as whether bolts on equipment had loosened.

The company pledged to provide additional vehicles to the 16 that elderly residents can use to evacuate in the event of an accident at the plant. The offer represents the company's commitment to providing support for the planned revision of evacuation plans.

But it rejected Mitazono's request for a study of active faults in the vicinity of the Sendai plant on the grounds that a considerable number of such studies had already been conducted.

Utility will not suspend reactors despite request

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160905_20/

The operator of the Sendai nuclear power plant in southwestern Japan says it will not suspend the plant's reactors despite a request by the governor of Kagoshima Prefecture to do so in order to recheck their safety.

The operator says it will instead conduct special inspections at the same time the reactors undergo regular inspections.

On Monday, the president of Kyushu Electric Power Company Michiaki Uriu handed a written reply to Governor Satoshi Mitazono.

It was in response to a request by the governor to stop the plant in light of rising concerns among residents after strong quakes hit neighboring Kumamoto Prefecture.

Two reactors at the Sendai plant went back online last year after the government imposed stricter regulations following the 2011 accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

In his reply, Uriu said during the special inspections workers will check the equipment and the functioning of facilities that the governor is requesting.

He said the inspections will be conducted at the same time as the regular inspections which are scheduled from October for the No.1 reactor, and December for the No.2 reactor.

Other measures outlined in the reply include increasing the number of quake observation points around the plant by about 10 and preparing more vehicles to evacuate people from nearby social welfare facilities.

The document also said the utility will disclose more information on the state of the plant after an earthquake strikes.

Mitazono called Uriu's reply extremely regrettable. **The governor said he will make another request after further consideration.**

Abe lied about the situation in Fukushima, says Koizumi

September 7, 2016

Former Japan PM accuses Abe of lying over Fukushima pledge

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/sep/07/former-japan-pm-junichiro-koizumi-accuses-abe-lying-over-fukushima-pledge>

Junichiro Koizumi disputes current leader's description of situation at stricken nuclear power plant as being under control.

Justin McCurry in Tokyo

Japan's former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi has labelled the country's current leader, Shinzo Abe, a "liar" for telling the international community that the situation at the wrecked Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant is under control.

Koizumi, who became one of Japan's most popular postwar leaders during his 2001-06 premiership, has used his retirement from frontline politics to become a leading campaigner against nuclear restarts in Japan in defiance of Abe, a fellow conservative Liberal Democratic party (LDP) politician who was once regarded as his natural successor.

Abe told members of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in Buenos Aires in September 2013 that the situation at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant was "under control", shortly before Tokyo was awarded the 2020 Games.

IOC officials were concerned by reports about the huge build-up of contaminated water at the Fukushima site, more than two years after the disaster forced the evacuation of tens of thousands of residents.

"When [Abe] said the situation was under control, he was lying," Koizumi told reporters in Tokyo. "It is not under control," he added, noting the problems the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power (Tepco), has experienced with a costly subterranean ice wall that is supposed to prevent groundwater from flowing into the basements of the damaged reactors, where it becomes highly contaminated.

"They keep saying they can do it, but they can't," Koizumi said. He went on to claim that Abe had been fooled by industry experts who claim that nuclear is the safest, cleanest and cheapest form of energy for resource-poor Japan.

"He believes what he's being told by nuclear experts," Koizumi said. "I believed them, too, when I was prime minister. I think Abe understands the arguments on both sides of the debate, but he has chosen to believe the pro-nuclear lobby."

After the Fukushima crisis, Koizumi said he had "studied the process, reality and history of the introduction of nuclear power, and became ashamed of myself for believing such lies".

Abe has pushed for the restart of Japan's nuclear reactors, while the government says it wants nuclear to account for a fifth of Japan's total energy mix by 2030. Just three of the country's dozens of nuclear reactors are in operation, and two will be taken offline later this year for maintenance.

Koizumi, 74, has also thrown his support behind hundreds of US sailors and marines who claim they developed leukaemia and other serious health problems after being exposed to Fukushima radiation plumes while helping with relief operations – nicknamed Operation Tomodachi (friend) – following the 11 March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

In 2012 the service personnel launched a lawsuit accusing Tepco of failing to prevent the accident and of lying about the levels of radiation from the stricken reactors, putting US personnel at risk.

Most of the 400 plaintiffs were aboard the USS Ronald Reagan, a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier that was anchored off Japan's north-east coast while helicopters flew emergency supplies to survivors of the tsunami, which killed almost 19,000 people.

Medical experts, however, said the sailors would have received only small, non-harmful doses of radiation; a US defence department report published in 2014 said no link had been established between the sailors' health problems and their exposure to low doses of Fukushima radiation.

Koizumi, who met several of the sick servicemen in San Diego in May, plans to raise \$1m by the end of next March to help cover the sailors' medical expenses.

“I felt I had to do something to help those who worked so hard for Japan,” he said. “That won’t be enough money, but at least it will show that Japan is grateful for what they did for us.”

Despite his opposition to Abe’s pro-nuclear policies, Koizumi was complimentary about his performance as prime minister during his second time in office in the past decade.

“As far as nuclear power is concerned, we are totally at odds,” Koizumi said. “But I think he’s reflected on the mistakes he made during his first time as leader and is doing a much better job second time around.”

In political longevity terms, Abe’s performance could hardly be worse. He resigned in September 2007 after less than a year in office, following a series of ministerial scandals, a debilitating bowel condition and a disastrous performance by the LDP in upper house elections.

Koizumi's anti-nuclear conviction



September 7, 2016

Despite dwindling momentum, Koizumi pursues anti-nuclear goals

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/09/07/national/politics-diplomacy/despite-dwindling-momentum-koizumi-pursues-anti-nuclear-goals/#.V8_1vDVdeos

by Ayako Mie
Staff Writer

While Japan's once-charged anti-nuclear movement struggles to retain its momentum five years after the 2011 Fukushima catastrophe, former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi remains doggedly determined to attain his goal of ending the country's reliance on atomic energy.

On Wednesday, he renewed his pledge to help ill U.S. veterans whose conditions they claim are linked to the release of radioactive plumes from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Koizumi, who is opposed to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's pro-nuclear stance, says Japan can be put on a sustainable path without atomic power.

"The nuclear power industry says safety is their top priority, but profit is in fact what comes first,"

Koizumi told an audience of more than 180 who had gathered for his news conference at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan in Tokyo. "Japan can grow if the country relies more renewable energy."

As part of his anti-nuclear push, the 74-year-old former leader set up a fund in July to help U.S. sailors with conditions such as leukemia that they say was caused by radioactive fallout from Fukushima No. 1. He said the fund has raised about ¥40 million so far, with a goal of topping ¥100 million by next March 31.

In May, Koizumi visited Carlsbad, California, to speak to several veterans with health conditions who had taken part in Operation Tomodachi while aboard the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan.

Those veterans had provided humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to the Tohoku region after quake and tsunami of March 11, 2011, at the request of the Japanese government.

"After talking to the sailors, I thought it would not be enough for me to simply say 'I'm sorry' and leave," Koizumi said, explaining the impetus for setting up the fund. "Words alone would not be enough and I thought that I had to do something."

Currently, about 400 U.S. veterans are taking part in a class-action lawsuit in California against Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc., operator of the stricken plant. The lawsuit says that some suffer from leukemia, testicular cancer and thyroid problems, or have experienced rectal and gynecological bleeding.

However, a 2014 report by the U.S. Defense Department determined that there were no causal relationship between radiation exposure during Operation Tomodachi and their illnesses.

Koizumi noted that while expressing sympathy for the veterans, a Foreign Ministry official had even said that there was nothing the Japanese government could do.

"I'm not a doctor, but using common sense one can infer their conditions were caused by radiation, since strong and healthy sailors just don't find tumors or suffer from conditions like nasal hemorrhages," Koizumi said.

He was a backer of nuclear power while leader between 2001 and 2006.

But Fukushima changed all that.

After the disaster, he became one of the most outspoken opponents of atomic energy, calling the often-repeated mantra of "clean, safe, cheap" nuclear power a lie. With the shift, he set up a foundation with former Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa in 2014 to call for an immediate phasing out of nuclear power to be replaced with a renewable energy policy.

Yet, Abe's government sees nuclear energy as a key plank in his bid to export infrastructure and hopes to restart the nation's reactors so that nuclear can supply 20 to 22 percent of Japan's electricity by 2030. Currently, two reactors at the Sendai power plant in Kagoshima Prefecture and one reactor at the Ikata plant in Ehime Prefecture are operating.

On Wednesday a request by Kagoshima Gov. Satoshi Mitazono to suspend power generation at the Sendai plant was snubbed by operator Kyushu Electric Power Co.

Japanese and Chinese communists don't agree on nuke ban

September 6, 2016

Japanese, Chinese communists clash over nuclear ban

JJI

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/09/06/national/politics-diplomacy/japanese-chinese-communists-clash-nuclear-ban/#.V88N2TVdeos>

Japanese and Chinese communists fought fiercely over whether to include a ban on nuclear weapons in a joint statement issued at the **International Conference of Asian Political Parties in Malaysia last week**. During the three-day meeting through Saturday, the Japanese Communist Party insisted on adopting a statement in line with a draft that called for promptly holding negotiations to conclude a nuclear weapons ban treaty, according to Akira Koike, head of the JCP secretariat. But the Communist Party of China labeled the draft as hegemonic, saying it forced a certain position. The JCP rejected the criticism, but the wording in question was eventually removed, as demanded by the CPC.

"It was very unjustifiable," Koike told a news conference Monday in Tokyo. "Such a development had never been seen since the normalization of ties between the two parties in 1998."

The JCP has submitted a written protest to the forum, saying that one delegation's behavior was out of the norm and extremely autocratic, Koike revealed.

"Controlled release" of contaminated water safer than uncontrolled...

September 6, 2016

Tepco adviser says treated Fukushima water safe for release into Pacific Bloomberg

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/09/06/national/science-health/tepcos-adviser-says-treated-fukushima-water-safe-release-pacific/#.V88NkTVdeov>

Treated water from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant is **safe to be released under controlled circumstances into the Pacific Ocean**, according to an independent Tepco adviser.

"It is much better to do a controlled release in my view than to have an accidental release," Dale Klein, a former chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, said in an interview in Tokyo. "I get nervous about just storing all that water when you have about 1,000 tanks. You have all the piping, all the valves, everything that can break."

More than five years after the meltdowns at Fukushima No. 1, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. continues to struggle to contain the radiation-contaminated water that inundates the plant.

About 300 tons of water — partly from the nearby hills — flows into the reactor buildings daily, mixing with melted fuel and becoming tainted, according to Tepco. For perspective, that’s roughly the amount of water contained in one lane of an Olympic-size swimming pool.

The water is currently pumped out of the buildings and purified, lowering its radioactive content with a system called Advanced Liquid Processing System, or ALPS. **The treated water, which still contains a radioactive element known as tritium,** is then stored in one of roughly 1,000 tanks at the site.

What to do with the treated water remains a headache for Tepco.

The utility was urged by the International Atomic Energy Agency in May 2015 to consider discharging the water into the ocean.

In early 2014, Klein, an independent adviser to Tepco, criticized the company’s progress in managing the water situation, saying at the time that the task distracted it from other important challenges associated with the cleanup.

Tepco will cooperate with the government, local authorities and fishermen regarding what to do with the tritium water, spokesman Tatsuhiro Yamagishi said.

As of July 28, Tepco stored 668,352 tons of treated water at Fukushima No. 1, while 188,462 tons of untreated water was waiting in a second set of tanks to be processed by ALPS, according to Yamagishi.

The government agency overseeing handling of the treated water has not decided whether to go ahead with an ocean release because it needs to “weigh any potential impact on society,” according to an official who asked to not be named, citing internal policy.

“I hope the government will help move toward a decision,” Klein said.

Nuclear power plants routinely and safely release diluted concentrations of tritium-laced water, according to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Release of the “water will not be a safety issue, but it will be an emotional issue,” Klein said. “A lot of people are not going to know what tritium is and they’re just going to perceive that the water is glowing in the dark.”

Disappointing

September 9, 2016

Kagoshima governor hints at dropping action to halt nuclear reactors

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/09/09/national/kagoshima-governor-hints-dropping-action-halt-nuclear-reactors/#.V9LNWzVdeos>

Kyodo

KAGOSHIMA – Kagoshima Gov. Satoshi Mitazono suggested Friday he may give up on his pursuit to have Kyushu Electric Power Co. immediately suspend the operation of two reactors at its nuclear power plant in the southwestern prefecture after the utility’s president again rejected the request.

“Thinking realistically, time is short before (the reactors will go through) regular checkups,” Mitazono said when asked by reporters whether he will ask the utility again to immediately halt the operation of the reactors.

A roughly two-month-long regular checkup is scheduled to begin for the Nos. 1 and 2 reactors at the Sendai plant from Oct. 6 and from Dec. 16, respectively, during which the plant's operation will be suspended.

Mitazono's remarks came after he received a written rejection from Kyushu Electric President Michiaki Uriu, who instead promised additional safety measures.

"I've been calling for the early suspension. It's regrettable," Mitazono, elected on an anti-nuclear platform in July, told Uriu in a meeting at the Kagoshima Prefectural Government office building.

Kyushu Electric said in writing that its rejection reflected the Nuclear Regulation Authority's view that there was no need to suspend operations of the two-reactor complex in Satsumasendai.

The utility presented a plan to conduct special checkups prior to the scheduled start of regular checks, prepare additional vehicles to help evacuate residents living within 30 kilometers of the nuclear complex in case of a nuclear accident and help remove fallen trees and other objects on evacuation roads when they are blocked after earthquakes and other disasters.

As for the enhanced safety steps, Mitazono said his calls for the reactors' immediate suspension have contributed to advancing the complex's safety "a few steps forward."

Mitazono has been calling for the immediate suspension of the two reactors at the Sendai complex, citing local worries about the plant's safety after major earthquakes rocked neighboring Kumamoto Prefecture and its vicinity in April.

Currently, the two Sendai reactors and one reactor at Shikoku Electric Power Co.'s Ikata plant in Ehime Prefecture are operating in Japan after passing tougher safety checks introduced in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear crisis triggered by a powerful earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

Prefectural governors have no legal power to suspend the operation of reactors.

Forcing (customers of) new power suppliers to pay for decommissioning

September 8, 2016

Gov't may shift nuke accident, reactor decommissioning costs onto new power suppliers

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160908/p2a/00m/0na/006000c>

The government is moving to bill new electricity suppliers for a portion of nuclear reactor decommissioning costs and compensation payments related to the Fukushima nuclear disaster, it was learned on Sept. 7.

- **【Related】** Consumer affairs minister suggests move away from nuclear power following deregulation
- **【Related】** Editorial: Make consumer benefits focal point of electricity market deregulation

After decades under regional utility monopolies, the electricity supply market was opened to competition in April this year. The government apparently fears that the old monopolies such as Tokyo Electric Power

Co. (TEPCO) lose too many customers to new suppliers and they may no longer be able to cover the high costs of decommissioning old reactors or compensate the victims of nuclear accidents, hence the move to shift some of the financial burden onto new market entrants.

However, these costs were originally supposed to be covered by the nine big utilities, and the government's moves would essentially transfer that burden onto the Japanese people, making a clash more than likely.

Under the current system, large utilities must cover nuclear reactor operating expenses -- including eventual decommissioning -- from electricity bill income. Also, TEPCO receives monies to cover Fukushima nuclear disaster compensation claims from the government-licensed Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp. (NDF), which is in turn funded by all the large utility companies.

The new system being considered by the government would spread the financial burden of nuclear accident compensation and reactor decommissioning to new electricity suppliers, lightening the load on the big utilities. The government estimates the total cost for reactor decommissioning plus Fukushima nuclear disaster compensation paid before the NDF was established at some 8 trillion yen. The new power suppliers would likely pass on their share of these costs to their customers, resulting in monthly power bills up to about 200 yen higher than at present for an average three-person household.

However, forcing customers of the new electricity firms to pay for the old utilities to decommission their reactors and for TEPCO's nuclear disaster liabilities runs counter to the goals of liberalizing the electricity market, which was intended to push down prices through competition. It would also in essence be **corporate welfare** for the big utilities operating nuclear plants.

A sub-committee to debate the new system will be established under the Advisory Committee for Natural Resources and Energy reporting to the minister of economy, trade and industry. The committee will decide on what direction to take by the end of this year, with an eye to submitting a bill to revise the Electricity Business Act to the ordinary Diet session next year.

Abe lied about the situation in Fukushima (2)

September 7, 2016

Koizumi: Abe's Fukushima 'under control' pledge was a lie

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201609070073.html>

REUTERS

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's promise that the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant was "under control" in his successful pitch three years ago for Tokyo to host the 2020 Olympic Games "was a lie," former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said on Wednesday.

Koizumi, one of Japan's most popular leaders during his 2001-2006 term, became an outspoken critic of nuclear energy after a March 2011 earthquake and tsunami triggered meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s (TEPCO) Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986.

Abe gave the assurances about safety at the Fukushima plant in his September 2013 speech to the International Olympic Committee to allay concerns about awarding the Games to Tokyo. The comment met with considerable criticism at the time.

"Mr. Abe's 'under control' remark, that was a lie," Koizumi, now 74 and his unruly mane of hair turned white, told a news conference where he repeated his opposition to nuclear power.

"It is not under control," Koizumi added, citing as an example TEPCO's widely questioned efforts to build the world's biggest "ice wall" to keep groundwater from flowing into the basements of the damaged reactors and getting contaminated.

"They keep saying they can do it, but they can't," Koizumi said. Experts say handling the nearly million tons of radioactive water stored in tanks on the Fukushima site is one of the biggest challenges.

Koizumi also said he was "ashamed" that he had believed experts who assured him that nuclear power was cheap, clean and safe and that resource-poor Japan had to rely on nuclear energy.

After the Fukushima crisis, Koizumi said, "I studied the process, reality and history of the introduction of nuclear power and became ashamed of myself for believing such lies."

All Japan's nuclear plants--which had supplied about 30 percent of its electricity--were closed after the Fukushima disaster and utilities have struggled to get running again in the face of a skeptical public. Only three are operating now.

Abe's government has set a target for nuclear power to supply a fifth of energy generation by 2030. The meltdowns in three Fukushima reactors spewed radiation over a wide area of the countryside, contaminating water, food and air. More than 160,000 people were evacuated from nearby towns.

High time to put an end to Monju once "dream reactor"

September 4, 2016

Monju and the nuclear fuel cycle

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/09/04/editorials/monju-nuclear-fuel-cycle/#.V8wUC6Jdeos>

Media reports that the government is finally weighing whether to pull the plug on the Monju fast-breeder reactor in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, due to the massive cost needed to restart the long-dormant facility, should come as no surprise. Once touted as a "dream reactor" for an energy-scarce country that produces more plutonium than it consumes as fuel, Monju has been a nightmare for national nuclear power policy for the past two decades. The sole prototype reactor for this kind of technology has been in operation a mere 250 days since it first reached criticality in 1994. It has mostly been offline since a 1995 sodium coolant leak and fire. Its government-backed operator has been declared unfit by nuclear power regulators to run the trouble-prone reactor, and the education and science ministry, in charge of the project, has not been able to find a viable solution.

More than ¥1 trillion in taxpayer money has so far been spent on Monju, and maintenance alone costs ¥20 billion a year. Restarting the reactor under the Nuclear Regulation Authority's new safety standards would cost another several hundred billion yen, including the expense of replacing its long-unused fuel as well as its aging components — though there would still be no guarantee that it would complete its mission of commercializing fast-breeder reactor technology.

The Abe administration may think that writing off the ill-fated costly project, even with the projected ¥300 billion cost of decommissioning the facility over 30 years, will help win more public support for its policy of seeking to reactivate the nation's conventional reactors — most of which remain idled in the wake of the 2011 meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power's Fukushima No. 1 plant — once they've cleared the NRA screening. Public concerns over the safety of nuclear energy remain strong after the Fukushima disaster, with media surveys showing a large portion of respondents still opposed putting the idled reactors back online.

If it is going to decide to decommission the Monju reactor, however, the government should also rethink its pursuit of the nuclear fuel cycle — in which spent fuel from nuclear power plants is reprocessed to extract plutonium for reuse as fuel. Monju, which runs on plutonium-uranium mixed oxide (MOX) fuel, has been a core component of the program. As Monju remained dormant for more than 20 years, the government and power companies have shifted the focus of the policy to using MOX fuel at regular nuclear power plants. The No. 3 reactor at Shikoku Electric Power's Ikata plant in Ehime Prefecture, which resumed operation in August, runs on MOX fuel. The government apparently thinks the Monju program is no longer essential to the policy.

But the nuclear fuel cycle itself has proven elusive, and some say the policy has already collapsed. It is still nowhere in sight when the nuclear fuel reprocessing plant in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture — another key component in the program and whose construction began in 1993 — will be ready for operation. After its scheduled completion in 1997 has been delayed by more than 20 times due to a series of technical glitches and other problems, its construction cost has ballooned three times the original projection to ¥2.2 trillion.

If indeed the Rokkasho facility is completed and starts reprocessing spent fuel from power plants across the country, the Ikata power plant is currently the only one in operation that consumes plutonium-uranium fuel. It's not clear how many more will be up and running in the years ahead given the slow pace of restarting the idled reactors, and the Rokkasho facility operating without a sufficient number of reactors using MOX fuel would only add to Japan's stockpile of unused plutonium — which has already hit 48 tons.

If it's the cost problem that's finally spelling doom for the Monju project, the government and power companies should also consider the cost-efficiency of the nuclear fuel cycle program, including the extra cost of reprocessing spent fuel into MOX fuel. They should also think about whether the program is compatible with the government's stated policy — though its commitment may be in doubt — of seeking to reduce Japan's dependency on nuclear power as an energy source.

Monju has drifted on for years after its future was clearly in doubt. A decision now to terminate the project seems sensible. Such a decision should also prompt the government to stop and consider whether its nuclear fuel cycle still makes sense.

All's well in Fukushima's paradise

September 10, 2016

Study draws a blank on thyroid cancer and 2011 nuclear disaster

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201609100031.html>

By TERU OKUMURA/ Staff Writer

Researchers have found no correlation between radiation exposure and the incidence rate of thyroid cancer among 300,000 children living in Fukushima Prefecture at the time of the 2011 nuclear disaster. But the team at Fukushima Medical University, which carried out the study, cautioned that the health of local children should continue to be monitored to be more definitive.

“At the present stage, we have found no evidence pointing to any relationship between doses of external radiation resulting from the nuclear accident and the thyroid cancer rate,” said Tetsuya Ohira, a professor of epidemiology at the university. “But we need to continue to look into the situation.”

The study involves 300,476 children in Fukushima Prefecture who were aged 18 or younger when the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant went into a triple meltdown in March 2011 after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

The children underwent the first round of health checks between October 2011 and June 2015.

Of the total, 112 were tentatively diagnosed as having thyroid cancer.

There are two types of radiation exposure: external exposure in which a person is exposed to radiation in the atmosphere, and internal exposure in which a person is exposed through the intake of contaminated food, water and air.

For the study, municipalities in the prefecture were classified into three groups based on the estimate for residents' external exposure. That data was obtained during a prefecture-wide health survey carried out after the disaster occurred.

The first group is a zone where people with an accumulative dose of 5 millisieverts or more represented 1 percent or more of the population there. The second group is a zone where people with an accumulative dose of up to 1 millisievert account for 99.9 percent or more of the population. The third group is a zone that falls into neither of the other two groups.

The scientists looked at the incidence rate for thyroid cancer in each group and concluded there is almost no difference among the groups.

The number of subjects diagnosed with thyroid cancer was 48 per 100,000 people in the first group, 41 in the second group and 36 in the third group.

The finding was similar to a separate survey in which researchers looked into the possible association among 130,000 or so children whose radiation exposure had been estimated.

Hokuto Hoshi, head of a health survey panel set up at the prefectural government after the nuclear disaster, said he will closely follow the results of future studies to offer a more conclusive finding.

“The outcome of the recent study provides one indication in making any overall judgment,” said Hoshi, who also serves as vice chairman of the Fukushima Medical Association. “The study is substantial and we are going to pay attention to the findings of further studies.”

All's well in Fukushima's paradise (2)

"Prevalence of thyroid cancer for the location groups were 48/100,000 for the highest dose area, 36/100,000 for the middle dose area, and 41/100,000 for the lowest dose area."

<http://journals.lww.com/md->

[journal/Abstract/2016/08300/Comparison_of_childhood_thyroid_cancer_prevalence.15.aspx#](http://journals.lww.com/md-journal/Abstract/2016/08300/Comparison_of_childhood_thyroid_cancer_prevalence.15.aspx#)

Abstract: The 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake led to a subsequent nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. In its wake, we sought to examine the association between external radiation dose and thyroid cancer in Fukushima Prefecture. We applied a cross-sectional study design with 300,476 participants aged 18 years and younger who underwent thyroid examinations between October 2011 and June 2015. Areas within Fukushima Prefecture were divided into three groups based on individual external doses ($\geq 1\%$ of 5mSv, $< 99\%$ of 1mSv/y, and the other). The odds ratios (ORs) and 95% confidence intervals of thyroid cancer for all areas, with the lowest dose area as reference, were calculated using logistic regression models adjusted for age and sex. Furthermore, the ORs of thyroid cancer for individual external doses of 1 mSv or more and 2mSv or more, with the external dose less than 1mSv as reference, were calculated. Prevalence of thyroid cancer for the location groups were 48/100,000 for the highest dose area, 36/100,000 for the middle dose area, and 41/100,000 for the lowest dose area. Compared with the lowest dose area, age-, and sex-adjusted ORs (95% confidence intervals) for the highest-dose and middle-dose areas were 1.49 (0.36–6.23) and 1.00 (0.67–1.50), respectively. The duration between accident and thyroid examination was not associated with thyroid cancer prevalence. There were no significant associations between individual external doses and prevalence of thyroid cancer. External radiation dose was not associated with thyroid cancer prevalence among Fukushima children within the first 4 years after the nuclear accident.

Comments from the webmaster: There seems to be a mistake in the way the groups were presented in the precedent article

Study draws a blank on thyroid cancer and 2011 nuclear disaster

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201609100031.html>

According to the above abstract, it should read:

group 1: 48/100.000

group 2: 36/100.000

group 3: 41/100.000

More importantly, what we are talking about here is the possible effect of **external** radiation. Has the dose of internal radiation (inhaled or ingested by the children) not been taken into account at all in this study?

TEPCO admits security awareness (at F. Daini) has been decreasing

September 13, 2016

NRA: TEPCO kept alarm silent at Fukushima Daini

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160912_26/

Japan's nuclear regulator has issued a warning to Tokyo Electric Power Company after a legal violation was found at its Fukushima Daini nuclear plant. **The utility had deactivated the alarm of an entry sensor.**

The Nuclear Regulation Authority says the violation was found during an inspection at the plant last October. **The warning sound on a detector preventing intrusions from outside was disabled.**

TEPCO officials told the authority that the alarm was turned off after the detector was repeatedly activated by moving objects other than people. The officials said the workers in charge of security at the plant had made the decision.

The officials told the authority that they found the alarm had been switched off on a daily basis. **They admitted that security awareness had been decreasing.**

The authority on Monday warned TEPCO that alternative measures to ensure security were not sufficient. They said disabling the alarm was a legal violation that could become a serious problem.

The authority also instructed the utility to prevent a recurrence.

TEPCO officials say the company will take thorough measures including training its employees and improving problem solving methods.

The purpose of deregulation

September 14, 2016

Power retail deregulation

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/09/14/editorials/power-retail-deregulation/#.V9o6hzVdeov>

The increase in the number of customers of new entrants to the electricity retail market following the market deregulation in April appears to be slowing down rapidly. It may be too early to judge whether this endangers **the purpose of the deregulation — to introduce greater competition in power retail and benefit consumers through lower charges and better and more diverse services.** Still, the government should assess the situation and see what more needs to be done to ensure a competitive environment in the market previously dominated by regional monopolies.

Capping a series of market liberalization since the late 1990s, electricity retail to small-scale users such as households and small shops was opened up for new entrants to the business in April, enabling consumers to choose the power suppliers they want, no longer bound by the contracts with 10 big power firms that each monopolized supply to the region they service. The deregulation led more than 300 new entrants to the power retail market from various non-electricity sectors, ranging from city gas suppliers such as Tokyo Gas and Osaka Gas, oil wholesalers like JX Nippon Oil & Energy and telecom carriers such as SoftBank. Some of the new power suppliers have been established by local governments.

More than five months on, households across the country that have switched power supply contracts to new entrants account for less than 3 percent of the total, according to the Organization for Cross-Regional

Coordination of Transmission Operations, which adjusts electricity supply and demand on a nationwide basis. Most of the customers of the new suppliers are concentrated in the greater Tokyo area and the Kansai region — with roughly 60 percent of them in the area formerly monopolized by Tokyo Electric Power and 20 percent in the area serviced by Kansai Electric Power — likely a reflection of the still limited number of new market entrants in other parts of the country.

To crack open a market that has been dominated by regional monopolies for decades, the new suppliers offer various new plans to attract customers — in most cases packaging at discount their own services such as gas and mobile phones with power supply to households. Some of the plans enable customers to accumulate points usable for shopping in accordance with their payment of electricity charges. Some of the new suppliers sell electricity that to a large portion has been generated by renewable sources such as solar and wind.

The market liberalization seemed to generate enough consumer interest. In April alone, roughly 820,000 households switched their contracts to new suppliers. But the pace of increase has since slackened, with the number standing at around 1.5 million as of the end of July.

Slow growth in the number of customers spells trouble for many of the new entrants to the business.

Unless there are enough customers and sales for the new participants in the market, the purpose of the deregulation — to develop a full-scale power retail market — may be at risk. Experiences in other advanced economies that have already liberalized retail electricity do not seem to bode well for Japan — **in many countries the market deregulation resulted in major power companies dominating the market over time.**

A survey by Mitsubishi Research Institute quotes consumers as saying that they do not consider switching contracts to new power suppliers because they think that the procedure is too cumbersome, that it's hard to see the benefits of the plans offered by the new firms and that electricity charges would not go down significantly after all.

The new power suppliers can address some of this skepticism on the part of the consumers through their own efforts, such as simplifying the procedures for switching to their services and improving the way they publicize their plans. On the other hand, there will be limits to the discounts they can offer against the services of the major power firms. A household is generally said to save up to about ¥1,000 a month in electricity charges by switching the power supply contract to one of the new suppliers. That relatively modest amount may not be as attractive for consumers as, for example, discount smartphone services. There will be various things that can and should be done to promote development of the power retail market in this country. The government, for its part, should further establish a market environment that facilitates competition between the major power firms and new entrants to the business. One idea would be to expand an electricity wholesale market where small suppliers that do not have power-generation facilities can procure electricity for retail.

Reform of the nation's electricity business is not yet complete. Separation of the former regional monopolies' power-generation facilities and power transmission and distribution segments is planned in 2020. The key will be **ensuring fair access to the electricity transmission and distribution networks to all power retailers so that they compete on an equal footing.** The government must not lose track of the purpose of the power sector reforms in proceeding with these measures.

6.000 workers every day at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant

September 16, 2016

TEPCO keeps thousands on the clock at idled Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, hoping for restart

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/09/16/national/tepc-keeps-thousands-clock-idled-kashiwazaki-kariwa-plant-hoping-restart/#.V9un-DVdeou>

by Emi Urabe

Bloomberg

More than 6,000 workers cycle through the world's biggest nuclear plant every day **to operate and maintain a facility that hasn't sold a kilowatt of electricity in more than four years.**

The buzz at Tokyo Electric Power Co. Holdings Inc.'s Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant plays out daily across Japan, where utilities employ thousands of workers and spend billions of dollars awaiting the green light to restart commercial operations. With only three of the country's 42 operable reactors running, they're betting a central government committed to nuclear power will win over local officials and a wary public who don't believe enough has been done to guarantee safety since the worst meltdown disaster since Chernobyl.

"Even though operating expenses of nongenerating reactors remain high, utilities would prefer to keep them open while there is any chance they can restart," said James Taverner, a Tokyo-based analyst at IHS Markit Ltd. "Utilities have already committed significant expenditure for plants to meet new safety standards, and decommissioning costs are considerable."

The nine biggest regional utilities spent more than ¥1.5 trillion (\$14.6 billion) on their nuclear plants during the year to March, according to Bloomberg calculations based on the latest earnings reports. Over that same period, those plants accounted for just 1.1 percent of the nation's electricity.

Nuclear-related costs accounted for 9 percent of all operating expenses at the utilities in the previous fiscal year, according to the calculations. That includes personnel and maintenance, as well as waste disposal and contributions to the nation's nuclear damage compensation system.

The burden of paying for nuclear facilities producing little electricity has been softened by price declines in recent years for coal, natural gas and oil, which are also used as fuels for power generation. Tepco sees itself swinging to a net loss as fossil fuel prices recover, **making the restart of Kashiwazaki-Kariwa key to profitability,** Naomi Hirose, the company's president, said in an interview earlier this year.

Costs for operating the country's nuclear facilities were slightly higher before the March 2011 Fukushima disaster, at about ¥1.7 trillion a year, when atomic energy accounted for nearly 30 percent of Japan's electricity mix. Tokyo Electric estimates that restarting one of the newest reactors at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa — known as KK — would boost net income by as much as ¥10 billion a month.

Tepco's plant, the world's biggest with about 8.2 gigawatts of generating capacity, has seven reactors at a facility spread across more than 1,000 acres (400 hectares) in Niigata Prefecture.

Workers clad in jumpsuits and loaded down with manuals convene daily in a mock-up of the reactor control room, preparing for the restart of the plant under new safety guidelines imposed after the Fukushima meltdowns.

"Everyday, this room is full of workers, from fresh employees to old veterans, sharpening their skills," Nobuyuki Suzuki, a deputy manager in the company's human resources development group, said at the KK plant last month. "Operators at this facility are required to go through training here on a regular schedule."

About three-fourths of the Tepco employees and contract workers at the plant are from the prefecture hosting the facility, making it **one of the area's biggest economic drivers**.

The plant is an economic windfall for the region, employing thousands of workers and supporting restaurants, shops and even taxi companies, according to Masayoshi Oota, an official from the village of Kariwa. "If the (reactors) were to disappear, then so would the economic benefit," he said.

The nuclear energy industry employs more than 80,000 engineers, construction workers and operators, according to a report published by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry last year.

To boost confidence in the giant facility's safety, Tokyo-based Tepco has spent ¥470 billion on flood barriers, a 15-meter seawall and a reservoir the size of 30 Olympic-size swimming pools to supply water in the event a reactor pump fails.

KK's restart is far from assured. The plant was forced to shut for 21 months following a strong earthquake in July 2007. Though some units eventually restarted, all were shuttered again after the March 2011 Fukushima debacle started, for safety checks.

There is skepticism among the public. The restart of nuclear reactors is opposed by 53 percent of Japanese and supported by just 30 percent, according to a nationwide poll conducted earlier this year by the Mainichi newspaper.

Local courts and governments have been some of the biggest roadblocks to restarting more reactors, crimping Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's goal of deriving as much as 22 percent of the nation's energy needs from nuclear by 2030. Goldman Sachs Group Inc. lowered its price target on six Japanese power utilities this month on risk of delays in restarting operations or renewed shutdowns.

"While some reactors have been restarted, the method to shut them down again (is) evolving," Goldman analyst Hiroyuki Sakaida wrote in a report dated Sept. 14. "We think it will be difficult to fully price in nuclear restarts and restored dividends until fundamental solutions are found to resolve the economic uncertainty surrounding nuclear power operations."

Should the plant clear the necessary regulatory, legal and political hurdles and resume operations, Tepco plans to maintain the facility's workforce at current levels, a reflection of how many workers are needed even during a period called cold shutdown.

"Right now we are focused on the nation's regulatory review of the plant," said Chikashi Shitara, facility chief at KK. "Even though the plant isn't running, there is still a lot we must do."

Chiba nuke waste "not radioactive"

July 22, 2016

7.7 tons of Chiba's Fukushima waste won't be deemed radioactive anymore, clearing way for general disposal

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/07/22/national/7-7-tons-of-chibas-fukushima-waste-wont-be-deemed-radioactive-anymore-clearing-way-for-general-disposal/#.V5Rh5RHr1_8

JJI

CHIBA – The government on Friday informed the city of Chiba that the radioactive designation for 7.7 tons of Fukushima-tainted waste stored in the city will be lifted on Saturday, allowing it to be treated as general garbage.

State Minister of the Environment Shinji Inoue conveyed the decision to Chiba Mayor Toshihito Kumagai during a meeting at City Hall in Chiba Prefecture's capital.

The decision came after it was found that the radioactive activity of cesium in the waste had fallen below the state-set limit of 8,000 becquerels per kilogram.

It will be the first time for such a designation to be lifted for such waste.

The waste was part of the aftermath of the massive earthquake and subsequent tsunami of March 2011, which triggered a triple core meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant. The defunct plant is owned by Tokyo Electric Power Holdings Inc.

Some 3,700 tons of designated radioactive waste created by the man-made meltdowns, including incineration ash, is stored in Chiba. The 7.7 tons in question is sitting in a garbage disposal facility in Mihama Ward in Chiba.

The lifting of the designation will allow the city to dispose of the waste in the same way as general waste. But Kumagai has expressed his intention to keep it in storage for the time being.

As of the end of March, 172,899 tons of such designated waste was being stored in Chiba, Tokyo and 10 other prefectures in eastern Japan.

See also :

<http://www.fukushima-is-still-news.com/2016/06/lifting-the-designation-as-radioactive-waste.html>

<http://www.fukushima-is-still-news.com/2016/07/in-chiba-radioactive-is-no-longer-radioactive.html>

<https://www.ipnw.de/atomenergie/artikel/de/77-tonnen-fukushima-muell-nicht-ra.html>

7,7 Tonnen Fukushima-Müll "nicht-radioaktiv"

13.09.2016

Im Juli 2016 informierte die japanische Regierung die Stadt Chiba, dass für 7,7 Tonnen radioaktive Abfälle, die durch die Atomkatastrophe von Fukushima verursacht worden waren, die Kennzeichnung „radioaktiv“ aufgehoben wird. Bei dem strahlenden Müll handelt es sich vor allem um kontaminiertes Erdreich und Dekontaminationsabfälle. Die Entscheidung beruht darauf, dass die Cäsium-Radioaktivität mittlerweile unter den staatlichen Grenzwert von 8.000 Becquerel pro Kilogramm gefallen war. Zum Vergleich: normales oberflächliches Erdreich hat eine Cäsium-Konzentration von 10-110 Becquerel pro Kilogramm. Nach der Atomkatastrophe von Fukushima wurden im ganzen Land radioaktiv kontaminierte Flächen abgetragen und gemeinsam mit anderen verseuchte Materialien in großen Mengen zusammengetragen. Da Stauraum für den strahlenden Müll in der Präfektur Fukushima knapp wurde, begann man, ihn auch in andere Präfekturen zu transportieren. Chiba liegt ca. 200 Kilometer südlich von Fukushima, in der Nähe von Tokio.

Die Gesamtmenge der in Chiba, Tokio und 10 anderen Präfekturen im östlichen Japan als radioaktiv gekennzeichnete Abfälle wurden Ende März 2016 mit 172.899 Tonnen angegeben. Durch die

Entscheidung können die Abfälle nun formal als allgemeiner, nicht-radioaktiver Müll behandelt werden. Der Bürgermeister von Chiba, Toshihito Kumagai, hat zwar die Absicht bekundet, sie auf absehbare Zeit weiterhin in dem bisherigen Lager zu belassen, aber die Gefahr besteht, dass radioaktiver Müll in den normalen Abfallverwertungskreislauf eingespeist wird. So würden nicht nur zahlreiche MitarbeiterInnen der Abfallentsorgung mit erhöhten Strahlenwerten belastet werden, sondern auch die Allgemeinbevölkerung. Hausmülldeponien sind nicht adäquat für die Lagerung von radioaktiven Stoffen ausgelegt so könnten strahlende Partikel wie Cäsium, Tritium oder Strontium über viele Jahrzehnte ins Grundwasser und die Umgebung abgegeben werden. Zudem werden große Mengen des Mülls verbrannt, so dass auch eine erneute Freisetzung der radioaktiven Stoffe in die Atmosphäre droht. Man weiß heute, dass jede auch noch so geringe Menge an Strahlung mit einer Erhöhung des Krebsrisikos einhergeht und so sind staatliche Grenzwerte nur ein schwacher Trost für die Menschen, die in der Nähe von Mülldeponien leben, in denen strahlender Müll aus Fukushima gelagert oder verbrannt wird. Ein ähnliches Problem existiert derzeit auch in Deutschland, wo die strahlenden Abfälle der zurückgebauten Atomkraftwerke ebenfalls „freigemessen“ und anschließend in die normale Abfallverwertung eingespeist werden sollen. Die IPPNW setzt sich entschieden gegen diese Ausbreitung radioaktiver Materialien in der Umwelt ein.

TEPCO wants more help from Govt.

September 20, 2016

Panel to examine options for wrecked Fukushima plant

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/09/20/business/panel-examine-options-wrecked-fukushima-plant/#.V-DkJzVdeos>

Kyodo

A panel of experts will discuss reforms at Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc., including the costly plans to scrap its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, Industry minister Hiroshige Seko said Tuesday.

The costs of decommissioning the plant, ravaged by the 2011 triple meltdown, is **expected to far exceed the initial estimate of ¥2 trillion**, prompting the government to review its financial aid to the utility with the help of the private sector.

The government-appointed panel will meet for the first time in early October and draft proposals by year-end, Seko said, as Tepco plans to revise its business plan, compiled in 2014, possibly early next year. Members of the panel include Akio Mimura, head of the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and other senior officials of major business groups. Tepco President Naomi Hirose will also join as an observer.

The utility's business has been pressured by the **costs of cleaning up contaminated areas and compensating those affected by the accident.**

The **growing costs of scrapping the plant as well as increased competition in the sector** led the company to seek fresh government assistance in July.

Trying to dispel rumors about Fukushima food

September 21, 2016

'Farm inns' near Fukushima nuke plant see surge in guests

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160921/p2a/00m/0na/016000c>

NIHONMATSU, Fukushima -- The number of "farm inns" run by local residents here in the Towa district, dozens of kilometers from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, has steadily been increasing to accommodate a rising number of visitors and guests.

The farm inns are being run **to dispel groundless rumors about local farm products being tainted with radioactive substances** from the nuclear power station. Four farm inns opened in 2012, one year after the outbreak of the nuclear crisis, and there are currently 24 farm inns in the Towa district about 40 kilometers northwest of the nuclear complex. Two more farm inns are expected to open in the future. Guests of the inns can enjoy working on farms and cuisine using local ingredients so that they can feel assured of the safety of locally-produced products. The farm inns are gaining popularity and attracting **more than 1,000 guests a year**, as people visit and stay there to enjoy both lodging and local cuisine, **thinking that such activities will help disaster-stricken communities recover.**

The Towa district is a rural area **in the mountains**. The area's population has halved to about 6,500 over the last 50 years as it suffered from depopulation and the nuclear accident promoted local residents to stop farming.

The situation was such that local residents focused on farm inns. That's because demand for lodging facilities increased in the Towa district facing evacuation zones around the nuclear power plant as work to assess radiation levels and other radiation-related projects began in the evacuation districts. A non-profit organization comprised of local residents played a coordinating role and recruited farmers to run inns there. Most of the people who initially used the farm inns were researchers and administrative officers. But currently, many college students and company employees use them for training. A total of 1,106 people stayed at the inns in 2015.

On the evening of Sept. 8, about two dozen students of Tokyo-based Daito Bunka University stayed at six farm inns there for a seminar camp. The inns served their specialty dishes in an effort **to show the students that local farm products have been shipped after clearing radiation checks.**

The "Tanbo" farm inn run by Masatoshi Muto, a 65-year-old vegetable farmer, served home-made meals using special vegetables such as cucumbers and carrots. Male students said they liked the food because the vegetables were so fresh. Muto said he had felt depressed at times when he was told by some people that "we don't want to eat food from Fukushima." But he said, "I feel uplifted when I see our guests enjoy eating." Hironao Takahashi, a 19-year-old sophomore who stayed at the inn, said, "I've come to know that they check their products carefully before shipping them. From now on, I would like to see the foodstuff with my own eyes and judge without being influenced by rumors."

Tatsuhiko Ono, a 62-year-old vegetable farmer and a key figure in the group of farm inn operators, said, "Even if we show scientific data, we cannot easily persuade people about the safety of our products unless they come and visit production sites." The value of total vegetable shipments from the entire Towa district

remains about 80 percent of pre-disaster levels, he said. "We hope that people who visit our farm inns will send a message about the attractiveness of the Towa district."

Monju & the "structure of irresponsibility"

September 22, 2016

EDITORIAL: Scrap not only Monju but also 'structure of irresponsibility'

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201609220026.html>

In a long overdue move, the central government on Sept. 21 decided to review the Monju prototype fast-breeder nuclear reactor in Fukui Prefecture with an eye toward decommissioning.

Monju has remained mostly offline for more than two decades. Bringing it online would require hundreds of billions of yen more in safety and other measures.

It would be unpardonable to spend huge sums of additional taxpayers' money on the prototype reactor when calls for early commercialization of the technology is practically nonexistent.

The central government should tackle a mountain of unresolved problems, including providing explanations to host local governments, in steadily moving toward decommissioning Monju.

The 1 trillion yen (\$9.9 billion) spent on the Monju program has delivered meager achievements. Officials were too late in deciding to scrap the reactor.

Japan should bid farewell to the "structure of irresponsibility" that allowed the program to drag on.

The government set up a predecessor of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission and the Science and Technology Agency, now part of the education and science ministry, in 1956 to push the development of nuclear energy. In the same year, the government said in its first long-term plan: "A goal will be set for domestic production of breeder-type power reactors, mainly from the viewpoint of effective use of atomic fuel resources."

A fast-breeder reactor, which would have generated more plutonium than it burns, embodied a technology dreamed of by many nations of the world.

Monju falls in the second stage of the evolution process: from an experimental reactor to a prototype reactor to a demonstration reactor and to the final goal of a commercial reactor.

Construction began in earnest in 1985, and the first criticality was reached in 1994, but sodium coolant leaked in 1995.

Monju's operator had insisted there would be no sodium leaks, although similar accidents had occurred overseas. It tried to cover up or falsify facts to play down the damage after the leak, thereby losing confidence of society.

In the meantime, a number of other countries successively abandoned development of fast-breeder reactors, as the technological difficulties and the costliness became clearer.

When Monju was brought back online in 2010, its operator appeared to have been given an opportunity to bring forth research results. But a refueling apparatus fell into the reactor vessel soon afterward.

It was also revealed that safety maintenance checks had been skipped for as many as 10,000 pieces of equipment.

Despite the problems, Monju has been kept on “life support” at an annual maintenance cost of about 20 billion yen because outside bodies have failed to fulfill their function of conducting checks on the program. The Japan Atomic Energy Commission, relevant ministries and agencies, and researchers in the field of nuclear power formed a single community, whereas the national Diet, whose role includes debating budgets, would not touch on the matter.

This time around, the government held a meeting of relevant Cabinet ministers to come up with the decommissioning policy. The decision deserves to be called a step forward if political circles intend to handle the matter responsibly.

But many concerns linger. The government decided to stick with its nuclear fuel recycling program and set up a new council toward developing a new fast reactor in the aftermath of Monju’s decommissioning.

Such a plan runs the risk of following in Monju’s footsteps.

Nuclear power administration should be acceptable to broad layers of the public. Putting Monju’s decommissioning plan into practice and reviewing Japan’s entire nuclear fuel recycling program should be seen as key steps toward that goal.

Where is the truth?

September 24 2016

Canada activist found guilty of harassing scientists over Fukushima fallout

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/09/23/national/crime-legal/canada-activist-found-guilty-harassing-scientists-fukushima-fallout/#.V-Yv_DVdeos

by Alastair Wanklyn
Staff Writer

A Canadian environmental activist who waged a sustained online campaign against two prominent marine scientists was found guilty of criminal harassment by a court in Victoria, British Columbia, on Thursday. The court heard that Dana Durnford, 54, threatened violence against **Jay Cullen, of the University of Victoria, and Ken Buesseler, of Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts**, and accused them of underplaying the extent of damage to Pacific ecosystems from the 2011 Fukushima disaster.

Durnford was sentenced to three years’ probation.

“I expected and was pleased with the judge’s ruling,” Cullen said after the verdict. “Mr. Durnford, on many occasions, threatened physical violence against scientists and others who have focused their attention and expertise to better understand how the Fukushima nuclear disaster has affected the marine environment and human health. Such behavior is criminal.”

Buesseler also welcomed the ruling. Threatening violence is “never an appropriate response to scientific findings you might disagree with,” he said.

Durnford, a former professional diver, has a large online presence.

His unscripted videos, recorded in a mock television studio, present what he purports to be research that contradicts mainstream scientific findings.

He alleges collusion between the global scientific establishment and the nuclear industry over the dangers presented by the nuclear industry and, in particular, the Fukushima debacle.

Durnford, of Powell River, British Columbia, did not respond to phone calls and an email for comment on Friday.

In a video apparently recorded shortly before the trial began this week, he alluded to trouble meeting court-related costs.

“They bankrupted us in these court proceedings in order to silence us,” he told viewers.

Forget nuclear fuel cycle project

September 23, 2016

Editorial: Gov't should admit nuclear fuel cycle project has failed

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160923/p2a/00m/0na/013000c>

The government has decided to carry out a fundamental review of the fate of the Monju prototype fast-breeder nuclear reactor in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, operated by the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA), with an eye to eventually decommissioning the troubled reactor. The government will make a final decision on the matter by the end of this year after consulting with concerned local governments.

- **【Related】** Japan moves step closer to scrapping trouble-prone Monju reactor

Over 1 trillion yen in taxpayers' money has been invested in Monju. However, operations at the reactor have almost completely been suspended for more than 20 years because of a series of accidents and other problems. Hundreds of billions of yen would reportedly be needed to restart Monju. Still, there are no prospects that the operation of the reactor would produce any results. It is only natural, therefore, that the government intends to decommission the reactor. At the same time, the government's responsibility for repeatedly delaying a decision on the fate of the trouble-plagued reactor should be seriously called into question.

The government has promoted the nuclear fuel cycle project, in which plutonium extracted from spent nuclear fuel is mixed with uranium to produce mixed oxide fuel, or MOX fuel, to be used at nuclear reactors, as part of national policy. A fast-breeder reactor, which produces more plutonium than that consumed, is the core facility of the nuclear fuel cycle project along with a spent nuclear fuel reprocessing plant.

We cannot help but raise serious questions over a decision that the government made at a recent meeting of Cabinet ministers concerned with nuclear energy policy to continue the nuclear fuel cycle project and research and development of fast reactors, while moving toward decommissioning Monju.

There are numerous challenges to putting the nuclear fuel cycle into practical use from the viewpoints of technology, economic efficiency and security. The completion of a nuclear fuel reprocessing plant, under construction in the Aomori Prefecture village of Rokkasho, has been repeatedly postponed. Doesn't the government's latest decision reflect its true intention to scrap the Monju reactor -- the core facility in the nuclear fuel cycle project -- in a bid to deflect criticism against continuing the already failed project?

The government claims that plutonium extracted from spent nuclear fuel in the cycle project should be regarded as semi-domestically produced energy, and would contribute to energy security. However, continuing the nuclear fuel cycle project means that Japan would remain dependent on atomic power in the country's energy policy.

One of the lessons learned from the Fukushima nuclear crisis is that there are high risks involving a quake-prone country relying on nuclear power. Japan needs to phase out atomic power. The government should take the opportunity to decommission Monju and put an end to the nuclear fuel cycle project. Monju uses liquid sodium, which is flammable if exposed to air or water, as coolant. Its maintenance requires more advanced technology than conventional reactors that use water as a cooling agent. Monju has hardly been operated since a sodium leak accident in December 1995. Nevertheless, approximately 20 billion yen is spent on maintenance of the reactor each year.

It came to light that JAEA failed to inspect many parts of Monju, prompting the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) to advise the reactor's regulator, the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry, in November 2015 to replace the JAEA with another body as the operator of the reactor. In response, the ministry has proposed to set up a new entity to operate Monju with cooperation from the private sector including power companies. However, major utilities have no intention of playing a key role in operating such a body amid intensifying competition in the industry following deregulation of the power market.

Furthermore, the Monju reactor must meet the new regulatory standards, which the NRA set after the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, before being restarted. The government estimates that some 580 billion yen would be needed for work to remodel the reactor, such as reinforcement of the facility to make it quake-resistant. A huge amount of additional costs have also fueled calls for scrapping the reactor. After Monju is shut down, the focus will be on how to consume plutonium extracted by reprocessing spent nuclear fuel. Japan has already stockpiled about 48 metric tons of surplus plutonium both in the country and overseas, including that generated as a result of commissioning British and French entities to reprocess spent nuclear fuel. This is despite the fact that the Japanese government has repeatedly pledged to the international community that it will never possess surplus plutonium to prevent such a substance from being used by terrorists or converted to nuclear weapons.

The Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan had worked out a plan to use MOX fuel at conventional nuclear power plants and intended to introduce such fuel to 16 to 18 reactors across the country. However, the plan was scrapped after the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis. Currently, the No. 3 reactor at Shikoku Electric Power Co.'s Ikata plant is the only reactor using MOX fuel, and much of the surplus plutonium has not been used as planned.

The government intends to continue research and development of fast reactors in cooperation with a French organization at ASTRID, a new fast breeder that France is planning to build. However, there is no guarantee that the ASTRID project will progress smoothly.

In fact, the assessment of the nuclear fuel cycle project, which the government's Japan Atomic Energy Commission made following the outbreak of the nuclear disaster, shows it is more economically efficient to directly dispose of spent nuclear fuel than reprocessing such waste.

Japan, despite being a non-nuclear power, can reprocess spent nuclear fuel under the Japan-U.S. agreement on peaceful use of nuclear energy that went into force in 1988. The accord is set for renewal in 2018. It remains to be seen, however, as to how the next U.S. administration, to be launched following the November presidential race, will respond to the issue.

In the meantime, the biggest challenge to reviewing the nuclear fuel cycle project perhaps is how to deal with local bodies that have hosted relevant facilities.

Local governments that host Monju are urging the government to retain the prototype reactor. Aomori Prefecture, where the reprocessing plant is situated, has agreed that spent nuclear fuel would be brought into the facility on the assumption that the nuclear fuel cycle project is promoted. If the project was to be abandoned, Aomori Prefecture could end up being a nuclear waste dump site, but power companies cannot easily take over spent nuclear fuel, either.

The government should exercise wisdom to solve these problems rather than insisting on continuing the nuclear fuel cycle project.

Local agreement may be needed to restart Fukushima Daini plant

September 24, 2016

Japan mulls legislation requiring local government approval for restarting Fukushima No. 2 nuclear plant

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/09/24/national/japan-mulls-legislation-requiring-local-government-approval-restarting-fukushima-no-2-nuclear-plant/#.V-YueTVdeos>

JJI

The Japanese government is considering legislation to oblige Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. to obtain approval from local governments if it applies for restarting its Fukushima No. 2 nuclear power station, Jiji Press learned Friday.

The legislation is also expected to stipulate that the plant be decommissioned if Tepco fails to win such approval and is unable to submit an application for its restart within three years after the law takes effect, sources said.

It will be a special measure under the nuclear reactor regulation law, which does not require local government approval for restarting reactors.

The government aims to submit the legislation to the extraordinary session of the Diet that will be convened on Monday, the sources said.

All the No. 1 to No. 4 reactors at the Fukushima No. 2 plant have been offline since the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami led to a triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power station.

Although three of the four reactors at the No. 2 plant lost cooling functions temporarily in the 2011 disaster, they avoided severe accidents such as a core meltdown.

Tepco has not clarified what to do with the No. 2 plant. It is working on decommissioning the stricken No. 1 plant.

The Fukushima prefectural government and its assembly have been calling for scrapping the No. 2 plant. The legislation could force Tepco to decommission the No. 2 plant because it raises further hurdles for resuming operations.

The government has yet to decide on details of the legislation, including the scope of local governments whose approval would be necessary for reactor restarts, the sources said.

The government allows the restart of nuclear reactors that pass the Nuclear Regulation Authority's screening based on the stricter safety standards introduced after the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

But the government sees a need for taking special measures for the No. 2 plant because it is located near the No. 1 plant, which caused severe damage to Fukushima Prefecture, the sources said.

What happened to documents used for the 2012 NAHC report?

September 25, 2016

Records of Diet's Fukushima investigation still under wraps

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201609250019.html>

By AKIRA MINAMI/ Staff Writer

Five years after the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the Diet is still sitting on a trove of raw documents and testimonies of more than 1,100 individuals who were on the front lines during the crisis.

The cache was compiled by the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission, which released a report of its findings that totaled about 600 pages in July 2012.

The documents collected by that commission, including the testimonies of 1,167 individuals, have still not been released to the public more than four years after its disbandment.

Yasunori Sone, a political science professor at Tokyo's Keio University, said the documents should, in principle, be released to the public because the investigation was conducted by the Diet on behalf of the people.

"The Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission was the first established in the Diet with the authority to carry out a thorough investigation," Sone said. "Disclosure rules should be decided on quickly because it will serve as a precedent for future commissions."

However, the documents submitted to the commission by the central government as well as Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Fukushima plant, remain in storage at the National Diet Library, along with more than 900 hours of questioning of the 1,167 individuals, many of whom worked to bring the accident under control.

Some of the testimony was given on condition that it would not be released.

For that reason, after the commission disbanded, the rules and administration committees of the two chambers of the Diet were to have established rules for disclosing the commission records.

The commission had left behind a record of its investigation as well as the source of the documents it had accumulated because it felt that it would be helpful when the documents were eventually released.

"It will be possible to learn about the background to the nuclear accident from new reports or books that are written based on the documents," said Kiyoshi Kurokawa, a professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo, who chaired the commission. "A fundamental point to not repeating mistakes is to learn from one's past errors."

Discussions within the rules and administration committees were disrupted when then Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda dissolved the Lower House in November 2012 and called a snap election.

The December election brought the Liberal Democratic Party and its junior coalition partner, Komeito, back in control of government.

A multiparty group of lawmakers who were seeking to end dependence on nuclear energy asked that the rules and administration committees resume work on establishing disclosure rules. However, a subcommittee held one session that focused on presenting the opinions of members.

"Both the ruling and opposition parties are hesitant about releasing the documents because there is the possibility that they contain contents that are disadvantageous to the LDP, which had pushed nuclear energy, and the then Democratic Party of Japan, which had to deal with the nuclear accident," said a member of that multiparty group.

The disclosure of the documents is not the only area in which the Diet has been less than aggressive.

In its report, the commission included seven recommendations, including the establishment of **a new independent investigation committee**, made up mainly of experts from the private sector, to conduct further studies into unanswered questions about the accident.

However, the rules and administration committees have yet to discuss the possibility of establishing such an investigative committee.

The commission also recommended the establishment of special committees in both chambers of the Diet to oversee the nuclear regulatory structure.

In 2013, a Special Committee for Investigation of Nuclear Power Issues was established separately in the two chambers.

However, **those special committees have been turned into venues to promote nuclear energy.** For example, committee members who were originally from labor unions of the electric power companies or who represented districts where nuclear plants were based criticized the Nuclear Regulation Authority for its strict standards regarding the resumption of operations at nuclear plants.

In a similar manner, the special committees also asked for a review of the rule that limited nuclear plants to a maximum 40-year operating life.

Tomoko Abe, a Democratic Party member who serves as secretary-general of the multiparty group seeking zero nuclear power generation, said, **"Although there are some issues regarding the nuclear accident that have become clearer with the passage of time, the arena for looking into those issues has been closed off.** It is the responsibility of the legislative branch to set up a structure that will continue to examine the nuclear accident."

Integrating fuels units

September 29, 2016

Hitachi, Toshiba, Mitsubishi Heavy may integrate nuclear fuel units

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/09/29/business/hitachi-toshiba-mhi-eye-uniting-struggling-nuclear-fuel-businesses/#.V-z0m8ldeos>

Kyodo

Hitachi Ltd., Toshiba Corp. and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. are considering integrating their nuclear fuel businesses, sources said Thursday. The tie-up could come in the spring.

Their nuclear businesses have been in the doldrums since the 2011 meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, which led to most plants being kicked into shutdown.

Integrating the fuel units would reduce costs and is seen as bolstering their respective financial standings.

The units that would be merged are Nuclear Fuel Industries Ltd., in which Toshiba holds a majority stake through U.S. subsidiary Westinghouse Electric, the Japanese unit of Global Nuclear Fuel, a joint venture of Hitachi, Toshiba and General Electric, and Mitsubishi Nuclear Fuel Co., an affiliate of Mitsubishi Heavy.

The three companies are studying a range of options, including placing the nuclear fuel business units under a new holding company, the sources said.

Toshiba and Mitsubishi Heavy separately said while various options are under consideration, no decision has been made yet.

The government introduced tougher safety standards in the wake of the Fukushima crisis, and most nuclear reactors have remained idle since then.

The only ones currently on line — after they passed the new safety checks — are the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai plant and the No. 3 reactor at the Ikata plant, which is operated by Shikoku Electric Power Co.

Still, Japan's nuclear industry is not alone in experiencing difficulties. Nuclear plant construction has slowed globally, shrinking profits at companies like French nuclear energy giant Areva.

Although the government maintains that Japan needs nuclear power, it is likely to be forced to look at what can be done to keep the sector afloat at a time when it is burning through cash.

TEPCO wants to expand and diversify its business

September 29, 2016

TEPCO taps IoT to expand business

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20160929_03/

Tokyo Electric Power Company has decided to team up with another Japanese firm to **develop a low-cost thermal power generation system using "Internet of Things" technology.**

TEPCO is planning to work with Mitsubishi Hitachi Power Systems, a company formed in 2014 that integrated the thermal power generation operations of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Hitachi.

The companies plan to jointly develop a system utilizing IoT, which connects various appliances through the Internet. It would collect and analyze data from sensors attached to turbines, boilers, and other equipment and automatically control the operation in the most efficient way. It is expected to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The companies plan to test the new system at a plant in the Philippines. They hope to eventually make inroads into power plants in other Southeast Asian countries, where demand for power is growing.

TEPCO is struggling to decommission its crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. Compensation for the 2011 nuclear accident is burdening its finances. The utility is also facing competition after deregulation ended TEPCO's monopoly in the power-retail market in Tokyo and neighboring areas.

The utility plans to **diversify its business** through various tie-ups.

New firms to pay for decommissioning?

September 28, 2016

New power firms may have to pay some costs for nuke reactor decommissioning

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160928/p2a/00m/0na/015000c>

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry has begun discussions on a plan to have new smaller electric power companies shoulder part of the costs of decommissioning nuclear reactors, officials said.

- **【Related】** Gov't may shift nuke accident, reactor decommissioning costs onto new power suppliers
- **【Related】** News Navigator: How does the liberalized electricity market work?
- **【Related】** Editorial: Make consumer benefits focal point of electricity market deregulation

This is due to fears that nine major power companies that operate nuclear plants and the Japan Atomic Power Co. alone cannot fully foot the costs of decommissioning their reactors in the future.

The government intends to draw a conclusion on the plan by the end of the year, but the move could spark criticism that nuclear plant operators would be given preferential treatment.

The industry ministry convened the first meeting of an advisory panel on electric power system reform on Sept. 27 to discuss challenges to the liberalization of the power market. At the meeting, the ministry proposed that the costs of decommissioning nuclear reactors be added to power grid usage fees that new power supplies pay to major utilities.

If new power companies add the costs of reactor decommissioning to electricity charges, consumers will be required to shoulder such additional costs.

The industry ministry has worked out the plan, which could be viewed as a relief measure for major utilities, because the business environment surrounding these companies has worsened following the liberalization of the power market and criticism of nuclear power in the wake of the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The costs of decommissioning a nuclear reactor are about 10 times that for a thermal power generator.

The operators of nuclear plants use part of their income from electricity charges to save enough money to dismantle their reactors in the future.

However, if the liberalization of the electricity market progresses, a growing number of consumers could switch to new power suppliers and the prices of electric power could further decline because of intensifying competition, making it more difficult for major utilities to secure enough funds to decommission their nuclear reactors.

The suspension of operations at most atomic power stations is also adversely affecting major power companies.

Power companies could secure enough funds to decommission nuclear reactors if they saved money on the assumption that the rate of utilizing such plants stood at 76 percent and that the lifespan of each reactor was 40 years.

However, the suspension of operations at many nuclear plants has been prolonged and power companies are being forced to decommission some reactors earlier than planned, as a result of which they have been unable to secure enough funds.

Under these circumstances, major power companies are insisting that new power companies should shoulder part of the decommissioning costs.

"Customers of new electric power firms previously used power generated by nuclear plants operated by major utilities. We would like these customers to shoulder a fair share of the costs for reactor decommissioning," an official of one major power company said.

Major power suppliers have asked the executive branch of the government and ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) legislators to consider their requests.

The government has shown consideration to major power companies that are being forced to shoulder the expenses of changes in Japan's energy policy -- such as market liberalization and stepped up safety regulations -- following the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis in 2011.

A working group within an advisory committee to the industry ministry called on the government in March 2015 to consider a system that would take advantage of the pricing system for power transmission and distribution to help power companies cover decommissioning costs.

However, new power suppliers are opposed to the move. "It'd be unreasonable for new electric power companies that don't have nuclear plants to shoulder the costs of those facilities," said an executive of a Kansai-based new power supplier.

Ennet Corp. President and CEO Tsutomu Takeda told the panel on Sept. 27, "We can't convince our customers unless you (the government and major power companies) explain how much it will cost to decommission a reactor."

An executive of a new power company based in the Tokyo metropolitan area said, "It'd be difficult to gain understanding from our customers who have switched from major power companies following the outbreak of the nuclear disaster."

In response, the industry ministry will consider setting up a market in which power is traded and encouraging major utilities to supply less expensive power generated by nuclear power and coal-fired thermal power plants to the market. The ministry is aiming to allow new power companies to procure less expensive power from the power transaction market in a bid to persuade them to shoulder part of the costs of decommissioning nuclear reactors.

Under the old power supply system in which major utilities enjoyed regional monopolies, power companies were able to secure funds to build and decommission nuclear plants solely by using electricity charges, allowing them to take advantage of low fuel costs for nuclear plants.

With the liberalization of the power market, however, nuclear power plants have lost their edge.

The government has postponed discussions on whether to go ahead with the construction of new nuclear power plants.

The system proposed lately could give preferential treatment to nuclear plants and encourage power companies to build more atomic power stations.

In-depth debate needs to be held on whether nuclear plants will be consistent with the policy of liberalizing the power market.

Making newcomers pay: Is that fair?

September 29, 2016

EDITORIAL: Costs of reactor scrapping really nothing to do with new players

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201609290032.html>

An expert panel set up by the industry ministry to figure out ways to fund the cost of scrapping nuclear reactors is set to consider an idea that seems to have no chance of being accepted by consumers. The group of experts advising the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry held its first meeting Sept. 27. The members will weigh a proposal to force new players in the power supply market to shoulder a portion of the costs of decommissioning nuclear reactors operated by established electric utilities. The new electricity providers were created out of power market deregulation and operate no nuclear power plants. They use the transmission grids controlled by the big utilities when they sell their customers electricity they generate or buy from others.

The proposal would raise the charges for using the grids to force the new power providers to pay part of the costs of reactor decommissioning. This would result in a portion of the costs being passed on to the customers of the smaller power firms through higher electricity bills.

The scope of the power market liberalization was expanded this spring to households.

Japan's power market used to be tightly regulated, with all households required to buy electricity from one of the large utilities monopolizing the regional markets. As a result, most Japanese consumers have been using electricity generated by nuclear power plants.

So, the proponents of the proposal say, even consumers who have started buying power from new providers should shoulder part of the costs of shutting down and dismantling reactors. This is an argument that gives a privileged status to nuclear power generation.

Apply this argument to other essential public utilities like running water and gas.

Imagine this: You subscribe to the services of a new gas supplier after moving to a new location and then receive a bill from the previous supplier for the costs of disposing of your now unused equipment. Would you agree to pay the bill?

The aim of power deregulation is to promote competition in the market by encouraging new entrants to challenge established utilities. This also allows consumers to choose their power supplies on the basis of lower prices, better environmental performances and other reasons.

If newcomers are required to foot a part of the bill for decommissioning reactors, the conditions in the market for both competition among players and the choices by consumers will be distorted.

Why has such an unreasonable idea been put on the table, in the first place?

The costs of decommissioning reactors operated by major utilities have been shouldered by their customers through higher electricity rates.

But the system to pass on decommissioning costs to consumers through rate hikes will have to be scrapped sooner or later due to market deregulation.

The proposal is aimed at securing a source of funds to finance the costly process by creating a system to raise the fees newcomers pay for using the power grids.

As they are losing customers to new power suppliers due to market liberalization, established utilities are obviously concerned about their financial future.

As they discuss the issue, the members of the expert panel will take account of the plans to dismantle the reactors at the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Decommissioning an ordinary reactor costs around 80 billion yen (\$789 million) even if it is a large one. But the process will be far costlier for the reactors at the Fukushima plant that melted down in 2011. The extra costs for the reactors have been estimated in the range of several to more than a dozen trillion yen per unit. So the Fukushima decommissioning is a totally different story.

In a July news conference, Tokyo Electric Power Co., which operated the crippled nuclear plant, asked for support.

It has been decided that another expert panel will discuss aid to the utility for the work along with plans to restructure its organization and operations.

The first order of business for the panel is to make rigorous estimates of the costs involved.

The proposed system to force new power suppliers to bear part of the costs of decommissioning reactors could provide financial support to nuclear power generation by big utilities. At the same time, it could serve as a disincentive for many newcomers' investment in renewable energy sources.

That is an unacceptable situation.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Sept. 29

Extra 83 billion dollar bill for Fukushima

September 21, 2016

Public to get new \$83-billion bill for Fukushima, reactor expenses

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201609210045.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The government plans to make the public pay an additional 8.3 trillion yen (about \$83 billion) to decommission reactors at the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant and provide compensation for evacuees of the 2011 disaster, sources said.

The public's money will also be used for the future decommissioning of reactors at other nuclear plants, they said on Sept. 20.

The burden will also affect families that switched from nuclear power generating utilities to new electric power companies after the liberalization of the electricity retail market for families in April this year.

Major utilities that operate nuclear plants are, in principle, required to secure funds through electricity charges to decommission their reactors. Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, is no exception.

Under the reforms of the power industry, the new electric power companies, which do not operate nuclear plants, were exempt from shouldering any burden related to nuclear power.

But the industry ministry wants to change that arrangement.

Even people in the ruling coalition and the government are criticizing the plan as an attempt to ease the burden of utilities that had long held regional monopolies.

"The plan will damage the basic idea of the reforms," said Taro Kono, former chairman of the National Public Safety Commission and a lawmaker of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party.

To realize the plan, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry aims to submit revisions to the Electricity Business Law to the next year's ordinary Diet session.

A government-approved organization is procuring funds from major electric power companies to assist in the eventual decommissioning of the reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

However, TEPCO has asked the government for additional support because more money will be needed for the lengthy operation.

The costs to decommission the reactors at the Fukushima plant are expected to soar to 6 trillion yen from the current estimate of 2 trillion yen, according to in-house documents of the industry ministry.

The ministry also needs an additional 3 trillion yen to cover compensation payments for evacuees from the 2011 nuclear disaster and 1.3 trillion yen to decommission reactors of other nuclear plants in the future, according to the documents.

To get the new electric power companies to pay part of the 8.3 trillion yen, the ministry plans to increase power grid "usage fees," which are paid to major electric power companies.

"It is necessary to collect costs from all of the people fairly," said a high-ranking official of the ministry.

Some of the consumers switched to new electric power companies because they did not want to continue using electricity produced by nuclear power plants.

But the ministry official pointed out that those consumers had been using nuclear-generated electricity until March.

New electric power companies, which do not have their own power grids, have concluded contracts with only 2 percent of all households in Japan.

The ministry is concerned that if more families switch from nuclear plant operators to the new companies, it could become difficult to secure sufficient funds to cover reactor decommissioning costs.

Under the ministry's plan, a standard family of three in areas covered by TEPCO will be required to pay an additional 180 yen every month. In areas covered by other major electric power companies, the corresponding figure will be about 60 yen.

(This article was written by Naoki Kazama and Yoichi Yonetani.)

Why don't you totally eliminate nukes?

October 3, 2016

Japan Political Pulse: A helping hand following radiation misfortune

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161003/p2a/00m/0na/021000c>

Recently former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, 74, was seen talking to 62-year-old Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Their encounter was recorded on a photo page of the Sept. 29 issue of the weekly magazine Shukan Bunshun.

- **【Fukushima & Nuclear Power】**

The scene was Aoyama Funeral Hall in Tokyo, where they had attended the Sept. 15 funeral of former Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Secretary-General Koichi Kato and were waiting for their cars to arrive. For about 90 seconds the "master and disciple" stood side by side. Below are the details of Koizumi's comments and the prime minister's reaction, which didn't appear in Shukan Bunshun.

Koizumi: "Why don't you totally eliminate nuclear power plants?"

Abe: (Faint smile, bow)

Koizumi: "Having zero nuclear power plants is cheaper. Why don't you understand such a simple thing? It's all lies, what the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is saying. The things advocates of nuclear power plants are saying -- they're all lies. Don't be fooled."

Abe: (Wry smile, bows again, and with head kept low heads to official vehicle)

Koizumi is currently pouring his efforts into a fund to support those who say they were affected by radiation during "Operation Tomodachi," a U.S. Armed Forces operation to support Japan in the wake of the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

Over 400 soldiers from the USS Ronald Regan aircraft carrier and accompanying ships complained of ill-health after helping in rescue efforts following their urgent dispatch to the seas off Fukushima Prefecture in the wake of the earthquake, tsunami and ensuing meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Some of them are said to have died from causes including leukemia.

The aircraft carrier fleet worked intermittently in a radiation plume from the stricken power plant between March 13 and 17, 2011. After returning home from Japan, a stream of soldiers developed ailments including brain tumors and thyroid cancer. The nuclear plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), and the Japanese and U.S. governments acknowledged that they had been exposed to low-level radiation, but do not accept a causal relationship between exposure and their illnesses.

Koizumi learned that some soldiers had left the military at a young age, had no insurance and couldn't pay their medical fees. It was in May this year that the former prime minister traveled to the United States and directly inquired about their circumstances.

Former soldiers earlier filed a lawsuit against parties including TEPCO, and oral arguments over whether jurisdiction of the case should lie in Japan or the United States were heard in an appeals court in California on Sept. 1. At the time, a Japanese government adviser is said to have supported an agent for TEPCO, stating that radiation exposure is the responsibility of the U.S. military.

Koizumi, who read a note on the hearing (carried in the Sept. 9 issue of the magazine *Shukan Kinyobi*), responded immediately.

"This is embarrassing. They were relief efforts for Japan, right? The American judge is said to have been appalled," he was quoted as saying.

On July 5, Koizumi appeared in a news conference with figures including former Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa, 78, and Tsuyoshi Yoshiwara, 61, an adviser at The Johnan Shinkin Bank, to announce the start of fundraising activities to help the U.S. soldiers. Koizumi himself approached the Japan Business Federation (Keidanren) but was turned away on the grounds that TEPCO is a member of the federation. Reinforcements have nevertheless appeared on the funding front. Japanese architect Tadao Ando, 75, posed the following question: "Mr. Koizumi, will you come to Osaka and give a lecture? I'll assemble 1,000 people. With a fee of 10,000 yen per person, that'll bring in 10 million yen."

When Koizumi appeared at the lecture in August, 1,300 people turned up. The same style of lecture is due to be held in Tokyo on Nov. 16, organized by the head of a group of managers of small- and medium-sized enterprises. Additionally, the president of a solar power generation company provided 10 million yen. Through these efforts, the total has climbed to 50 million yen. Koizumi apparently hopes to amass 100 million yen by next spring.

The connection between radiation exposure and the development of illness is delicate. There's a possibility of developing cancer, but there are doubts about whether a person would suddenly die, experts say.

On Sept. 7, Koizumi spoke at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan in Tokyo's Yurakucho district. He was asked if it was responsible to talk about damage from radiation exposure without presenting scientific evidence.

Below is the gist of his reply:

"I'm no longer a member of the government. I'm a civilian. There are people who are actually suffering. It's common sense for me to support them."

Fundraising and service instead of criticism; denial of the perception of saying, "Radiation exposure is the responsibility of the U.S. military" to protect nuclear power policies ... I support this form of common sense from our former prime minister. (By Takao Yamada, Special Senior Writer)

Two titles, one article: Govt. will be involved longer than planned

October 2, 2016

Government likely to retain grip on beleaguered Tepco

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/10/02/business/japanese-government-considers-longer-support-tepco/#.V_IJ7Mldeos

Kyodo

The government might stay involved in the management of Tokyo Electric longer than planned, given the ballooning costs of scrapping the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, sources close to the matter said. The delay in reactivating the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture, the main pillar of the utility's reconstruction plan, is another factor prompting the government rethink, the sources said Saturday. It had planned to end state control next April.

The government is leading the business operations of struggling Tokyo Electric Power Co. Holdings, which is facing huge compensation payments and other problems from the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, because it has acquired 50.1 percent of the firm's voting rights via the state-backed Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp.

Some bureaucrats at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry have been dispatched to Tepco. Tepco said in a business plan in 2014 that it would turn itself from a "temporarily publicly managed" company to a self-managed one starting next April.

The industry ministry will hold the first panel meeting Wednesday to discuss additional government support for the utility.

Tepco faces swelling costs for decommissioning the Fukushima No. 1 plant and compensating those affected beyond the previously estimated ¥11 trillion (\$108 billion). Two reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant are under prolonged safety examinations by nuclear regulators.

The prospect of restarting the giant plant is also being complicated by impending changes in the leadership of the Niigata Prefectural Government, which hosts it.

To restart the plant, approval from the Niigata governor is needed.

Hirohiko Izumida, the current governor, was cautious about restarting the reactors because of Tepco's failure to fully examine the cause of the Fukushima disaster. He withdrew his bid for re-election at the end of August.

Of the four candidates running for the Oct. 16 election, former Nagaoka Mayor Tamio Mori, 67, backed by the Liberal Democratic Party-Komeito ruling coalition, and Ryuichi Yoneyama, a 49-year-old doctor, are leading the race. Yoneyama has said he will follow Izumida's stance and is opposed to any discussion of restarts unless the Fukushima disaster is thoroughly explained.

Tepco's new business plan, including the revised schedule for ending state control, is expected to be compiled next January.

October 2, 2016

Japanese government considers longer support for Tepco

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/10/02/business/japanese-government-considers-longer-support-tepco/#.V_DKt8ldeos

Kyodo

The Japanese government is considering staying involved in Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s business management longer than currently planned, given larger-than-expected costs for scrapping the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, sources close to the matter said Saturday.

A delay in the process for reactivating the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture, a main pillar of the utility's reconstruction plan, is another factor prompting the government to think it would be too soon to end state control next April as initially planned, they said.

The government is leading business operations of the utility, which is facing huge compensation payments and other problems from the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, as it has acquired 50.1 percent of the firm's voting rights through the state-backed Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp.

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India-Japan to sign nuclear pact

October 1, 2016

Abe, Modi look to ink civil nuclear pact at November meeting

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/10/01/national/japan-india-look-ink-civil-nuclear-pact-november-meeting/#.V--dgcldeos>

Kyodo

A meeting between Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Indian counterpart Narendra Modi is set to be held in Tokyo in mid-November, with a civil nuclear cooperation pact likely to be signed, according to a source close to bilateral ties.

The pact would pave the way for Japan to export nuclear power plant technology to the fast-growing Asian economy. But it would be Japan's first signing of a civil nuclear cooperation pact with a country that has not joined the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

To ensure the nuclear technology transferred to India, considered a de facto nuclear weapons state, will not be used for military purposes, the pact will include a clause to halt Japanese cooperation with India if New Delhi conducts a nuclear test, the source said. Abe and Modi reached a basic agreement on the pact during a meeting last December.

One of the key issues in the negotiations has been how Japan, as the only country to have suffered nuclear bombings, can ensure India will not resume nuclear tests. Plutonium made by reprocessing spent fuel in a nuclear power plant can be used to make nuclear weapons.

Earlier, other diplomatic sources said that under a provision in the pact, Japan will permit Indian power producers to reprocess spent fuel at designated facilities on the condition the country accepts comprehensive inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Such “advanced consent” will be withdrawn, however, if threats to national security or issues regarding the protection of nuclear materials arise, the sources said.

India has accepted the Japanese stipulation that nuclear tests be regarded as such a threat, the sources said.

Following the signing of the treaty, the Japanese government will seek swift approval from the Diet to promote Japanese corporate participation in building nuclear power plants in India.

Aside from nuclear cooperation, Abe wants to strengthen coordination with India in maritime security as China continues to elevate its activities in the East and South China seas and the Indian Ocean.

The leaders are expected to confirm that they will deepen defense cooperation, such as through joint maritime exercises involving Japan, India and the United States, and affirm the importance of the rule of law.

Abe is also likely to convey Japan’s concerns about the increase in Chinese activity around the Senkaku Islands, which are administered by Japan but claimed by China and Taiwan.

It will be Modi’s first visit to Japan since August 2014.

Ikata new mayor steamroll anti-nuclear rival

October 3, 2016

Nuclear-power advocate elected Ikata mayor in landslide

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/10/03/national/nuclear-power-advocate-elected-ikata-mayor-landslide/#.V_IKaMldeos

Kyodo, Staff Report

An advocate of atomic power plants has steamrolled his anti-nuclear rival in the Ikata, Ehime Prefecture, mayoral election, garnering more than seven times as many votes as his opponent.

Sunday’s election followed the resignation of the former mayor, who had backed the recent restart of the Ikata nuclear power plant’s No. 3 reactor.

The previous mayor resigned in August after being hospitalized.

New Mayor Kiyohiko Takakado, a 58-year-old former member of the prefectural assembly, had the backing of the former mayor and all 16 members of the town’s assembly. During the campaign he vowed to continue the policies of his predecessor, Kazuhiko Yamashika.

His rival, 59-year-old Naohito Nishii of the Japanese Communist Party, had urged the town not remain dependent on nuclear power. He was backed by the JCP's local chapter as well as anti-nuclear citizens' groups.

Nishii was trounced in the election, garnering just 765 votes to Takakado's 5,451 in a race with 71.45 percent voter turnout.

"I will completely carry out safety measures for the nuclear power plant," Takakado said after his victory was assured. "I will also tackle the issues of the town's aging population and depopulation."

Shikoku Electric Power Co. reactivated the Ikata plant's No. 3 reactor in August. It was the first time in more than five years that the reactor was switched on since it was suspended for a routine safety inspection in April 2011.

It is the only reactor in Japan currently burning mixed uranium-plutonium oxide (MOX) fuel. It was the nation's fifth reactor that was rebooted under the stricter safety regulations introduced in July 2013 based on the 2011 catastrophe at the Fukushima No. 1 plant operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co. Holdings Inc. Besides Ikata, the only nuclear plant currently in operation in Japan is Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Sendai facility in Kagoshima Prefecture.

Yamashita, the former mayor, resigned Aug. 29 after being hospitalized in April.

The Ehime Shimbun reported at the time that he had suffered a stroke that resulted in him having problems speaking.

Niigata gubernatorial election & nuke safety

October 3, 2016

EDITORIAL: Niigata governor candidates must debate nuclear safety in earnest

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201610030020.html>

Official campaigning for the upcoming Niigata gubernatorial election started on Sept. 29, setting the stage for debate on the safety of a nuclear power plant in the prefecture.

The issue of the safety of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant has gained even more traction as Niigata Governor Hirohiko Izumida, who has been cautious about approving Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s plan to restart the idled plant, has announced he will not seek re-election.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority's safety inspections of the offline reactors, which the electric utility is seeking to bring back online, are in their final stages.

The election inevitably revolves around whether the new governor should allow TEPCO to proceed with the plan if the NRA gives the green light.

Four independent rookie candidates are running for the poll. But the race is effectively shaping up as a one-on-one battle between Tamio Mori, the former mayor of the city of Nagaoka in the prefecture supported by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and its junior coalition partner, Komeito, and Ryuichi Yoneyama, a doctor backed by the Japanese Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party and the People's Life Party & Taro Yamamoto and Friends.

Some 460,000 people live within 30 kilometers of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant. The candidates should announce their proposals to protect the safety of these residents during campaigning for the Oct. 16 election.

Plans to ensure the safe and smooth evacuations of residents living around nuclear power plants when a serious accident occurs are described as the last safety net for nuclear power plants.

The governors of prefectures where nuclear plants are located, as the chiefs of the local governments, have to take on a huge responsibility for the safety of local residents.

Izumida has insisted that he wouldn't start discussions on any plan to restart a reactor in his prefecture unless the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, also operated by TEPCO, is fully reviewed and explained.

He has undertaken his own investigation of the catastrophic accident by setting up an expert committee within the prefectural government.

Izumida has also criticized the fact that the new nuclear safety standards introduced after the 2011 accident don't require plans for evacuating local residents. He has been calling on the central government to improve the standards.

In 2002, it was revealed that TEPCO had covered up damage at its nuclear power plants including the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant. The magnitude-6.8 Niigata Chuetsu-oki offshore earthquake, which rocked Niigata Prefecture in July 2007, triggered a fire and resulted in small leaks of radiation at the plant.

Many people in the prefecture along the Sea of Japan remain deeply concerned about the safety of the nuclear plant and distrustful of TEPCO.

Izumida has responded to the concerns by raising issues about nuclear safety.

In the gubernatorial race, Yoneyama has cast himself as the candidate to carry on Izumida's legacy.

"I will take over the (nuclear power) policy of Izumida and won't start discussions on any reactor restart unless the Fukushima disaster is fully reviewed and explained," he has said.

Mori, who has been critical of Izumida's political approach, has taken a different stance toward the issue. "I will put the top priority on the safety of people in the prefecture and rigorously examine the conclusion the NRA reaches (in its safety inspection)," he has said.

The difference in position on the issue between the two candidates is likely to be a key factor for Niigata voters at the polls.

The governors of prefectures hosting nuclear power plants have the "right to consent" to a plan to restart a reactor. But this is only a conventional right based on safety agreements with the electric utilities involved and has no legal basis.

When new Kagoshima Governor Satoshi Mitazono, who took office in July, asked Kyushu Electric Power Co. to suspend the operation of its Sendai nuclear power plant in the prefecture, he was criticized for undermining the central government's energy policy.

But the criticism is off the mark. When a nuclear accident occurs, the local communities around the plant suffer the most.

To allay anxiety among residents in areas around nuclear plants, the local governments concerned, through negotiations with the operators of the plants, have established systems and rights that allow them to become involved in safety efforts.

The Fukushima disaster has only increased anxiety among residents around nuclear power plants.

The chief of the local government in an area home to a nuclear plant has every right to refuse to entrust the safety of local residents entirely to the utility and the central government.

Niigata Prefecture is not an area where TEPCO supplies power, but it has been bearing the risks involved in the operation of a massive nuclear power plant that generates electricity for the Tokyo metropolitan area.

The gubernatorial election will be a choice that directly affects the central government's energy policy. We are eager to see the candidates engaged in meaningful debate on the safety of the nuclear plant based on a national perspective.

Should new power suppliers be made to pay for decommissioning?

October 4, 2016

Editorial: Making new power suppliers pay for reactor decommissioning costs unacceptable

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161004/p2a/00m/0na/014000c>

The government is discussing a plan to shift part of the costs for decommissioning nuclear reactors onto new power companies that have forayed into the electricity retail market following its full liberalization this past spring.

- **【Related】** Gov't may shift nuke accident, reactor decommissioning costs onto new power suppliers
- **【Related】** New power firms may have to pay some costs for nuke reactor decommissioning
- **【Related】** News Navigator: How does the liberalized electricity market work?

The controversial scheme allows major utilities that operate nuclear power plants to pass part of those costs onto new entrants, which will then be tacked onto electricity bills. Such a proposal can only distort fair competition in the liberalized market.

Meanwhile, there is no time to waste in efforts to decommission nuclear reactors in order to achieve the goal of phasing out nuclear power. The government should discuss the cost-sharing issue while drawing a road map toward a nuclear power phase-out. Just easily passing those costs onto new entrants makes no sense.

An expert panel to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is tasked with discussing the plan to partially shift the decommissioning costs to new power suppliers, and the government is poised to draw a conclusion by the end of the year.

It is estimated to cost around 80 billion yen to dismantle a major reactor. Major power companies have been accumulating funds to that end over a 40-year period, but they will still need to save a total of some 1.2 trillion yen to complete the task.

Major utilities have heretofore amassed those funds by tacking part of the costs onto electricity bills. However, revenues from those channels could dwindle following the liberalization of the electricity

market in April, where new entrants are luring consumers with cheaper bills. The plan to shift part of the decommissioning costs onto new entrants was devised to address this financial challenge.

The government insists that consumers who have switched to new power companies should also bear decommissioning costs because they had previously used power generated at major utilities' nuclear plants. However, consumers have already shouldered their fair share of the burden through the electricity bills onto which part of those costs have been tacked. It is unfair for them to have to share yet additional burdens.

It would be understandable if new power companies are made to shoulder part of the decommissioning costs when they purchase power generated by major utilities. The government is apparently trying to fend off criticism by creating a new market where new suppliers can procure power generated at nuclear plants at cheaper prices.

However, there are consumers who are willing to use electricity generated at non-nuclear power plants or by other means. The liberalization of the power market is catering to their needs by allowing them to freely choose which utility to contract. This may also be why the government has instructed power companies to announce their energy source ratio. It would be impossible to gain public understanding if they were to be charged additional costs across the board.

The government has asserted that nuclear power costs less than other power generation methods, including the decommissioning costs. However, the move to shift part of decommissioning costs onto new entrants has raised questions about the legitimacy of that claim.

The government has also begun discussions over the costs for decommissioning the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. While Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the plant, is planning to shoulder 2 trillion yen of the burden, the overall cost is certain to largely top that amount. There is a proposal to ask new power suppliers operating in TEPCO's service areas to shoulder part of the decommissioning expenses, but it is irrational to pass on the snowballing costs stemming from the nuclear disaster to those new companies. More careful discussions are called for over the matter.

In any case, the issue of how to deal with the colossal amount of decommissioning costs is unavoidable. The government should squarely deliberate whether and how the public should bear the costs after setting forth a clear goal for a phase-out of nuclear power.

Monju stills raises many fundamental questions

October 4, 2016

Nuclear cash cow Monju now a liability for residents as plant faces ax

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/10/04/national/nuclear-cash-cow-monju-now-liability-residents-plant-faces-ax/#.V_PmH8ldeos

by Eric Johnston
Staff Writer

KYOTO – In February 1983, Mayor Koichi Takagi of Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, spoke to residents in the town of Shiga, Ishikawa Prefecture, who were hoping the town would be chosen as the site for a new nuclear power plant.

Tsuruga already hosted two conventional reactors and, just a couple weeks before Takagi's visit to Shiga, preparations began for the construction of a new fast-breeder reactor called Monju, named after the bodhisattva of wisdom. An old Japanese saying goes: "out of the counsel of three comes the wisdom of Monju," meaning that, by putting their heads together, even those of ordinary intelligence can think up an idea as good as one from Monju.

Takagi, who also served as head of a nationwide group of mayors whose towns and villages hosted nuclear plants, had some sage advice for his audience. He said nuclear plants were a cash cow and that the media just sensationalized reports of mishaps.

Thirty-three years later, the Monju plant appears heading for the scrap heap. Its history has been one of controversy and scandals, including a 1995 sodium leak and fire, and subsequent cover-up attempt. Last month, the government decided on an overhaul of the Monju project, looking to decommission the idle facility.

Tsuruga is unhappy that the cash cow, which meant billions of yen to the local economy over the decades, is drying up, while the central government faces questions about the entire future of Japan's nuclear fuel cycle program.

Monju began as a policy decision made nearly a half century ago in reaction to what was seen as a worldwide problem in the conventional nuclear industry, a scarcity of uranium for conventional nuclear plants.

"According to the industry vision of the middle of the 1970s, plutonium-fueled breeder reactors were supposed to replace uranium-fueled light water reactors in order to save what was thought to be scarce natural uranium resources in a world with rapidly expanding nuclear power programs," said Mycle Schneider, a Canada-based nuclear energy consultant.

"The International Atomic Energy Agency then forecasted over 4,000 conventional reactors in the world for the year 2000. In reality, only one-tenth of the plants was built, more uranium resources were identified, and the uranium price plunged."

Decommissioning Monju is expected to take three decades, once it finally gets under way. But a host of fundamental questions remain about not only Monju but also Japan's nuclear fuel-recycling program, in which Monju was to have played a critical role.

On a practical level, these questions begin with how much the entire decommissioning process will cost. In 2012, the Science, Education, and Technology Ministry estimated that it would require at least ¥300 billion.

But that estimate does not include how much the central government might have to spend in Tsuruga and Fukui Prefecture over the coming years on various forms of public works projects in exchange for smooth local political cooperation in scrapping Monju. Over ¥1 trillion has already been spent on the plant.

Fukui residents and politicians are sure to raise strong objections if the central government concludes the only viable option for the tons of high-level radioactive waste generated by Monju's decommissioning process is to store at least part of it within the prefecture.

With three conventional nuclear reactors in the prefecture scheduled to be scrapped by midcentury, Gov. Issei Ishikawa has warned he will not tolerate having Fukui serve as a nuclear garbage dump. He has demanded that waste generated from decommissioning be disposed of outside the prefecture.

Adding Monju to the list of reactors to be decommissioned means seeking further local cooperation. That may only come after guarantees of more central government support, in the form of tax money, to help Fukui bear the burden of the decommissioning.

Meanwhile, question marks are cast over the remainder of Japan's nuclear fuel recycling program, especially the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant in Aomori Prefecture. However, experts say it is unlikely to get the ax anytime soon.

“Terminating Rokkasho and plutonium policy remains a long way off due to the vested interests and impacts this would have on nuclear power. But the Monju decision is a major step along that path,” said Shaun Burnie, senior nuclear specialist with Greenpeace Germany, who follows Japan's nuclear power policy closely.

“In immediate terms, (Monju's decommissioning) will not impact the use of MOX fuel in light water reactors. That's more affected by the lack of operating reactors with Ikata No. 3 being the only MOX-fueled reactor operating; Rokkasho justification will be based on using MOX fuel in LWR's most particularly at Oma.”

The Oma nuclear power plant in Aomori Prefecture, which is scheduled to start operating in fiscal 2024, will run 100 percent on MOX fuel.

For many in Fukui who have long opposed Monju, there are also concerns about not shutting down the entire nuclear fuel recycling program and suspicions that despite the government's policy of not possessing, manufacturing or introducing nuclear weapons, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government wants to keep that option open, as a diplomatic tool at least, via the fuel recycling program.

“Japan has about 48 tons of plutonium stockpiled domestically and in Europe, and we need to be careful. **The plutonium could be converted into nuclear weapons,** and we need to make sure it's not used for this purpose,” said Tetsuen Nakajima, abbot of Myotsu-ji, a Shingon Omuro temple in Wakasa Bay in Fukui Prefecture, and a long-time anti-nuclear activist.

Such suspicions remain because Abe has in the past said he believes the possession of “small” nuclear weapons would not violate the Constitution. Members of his Cabinet, notably Defense Minister Tomomi Inada, who is from Fukui, have also argued previously for a national debate on the matter.

Finally, experts question what the government's intentions are for a new committee on fast-breeder reactors it plans to form by year-end. The new committee will be centered in the Ministry for Economy, Trade and Industry, and the Education, Science and Technology Ministry, and will include nuclear power-related government agencies and representatives from the utilities and firms in the sector.

Keiji Kobayashi, a former nuclear physics instructor and fast-breeder expert at Kyoto University Research Reactor Institute, is a longtime opponent of Monju. He says Japan might not be done entirely with fast-breeder reactors.

“Plans for the committee include clarifying a goal on the development of a demonstration reactor and creating a detailed road (map) to achieving that goal,” he said. “Does that mean another reactor will be built? There are unanswered questions about what will happen to not only Monju but the fast-breeder reactor program in general.”

Kobayashi was referring to the possibility of Japan participating in France's Advanced Sodium Technological Reactor for Industrial Demonstration (ASTRID) program to develop next generation fast-breeder reactor technology via research at a demonstration reactor for research purposes.

Burnie of Greenpeace Germany says ASTRID is still in the planning stage, over budget and behind schedule, and that the prospects for it being built in France are dim. In addition, while **Japan's METI backs the idea of a demonstration reactor with French cooperation,** the education ministry is reportedly more

skeptical, noting that France closed its Super Phoenix fast breeder reactor in 1997 after numerous accidents, including, like Monju, sodium leaks.

If nukes are so cheap, why ask Govt. to pick up tab?

October 4, 2016

Perspectives: Asking gov't to pick up Fukushima disaster tab is irresponsible

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161004/p2a/00m/0na/018000c>

The Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan (FEPC) has informally requested that the government cover the additional costs for compensation and decontamination work in the wake of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. **Electric power companies, however, have to date explained that nuclear power is cheap. The stance of asking the government to pick up the tab cannot avoid being branded as irresponsible.**

Nuclear power companies are unhappy about the situation. They say that nuclear power was promoted as a government policy, but in the event of an accident the operators are the ones who have to take responsibility. Other major utilities besides Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) take the view that it is unreasonable to lay the responsibility for the disaster at TEPCO's plant onto them.

But major power companies have raked in huge profits by operating nuclear power plants. It cannot be denied that they have relied on the myth of nuclear safety and had been lax in adopting measures to cope with a potential disaster. While they may not have expected the cost of compensation and decontamination following the Fukushima disaster to swell to such a large amount, it is nevertheless irrational to lay the financial burden on the government's shoulders. If the government takes on the responsibility, it will eventually come out of taxpayers' pockets.

While the government initially puts up the funds through the Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp., the final mechanism is for power companies to cover the cost. The FEPC's move goes against the spirit of this system.

Calls to limit Govt's support to TEPCO

October 5, 2016

Calls grow to curb further govt. support to TEPCO

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161005_32/

Members of a panel looking at how to cover costs from the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi accident say government support to the operator should be limited.

Economic leaders and academic experts attended the first meeting on Wednesday of a committee set up by the industry ministry to discuss decommissioning and compensation costs.

Officials said the government has earmarked about 87 billion dollars for compensation and decontamination work, and that operator Tokyo Electric Power Company has set aside about 19 billion dollars to scrap the crippled reactors.

But they said these funds could fall well short of the amount that will be needed. Many participants said the utility must bear the increased financial burden through business restructuring and management reforms to curb additional government support.

TEPCO President Naomi Hirose, who took part in the meeting as an observer, warned that his company could become insolvent if it is forced to post the ballooning decommissioning costs as a debt.

He argued that a special accounting rule should be created to avoid a possible insolvency.

Before the next meeting is held, the government plans to show how much the cost of decommissioning the reactors is projected to grow.

Hirose told reporters after the meeting that his company should be the first to foot the bill, and that the firm will consider what should be done to absorb the cost.

Decontamination and compensation costs to reach 8 trillion yen

October 7, 2016

Federation estimates Fukushima nuke plant cleanup costs, redress may rise to ¥8 trillion

Kyodo

An industry group has estimated costs for decontamination work at the disaster-struck Fukushima nuclear plant and compensation for nuclear damage to be around ¥8 trillion (\$77.10 billion) more than the current official projection, a source said Thursday.

The Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan, which consists of the country's 10 electric power companies, has informally asked Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government to use state funds to cover the extra costs, the source also said.

The costs are supposed to be covered by the utilities, including Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc., operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, where three reactors melted down in the aftermath of the March 2011 quake-tsunami disaster. The government is cautious about using taxpayer money to deal with the issue, the source said.

Under the current estimate, compensation payments are projected to total ¥5.4 trillion, while decontamination costs are forecast to reach ¥2.5 trillion.

Tepco and other nuclear power plant operators have paid contributions for compensation payments to a state-backed fund. As for decontamination costs, the fund will seek to retrieve that money by selling Tepco shares that it owns.

540 billion yen to restart Monju?

October 8, 2016

Resuming Monju reactor operations may cost over ¥540 billion

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/10/08/national/resuming-monju-reactor-operations-may-cost-%c2%a5540-billion/#.V_iqNcldeos

JJI

The cost of resuming operations at Japan's trouble-plagued Monju prototype fast-breeder nuclear reactor is estimated to top ¥540 billion (\$5.2 billion), the science ministry says.

The estimate was presented Friday at a meeting of government and private-sector officials who discussed the fate of the reactor in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture.

More than ¥1 trillion (\$9.7 billion) has been spent on Monju, but it has only operated for a total of 250 days in the past 20 years due to a series of problems, including a leak of sodium coolant.

The government is considering options, including decommissioning the reactor. It plans to make a decision by the end of this year.

The ministry said the costs may far exceed ¥540 billion if the safety screening process by regulators is lengthy. The estimate does not include expenses for decommissioning the reactor.

The science ministry wants Monju to be maintained while the industry ministry is opposed to the idea.

Opposition to keeping Monju in place is expected to grow if a massive amount of money is needed for it to go back online.

The meeting brought together science minister Hirokazu Matsuno and industry minister Hiroshige Seko as well as nuclear industry executives, including Satoru Katsuno, chairman of the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan.

Nukes: What of security and transparency?

October 11, 2016

Toyama tritium researcher's data targeted in cyberattacks

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/10/11/national/crime-legal/toyama-tritium-researchers-data-targeted-cyberattacks/#.V_zN0sldeos

JJI

Research data and personal information may have been stolen from a personal computer belonging to a researcher of tritium, a radioactive isotope of hydrogen, at the University of Toyama's Hydrogen Isotope Research Center, the university said.

In addition to research data, hackers may have stolen personal information such as email addresses on some 1,500 people, including other researchers, the school said Monday.

Most of the possibly affected research data were those that have already been published or were slated to be published, and no highly confidential information was compromised, it said.

According to the university, **two staff members of the center received emails containing a virus in November 2015 and a PC of one of them, a member of the teaching staff, was infected. The PC continued questionable communications with an outside party for about six months.**

The center learned of the virus infection in June following an alert from an outside organization.

The university, based in the city of Toyama, briefed the education ministry on the cyberattacks in mid-June. Earlier in October, it started informing researchers who may have been affected.

The center conducts research on hydrogen, deuterium and tritium, including their use for energy.

Tritium is regarded as a candidate for fuel in nuclear fusion reactors, and is also one of the contaminants in the water building up at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

October 11, 2016

Fears of nuclear data leak after university's research unit hacked

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161011/p2a/00m/0na/010000c>

The University of Toyama's Hydrogen Isotope Research Center came under cyber-attack and information on research results related to the Fukushima nuclear crisis, as well as personal information on nearly 1,500 researchers and others, is feared to have leaked, it has been learned.

A spokesperson for the center, known for its research on tritium that can be used as fuel for a nuclear fusion reactor, explained, "The research results have already been published and there was no sensitive research data." The research results include those on methods of disposing of contaminated water from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

According to officials of the University of Toyama, two researchers' personal computers came under attack in November 2015. A part-time researcher specializing in tritium science and technology had their computer infected with a virus after opening a file attached to an email sent in by someone under the disguise of a friend. Up until June this year, at least 1,000 compressed files were created by remote control and a total of four rounds of massive communications were carried out. The hacking came to light after an external organization alerted the university.

The investigation by the university found that **most of the 59,318 files stored in the computers had apparently leaked out. Yet the university has not been able to confirm the content of 17,612 files among all of the files in question,** officials said.

The university reported the incident to the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry and Toyama Prefectural Police **in June this year** when the data leak came to light. **But the university had not informed relevant organizations about the problem until Oct. 7.** Takayuki Abe, head of the Hydrogen Isotope Research Center, said, "It took time to closely examine the situation."

TEPCO and the Tokyo blackout

October 13, 2016

TEPCO launching emergency power cable inspections

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161013_32/

Tokyo Electric Power Company says it will launch emergency inspections of the same type of power cable that caught fire on Wednesday.

The fire resulted in a massive blackout in parts of Tokyo.

Officials from TEPCO told reporters on Thursday that the same type of cable that ignited at its underground facility near Tokyo had been laid over a distance of 1,416 kilometers as of the end of 2012.

They said that more than 70 percent of this cable, stretching 1,008 kilometers, was at least 35 years old.

That includes sections between western parts of Tokyo and Niiza City in Saitama Prefecture where the fire broke out.

Cable aged 50 years or older accounted for a distance of 40 kilometers.

TEPCO officials said that the cable consists of a copper wire and multiple layers of paper, impregnated with oil, wrapping the copper core. The paper serves as an insulator to prevent short circuits.

They said damage to the insulator could result in power leakage and fire, and that oil used in the paper could then catch on fire and spread to other cables.

They said the emergency inspections to check the high-voltage transmission lines for possible oil leakages and degradation will be complete by Friday.

The industry ministry has instructed other power companies across the country to launch emergency inspections of their underground cables.

TEPCO chief offers apology over Tokyo blackout

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161013_19/

The president of Tokyo Electric Power Company has apologized for an extensive blackout that struck Tokyo on Wednesday.

President Naomi Hirose visited the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and met with Minister Hiroshige Seko on Thursday.

Power transmission cables at a TEPCO facility just outside Tokyo caught fire and caused the blackout that affected more than 580,000 households.

Hirose said the incident caused trouble to a great number of people. He announced that his company will launch emergency inspections of cables.

Seko pointed out that TEPCO failed to hold a news conference in a timely fashion and called for better communication from the company.

He also said his ministry finds it problematic that the power company only visually inspected the cables once a year even though they were in use for more than 35 years.

The minister called on TEPCO to thoroughly investigate the cause of the fire and to submit a report on preventive measures.

The TEPCO president pledged to get to the bottom of the incident and make every effort to fully disclose the outcome of the investigation.

TEPCO yet to determine cause of cable fire

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161013_30/

Japanese police and firefighters have suspended their investigation into what caused Wednesday's fire at a power transmission facility near Tokyo, which led to a blackout in parts of the capital.

The fire at an unmanned underground facility housing power cables caused a temporary electricity outage affecting over 580,000 houses in Tokyo on Wednesday afternoon.

Its operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, suspects that aging insulation materials used for the 35-year-old cables may have caused the fire. TEPCO said no problems were reported with the cables during an annual check in June.

Police and fire department personnel, accompanied by industry ministry and utility officials, entered the

6-meter-deep concrete facility on Thursday afternoon to start an onsite investigation.

They stopped the day's inspections later in the afternoon, as the heat and water inside hampered their work.

The temperature of the concrete walls was as high as 60 degrees Celsius, forcing investigators to leave every half an hour or so while the facility was cooled down. The cables were soaked in water in many places.

The inspectors said they will pump the water out and wait for the temperature to come down before resuming their investigation.

TEPCO to determine cause of cable fire

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161013_03/

The widespread power outage in Tokyo on Wednesday has been linked to a fire involving underground cables installed 35 years ago. Those copper wires were wrapped in layers of paper seeped in oil to prevent electrical leakage.

More than 580-thousand households and offices lost power temporarily.

The cause of the fire is not known, but Tokyo Electric Power Company says it is investigating in order to prevent a recurrence.

Utility officials say when insulation covering a cable sustains damage, the resulting leakage of electricity can lead to a fire.

They add the cables in question are visually inspected once a year, and the last check was performed in June.

October 12, 2016

Blackout in Tokyo after fire damages cables

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161012_35/

A blackout hit parts of Tokyo on Wednesday afternoon following a fire involving underground power cables. Tokyo Electric Power Company attributed the power outage to the fire, and said 586,000 households were affected.

The fire broke out at one of TEPCO's underground facilities in Niiza City, Saitama Prefecture, near Tokyo.

The utility said underground cables were damaged, and that it is investigating how the fire started.

The company finished rerouting the power supply in about an hour.

The fire was almost extinguished about 4 hours later.

No injuries have been reported.

Government offices in central Tokyo were affected due to the power failure. The Tokyo High Court and District Court were without power for about 30 minutes and officials had to reschedule some trials.

Traffic lights were out at about 200 locations, and police officers were deployed to control traffic.

The power outage also disrupted train services in Tokyo, and left some people trapped in elevators.

New lawsuit against TEPCO

October 12n, 2016

Family of Fukushima woman who killed herself to sue TEPCO

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161012/p2a/00m/0na/006000c>

FUKUSHIMA -- Two family members of a woman in her 80s who killed herself two years after the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis are planning to file a lawsuit with the Fukushima District Court against nuclear plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), demanding about 62 million yen in damages over her death, it has been learned.

The family members will argue that the woman ended her own life because she was forced to evacuate from her home in the Fukushima Prefecture village of Iitate in the wake of the nuclear accident, sources close to the bereaved family say.

According to a lawyer for the bereaved family, the woman and her family took shelter in a housing facility rented by the Fukushima Prefectural Government in April 2011 -- a month after the outbreak of the nuclear disaster -- because the central government designated the Iitate village as an evacuation zone. The woman tended to stay holed up in her home and developed what appeared to be symptoms of depression due to stress from living away from home, the lawyer said. When her husband died in August 2012, she sat in front of a family Buddhist altar and said things like "I want to go to where he (her deceased husband) is soon." On March 26, 2013, she hanged herself in her home.

The woman's daughter said, "If she had not been forced to evacuate, she wouldn't have killed herself." Meanwhile, officials of TEPCO's public relations department declined to comment on the matter.

Govt may have to submit withheld documents on 3/11

October 14, 2016

Judges may order gov't to submit redacted report in lawsuit over Fukushima disaster

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161014/p2a/00m/0na/005000c>

A judge presiding at a trial over the Fukushima nuclear crisis said the judges in charge will decide by the end of this year on whether to order the government to submit some of its investigation committee's reports on the disaster that have been withheld.

Presiding Judge Akihiko Otake at the Tokyo District Court made the remark on Oct. 13 during an oral proceeding of the suit filed by shareholders of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the crippled nuclear plant, to clarify the responsibility of former TEPCO board members over the disaster. Otake also said the judges in charge will conduct an in camera review on other documents, part of which has been blacked out before they were disclosed, to deem whether the measure is appropriate. Specifically, the judges will examine documents recording statements by the now deceased Masao Yoshida, who headed the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant at the time of the outbreak of the disaster in March 2011, and those by two officials of the then Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency. The documents were disclosed after the names of individuals and some other information were blacked out. **The court said it has already ordered the Cabinet Office to submit the documents with the blacked-out parts unveiled.** The Cabinet Office has reportedly responded that it intends to comply with the order by the end of this week.

Only Fukushima apples

October 16, 2016

Fukushima apples to be used during World Cocktail Championships in bid to repair tarnished reputation

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/10/16/national/fukushima-apples-used-world-cocktail-championships-bid-repair-tarnished-reputation/#.WANUI8ldeos>

Fukushima Minpo

More than five years after the Fukushima nuclear disaster, efforts by local farmers to regain consumer trust in their produce are finally paying off, with apples grown in the city of Fukushima chosen to be used in the annual World Cocktail Championships, which kicks off on Tuesday in Tokyo. During the contest, which will run through Thursday at the Imperial Hotel, Fukushima-grown apples will be used in the fruit-cutting event scheduled for Wednesday. **Several varieties of fruit will be used in the competition, but for apples, only those from Fukushima will be used.**

The planned appearance of apples from the disaster-hit prefecture is due to a joint effort by the Fukushima Fruit Thanks Project, a group of fruit farmers from the northern region of the prefecture and Yoshikazu Suda, a bartender in Tokyo's Ginza district who also hails from the prefecture. Suda, who runs the Ginza Zenith bar, is from the city of Date. Since the triple-meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, Suda has been working in cooperation with the farmers group to promote produce from the area.

As an executive director of the Nippon Bartenders Association and a director of a Ginza bar association, Suda saw the upcoming world championships as a great way to help promote fruit from the prefecture, which have experienced poor sales due to ongoing fears over radiation contamination.

Knowing the superior quality of Fukushima-grown fruit, Suda pitched the use of apples grown in the city of Fukushima for the competition.

"I'd be happy if using apples this time would be one way to help the reconstruction of my hometown," Suda said.

During the competition, apples grown by Chusaku Anzai, who operates a fruit farm in the city of Fukushima, will be used.

"I want to convey the greatness of Fukushima fruit to bartenders from around the world," said Anzai, 67, who is also vice chair of the farmers group.

To prepare for shipping, Anzai meticulously checked the condition of each apple at his farm earlier this month.

Some 500 bartenders from 53 countries will gather in Tokyo to take part in the championships, which will be held in Japan for the first time in 20 years.

Fukushima Mayor Kaoru Kobayashi has high hopes for the event and sees it as a chance to tout Fukushima as one of the nation's top fruit producers.

"It'll be a great opportunity to show the charm of Fukushima," Kobayashi said.

This section, appearing every third Monday, focuses on topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Oct. 5.

Decommissioning means big money. Taxpayers beware!

October 15, 2016

Fukui poised to benefit from decision to scrap Monju

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/10/15/national/fukui-poised-benefit-decision-scrap-monju/#.WAJdL8ldeos>

by Eric Johnston

Staff Writer

Big money pull a million strings Big money hold the prize

Big money weave a mighty web

Big money draw the flies

— Rush, "The Big Money"

Last month's announcement that the Monju experimental fast-breeder reactor in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, would likely be decommissioned was an acknowledgement of what had been obvious for

decades. Namely, that Monju was too fraught with technical and political problems to have ever stood a chance of success.

For Kansai, the decision brought a feeling of relief among those concerned about a plutonium-producing plant in their backyard, but a feeling of “now what?” among everyone else. No political leader in Osaka, Kyoto, Nara or Kobe either wistfully eulogized or passionately protested the recommendation that Monju, which has cost more than ¥1 trillion, be scrapped. In Fukui, however, it was a different story.

For more than four decades, Fukui’s leaders have finessed the art of extracting (extorting?) as much money from Tokyo as possible in exchange for cooperation in continuing not only Monju but also 13 commercial nuclear reactors, a concentration of nuclear power plants said to be the densest in the world.

Massive amounts of tax money were funneled into the prefecture by the Liberal Democratic Party for all sorts of uses. Some were noble (construction of modern train stations, schools, hospitals and social welfare facilities). Some were corrupt (propaganda museums that played down the risks of nuclear power, all expense-paid “study” tours to Europe’s nuclear reactor towns for local residents that included sightseeing trips to Paris).

Nobody really knows how much money, directly and indirectly, went to Fukui and Tsuruga over the decades for “bearing the burden of Monju.” Unofficial guesses put the figure in the billions of yen. But what has residents in Kansai, and elsewhere, concerned is how much it will cost them, in the form of future government payoffs to Fukui, to be rid of Monju.

The prefecture certainly has friends in high places looking out for its interests. Defense Minister Tomomi Inada, a favorite of Shinzo Abe, represents Fukui’s 1st district. That’s the one without nuclear power plants, but she’s very close to those in Fukui who support them. Then there’s Tsuyoshi Takagi, who served as reconstruction minister. He’s from Tsuruga and represents Fukui’s 2nd district in the Lower House, an area that hosts those 13 commercial nuclear reactors. In short, **Fukui has powerful allies who will work hard to ensure all manner of new funding flows to the prefecture and to Tsuruga over the coming decades. Making matters better for Fukui but worse for taxpayers elsewhere, three commercial reactors will be decommissioned over the next few decades.** You can be sure Fukui politicians from the governor on down are drawing up a long wish-list of pork barrel projects they will demand the central government, as well operator Kansai Electric Power Co., fork out in exchange for consenting to each reactor’s decommissioning plans — plans that might include disposing high-level radioactive waste generated by decommissioning in Fukui, over the objections of residents.

In short, **decommissioning means big money for Fukui in the years ahead in the form of subsidies, jobs and service-industry income. And not just at Monju, where the basic cost was recently estimated at ¥540 billion.**

With predictions it might cost ¥8 trillion to scrap the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, and perhaps a dozen commercial reactors probably heading for the scrap heap in the next decade, Japan has entered the “age of nuclear power decommissioning.”

There’s big money involved that will draw a swarm of flies, especially in towns and prefectures hosting the power plants. Taxpayers elsewhere, therefore, will need to be especially vigilant and handy with the flyswatters and insect repellent.

View from Osaka is a monthly column that examines the latest news from a Kansai perspective.

TEPCO shares down after Yoneyama's election

October 16, 2016

Tepco shares slump after anti-nuclear novice wins Japan election

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-nuclear-election-idUSKBN12G0HM>

By Kentaro Hamada | NIIGATA, Japan

Shares in Tokyo Electric Power (9501.T) fell 8 percent on Monday after an anti-nuclear candidate won an upset victory in a Japanese regional election, in a blow to its attempts to restart the world's biggest atomic power station and a challenge to the government's energy policy.

The election of Ryuichi Yoneyama, 49, a doctor-lawyer who has never held office, is a setback for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's energy policy, which relies on rebooting reactors that once met about 30 percent of the nation's needs. All but two are shut down in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Reviving the seven-reactor giant, with capacity of 8 gigawatts, is key to saving Tepco, which was brought low by the Fukushima explosions and meltdowns, and then the repeated admissions of cover-ups and safety lapses after the world's worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986.

Yoneyama won the vote on Sunday after a campaign dominated by concerns over the future of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa power station and nuclear safety, beating Tamio Mori, 67, who was backed by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and initially favored for an easy victory.

"As I have promised all of you, under current circumstances where we can't protect your lives and your way of life, I declare clearly that I can't approve a restart," Yoneyama told supporters at his campaign headquarters.

Tepco shares were down by 7.4 percent at 385 yen at 0100 GMT (09:00 p.m. EDT) after falling further earlier. The Nikkei 225 was up by 0.5 percent and other utilities were mixed.

Yoneyama had more than 500,000 votes to about 430,000 for Mori with 93 percent of the vote counted in the region on the Japan Sea coast, public broadcaster NHK said.

Mori, a former construction ministry bureaucrat, apologized to his supporters for failing to win the election.

Yoneyama, who had run unsuccessfully for office four times, promised to continue the policy of the outgoing governor who had long thwarted the ambitions of Tepco, as the company supplying about a third of Japan's electricity is known, to restart the plant.

As the race tightened, the election became a litmus test for nuclear safety and put Abe's energy policy and Tepco's handling of Fukushima back under the spotlight.

"The talk was of Kashiwazaki-Kariwa, but I think the result will affect nuclear restarts across the country," said Shigeaki Koga, a former trade and industry ministry official turned critic of nuclear restarts and the Abe administration.

Koga told Reuters it was important that Yoneyama join forces with another newly elected governor skeptical of nuclear restarts, Satoshi Mitazono of Kagoshima Prefecture in southern Japan. "Without strong support from others, it won't be easy to take on Tepco," he said.

TROUBLES

Tepco spokesman Tatsuhiro Yamagishi said the company couldn't comment on the choice of Niigata governor but respected the vote and would strive to apply the lessons of the Fukushima disaster to its management of Kashiwazaki-Kariwa.

The government wants to restart units that pass safety checks, also promoting renewables and burning more coal and natural gas.

Only two of Japan's 42 reactors are running more than five years after Fukushima, but the Niigata plant's troubles go back further.

Several reactors at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa have been out of action since an earthquake in 2007 caused radiation leaks and fires in a disaster that prefigured the Fukushima calamity and Tepco's bungled response.

Niigata voters opposed restarting the plant by 73 percent to 27 percent, according to an NHK exit poll. Yoneyama, who has worked as a radiological researcher, said on the campaign trail that Tepco didn't have the means to prevent Niigata children from getting thyroid cancer in a nuclear accident, as he said had happened in Fukushima. He said the company didn't have a solid evacuation plan.

The LDP's Mori, meanwhile, was forced to tone down his support for restarting the plant as the race tightened, media said, insisting safety was the top priority for Kashiwazaki-Kariwa, while promoting the use of natural gas and solar power in Niigata.

(Reporting by Kentaro Hamada; Writing by Aaron Sheldrick; Editing by William Mallard and Ros Russell)

Niigata governor's election threatens restart

October 17, 2016

Niigata election a setback for restarting Japan's biggest nuclear power plant

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/10/17/national/politics-diplomacy/setback-operator-worlds-largest-atomic-plant-anti-nuclear-doctor-elected-niigata-governor/#.WAS1Ccldeot>

Reuters, Kyodo, Bloomberg

NIIGATA – Sunday's victory by an anti-nuclear activist in the Niigata gubernatorial election is a setback for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's energy policy.

Ryuichi Yoneyama, 49, defeated the candidate endorsed by Abe's Liberal Democratic Party. Former construction ministry bureaucrat Tamio Mori, 67, was expected until the last moment to cruise to victory. Yoneyama, a doctor and lawyer, has never held office.

The campaign was dominated by concerns over the future of the world's biggest nuclear power station, the seven-reactor Kashiwazaki-Kariwa complex in Niigata Prefecture.

Currently, only two reactors across Japan are operating in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, and Abe has pushed hard for restarts.

"Under current circumstances where we can't protect the lives and the way of life of citizens in the prefecture, I can't approve a restart," Yoneyama told reporters Monday.

Supported by the Japanese Communist Party and two other small parties, Yoneyama secured close to 530,000 votes. Mori trailed with 465,000.

The focus will now be how Yoneyama will be able to cooperate with municipalities and the central government in creating evacuation plans for nuclear disasters. These will be key before restarts can take place.

Abe, meanwhile, told a Diet committee that he will respect the choice of Niigata and that he will cooperate with the new governor.

Shares in Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc., which operates the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa reactors, fell 8 percent Monday.

The complex has a capacity of 8 gigawatts. Its revival is key to saving Tepco, which was brought low by the Fukushima crisis and then repeated admissions of cover-ups and safety lapses.

“Senior managers at Tepco have made it clear that restarting the Kashiwazaki reactors is fundamentally important to restoring their finances,” Tom O’Sullivan, founder of Tokyo-based consultant Mathyos, said by email. “There now has to be significant uncertainty over restarting those reactors.”

Yoneyama’s victory came after Tepco President Naomi Hirose highlighted the utility’s financial vulnerability this month. He said it may face insolvency if it were to recognize the cost of decommissioning the crippled Fukushima No. 1 plant.

Tepco has said that resuming operations for just one of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa reactors would boost its profit by about ¥10 billion a month.

This was Yoneyama’s fifth attempt at public office, and the first time he was successful.

During the campaign he promised to continue the policy of the outgoing governor, who had long thwarted the ambitions of Tepco to restart the plant. Tepco supplies about a third of Japan’s electricity.

When the race tightened, the election became a litmus test for nuclear safety and put Abe’s energy policy and Tepco’s handling of Fukushima back under the spotlight.

“The talk was of Kashiwazaki-Kariwa, but I think the result will affect nuclear restarts across the country,” said Shigeaki Koga, a former trade and industry ministry official who is a critic of nuclear restarts and the Abe administration.

Koga said it will be important for Yoneyama to join forces with another newly elected governor skeptical of nuclear restarts, Satoshi Mitazono of Kagoshima Prefecture.

“Without strong support from others, it won’t be easy to take on Tepco,” he said.

The government wants to restart nuclear plants that pass safety checks while also promoting renewables and burning more coal and natural gas.

All of Japan’s reactors were eventually taken offline after Fukushima, but the Niigata plant’s troubles go back further.

Several reactors at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa have been out of action since an earthquake in 2007 caused radiation leaks and fires in a disaster that prefigured the Fukushima calamity and Tepco’s bungled response.

Yoneyama, who has worked as a radiological researcher, said on the campaign trail that Tepco lacks the means to prevent Niigata children from getting thyroid cancer in a nuclear accident, as he said happened in Fukushima. He said the company did not have a solid evacuation plan.

The LDP’s Mori, meanwhile, was forced to tone down his support for restarting the plant as the race tightened, insisting safety was the top priority for Kashiwazaki-Kariwa, while promoting the use of natural gas and solar power in Niigata.

People affected by the Fukushima crisis welcomed the election result, while operators of nuclear power-related businesses expressed concern.

Some evacuees of the 2011 crisis, including a 57-year-old man living in temporary housing in the city of Fukushima, said they hope the voices of the anti-nuclear camp will be reflected in Yoneyama’s policies.

“I don’t want another nuclear plant accident,” he said. “No nuclear plant should be restarted.”

Kotaro Nagai, 67, who operates a guest house in Kagoshima Prefecture, home to the Sendai nuclear plant, however, said the financial boon for hosting reactors is the key factor behind his support for restarts.

“There are many people who have benefited financially from nuclear power plants,” Nagai said. “A restart is a matter of life and death for us.”

Upset in Niigata pushing LDP to review nuclear energy policy

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

October 17, 2016 at 14:45 JST

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201610170029.html>

An opposition-backed candidate's victory in the Niigata gubernatorial election threw the Abe administration into a state of shock over the possible consequences to its nuclear energy policy and its standing on the national level.

Niigata Governor-elect Ryuichi Yoneyama has taken a cautious stance on restarting the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in the prefecture, the key issue in the gubernatorial election north of Tokyo. The ruling coalition parties of the Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito thought they had a sure winner in Tamio Mori, a former Nagaoka mayor, before the official campaign period started.

But the voters' rejection of the coalition-backed candidate means the Abe administration will have to review its energy policy.

"Our side lost in an election in which the opposition parties took an anti-nuclear stance," a senior government official said. "That will naturally have an effect on the central government's energy policy." The defeat of Mori, however, could have repercussions beyond just energy policy.

"There will be an effect on national politics in general, above and beyond nuclear energy policy, because this will give the opposition parties additional momentum," a high-ranking LDP official said on Oct. 16. The ruling coalition and proponents of nuclear power saw a great opportunity when Hirohiko Izumida, who had long opposed restarting the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, announced he would not run for re-election.

After Yoneyama entered the race and said he would continue the cautious stance taken by Izumida, LDP executives went to Niigata to campaign on behalf of Mori.

After such efforts by the ruling party failed, one pro-nuclear energy LDP official said about restarting the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, "We will have to take a wait-and-see approach for the time being."

Yoneyama's victory also throws a monkey wrench into plans of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry to help Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, to return to a more stable corporate footing.

TEPCO has been hampered by the huge costs associated with cleaning up after the 2011 disaster at its Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

Economy ministry officials had preconditioned their TEPCO rehabilitation plan on a resumption of operations at some of the seven reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant.

Although a prefectural governor does not have the legal authority to order utilities to start or suspend operations at a nuclear plant, the common practice until now has been for utilities to obtain the consent of the local government before resuming operations.

With Yoneyama having clearly stated his reluctance toward such a resumption, TEPCO faces a much higher hurdle in its attempt to reboot the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant.

"We will persistently try to gain the understanding of the new governor, but it might be difficult to resume operations over the next four years," a high-ranking economy ministry official said.

Nuclear foe Ryuichi Yoneyama elected Niigata governor, threatening Tepco reactor restarts

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/10/17/national/politics-diplomacy/anti-nuclear-candidate-yoneyama-leading-niigata-gubernatorial-election/#.WAS1Xcldeos>

Kyodo, Reuters

NIIGATA – An anti-nuclear candidate was elected governor of Niigata on Sunday, dealing a potential blow to Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s attempts to restart the world's biggest nuclear power station.

The winner, Ryuichi Yoneyama, 49, is a doctor and lawyer who has never held office and was backed mostly by left-wing parties.

The campaign was dominated by concerns over the future of the massive Kashiwazaki-Kariwa power station and nuclear safety more than five years after the Fukushima crisis.

Yoneyama defeated former Nagaoka Mayor Tamio Mori, 67, who was backed by the pro-nuclear Liberal Democratic Party.

Yoneyama gathered more than 528,000 votes, about 60,000 more than Mori. Voter turnout was 53.05 percent, up significantly from the 43.95 percent in the previous gubernatorial election in 2012.

"It's really regrettable. We will take the judgment of voters very seriously," said Keiji Furuya, a Lower House member who served as head of Mori's campaign office.

Yoneyama promised to continue the policy of the departing governor, who had long thwarted Tepco's ambitions to restart the plant.

Reviving the seven-reactor giant, with capacity of 8 gigawatts, is key to saving the utility, which was battered by the Fukushima catastrophe of March 2011 and then the repeated admissions of coverups and safety lapses.

Tepco is vital to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's energy policy, which relies on rebooting more of the reactors that once provided about 30 percent of the nation's electricity needs.

Govt should take election results seriously

October 17, 2016

Editorial: Gov't, TEPCO should take Niigata gubernatorial election results seriously

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161017/p2a/00m/0na/009000c>

A candidate who is cautious about restarting idled nuclear power plants won the Oct. 16 Niigata gubernatorial election, defeating a rival backed by the ruling coalition. The government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) should take seriously the outcome of the election, in

which the pros and cons of reactivating the utility's atomic power station in the prefecture was a key point of contention.

- **【Related】** Anti-nuclear candidate wins Niigata governor race
- **【Related】** Niigata governor-elect calls for Fukushima nuclear crisis investigation
- **【Related】** TEPCO suffers blow with anti-nuclear candidate's win in Niigata governor race

Ryuichi Yoneyama, 49, supported by the opposition Japanese Communist Party, Liberal Party and Social Democratic Party, beat former Nagaoka Mayor Tamio Mori, 67, backed by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its coalition partner Komeito.

Mori had been expected to score an easy victory as the approval rating of the Abe Cabinet has been high and both the ruling coalition parties enjoy support from the business community and related organizations. Therefore, the results highlight prefectural residents' deep-rooted distrust in TEPCO, the operator of the tsunami-ravaged Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

The governing bloc's loss in the Niigata election follows its defeat in the July Kagoshima gubernatorial race, in which journalist Satoshi Mitazono, who called on Kyushu Electric Power Co. to stop operations at its Sendai Nuclear Power Plant in the prefecture during his campaigning, scored a victory.

The outcome of the Niigata race also apparently shows local residents' displeasure toward Mori, who failed to clarify his stance toward whether the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant in the prefecture should be restarted, as well as their criticism of the Abe administration that is proactively trying to reactivate atomic power plants.

Close attention was focused on the latest election because incumbent Hirohiko Izumida abandoned seeking a fourth four-year term as governor.

The reason why Izumida gave up on running in the race remains unclear. However, Izumida has continued to demand TEPCO clarify the cause of the Fukushima nuclear crisis as a precondition for sitting at the negotiation table to discuss whether the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant should be reactivated. As such, TEPCO and the Abe government had expected that the retirement of Izumida would help facilitate the resumption of operations at nuclear plants.

As the election campaign went on, however, Yoneyama, who declared that he would take over Izumida's policy line, garnered growing support from local voters. Alarmed by the situation, LDP heavyweights, including Secretary-General Toshihiro Nikai, delivered campaign speeches and urged the local business community and industry organizations to vote for Mori.

Numerous voters in Niigata, who saw the LDP's desperate efforts to persuade local voters to vote for Mori, probably felt the old-fashioned culture of the LDP. During his campaigning, Mori emphasized his experience of serving as president of the Japan Association of City Mayors to demonstrate his close relations with the national government. However, he gave local voters the impression that he was hesitant to clarify his position on reactivation of atomic power plants.

Many challenges have been left unaddressed by Izumida, such as whether the evacuation plan for local residents in case of an accident at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant is appropriate. Yoneyama must address these challenges as he pledged during his campaigning.

The manner in which the largest opposition Democratic Party (DP) approached the election was poor. The DP did not officially support Yoneyama although the party had initially planned to field him in the next House of Representatives election because the TEPCO union has strong influence within the Japanese Trade Union Confederation (Rengo), which is a major supporting organization for the party. However, DP leader Renho did an about-face and delivered campaign speeches for Yoneyama in the final phase of the campaign apparently after being convinced that he would win.

The DP cannot win support from voters unless the party discusses its nuclear power policy and clarifies its stance on the issue.

October 17, 2016

Minister: We will listen to governor's ideas

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161017_16/

Japan's industry minister has indicated he wants to win the understanding of Niigata's newly elected governor for the restart of a nuclear power plant in the prefecture.

Hiroshige Seko made the remarks on Monday after Ryuichi Yoneyama won the gubernatorial election on the previous day.

The major issue in the campaign was whether to restart Tokyo Electric Power Company's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant.

Yoneyama has expressed caution about restarting the facility.

The minister said the election result shows the will of people in the prefecture.

Seko said the government will consider its ways to restart the nuclear plant and seek the new governor's understanding on the issue.

He said the government has been listening to incumbent Governor Hirohiko Izumida's opinions on the new regulations introduced after the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi accident and evacuation procedures.

The minister said it is also important to reform management at TEPCO, and the government will seek the new governor's ideas on how that can be achieved.

Argument that nukes are cheaper is not tenable

October 15, 2016

Cost of pulling plug on reactors

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/10/15/editorials/cost-pulling-plug-reactors/#.WAJd3cldeos>

In its latest discussions on electricity market reform, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is reportedly considering a measure to financially help major power companies with decommissioning their

nuclear plants. METI is reportedly weighing having new entrants to the liberalized power retail market shoulder part of the decommissioning cost, which would be added to the electricity bills of their customers. That would be nothing less than welfare for the major suppliers that are seeing nuclear power lose its cost advantages in the face of power retail deregulation since April. The government should avoid policies that could distort the principles of electricity business liberalization.

In its discussions launched in late September, the ministry says the committee will weigh establishing a system that would have power suppliers respond to “issues of public interest,” such as investments to prepare for decommissioning nuclear plants and severe nuclear accidents amid market liberalization. That sounds like a legitimate question to consider, but the measures contemplated by the ministry pose many problems.

One is a change to the accounting system for decommissioning nuclear power plants. Tokyo Electric Power faces massive financial problems in dealing with its Fukushima No. 1 plant, which suffered triple meltdowns after it was hit by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. The cost to decommission the crippled plant is certain to far exceed the estimated ¥2 trillion — in fact it is impossible to grasp the total cost at this stage since the technology to remove molten nuclear fuel from its reactors has not yet been established. Compensation for victims of the nuclear disaster, which was estimated in 2014 at ¥4.9 trillion, has already topped ¥6 trillion. The cost to decontaminate areas polluted with radioactive fallout from the plant is likely to top ¥2.5 trillion in the government’s plan.

Even in the absence of a major disaster like the Fukushima catastrophe, the major utilities operating nuclear power plants face a shortage in financial reserves to pay for decommissioning as they needed to scrap the plants earlier than scheduled in response to the tightened plant regulations following the Fukushima disaster, along with the overshooting of the cost of decommissioning from earlier forecasts. Besides Tokyo Electric, five major power firms have made decisions to decommission six of their reactors — one each for Kyushu Electric, Chugoku Electric, Shikoku Electric and Japan Atomic Power and two for Kansai Electric.

To cover the bloated expenses of decommissioning, the ministry is thinking of having all electricity suppliers — including new entrants to the market that do not run nuclear power plants — share the cost in the form of surcharges to the fees that they pay for accessing power transmission lines to service their customers. The cost will then be added to customers’ electricity bills.

Under the current system, the major suppliers operating nuclear power plants can include the cost of decommissioning them in the future — along with all other expenses in their power generation — in their electricity charges. But that system will be abolished in 2020, when their power transmission and distribution sections are to be separated from the power generation operations in the final phase of the reform. The idea of having all suppliers — and consequently all consumers — pay for the cost of decommissioning nuclear plants is intended to cope with this change. However, such a measure will blur the responsibility of major power companies that have relied heavily on nuclear power generation and miscalculated the related costs.

That will also have the effect of denying consumers the right to refuse to pay for electricity generated by nuclear power. The retail market liberalization in April enabled consumers to choose power suppliers, instead of being tied to regional monopolies. Some suppliers offer electricity mainly generated by renewable sources such as solar and wind. But applying the surcharge to all suppliers will result in forcing all consumers — including those who may not want to buy electricity from the former monopolies that run nuclear plants — to shoulder the cost of decommissioning.

The ministry’s committee is also reportedly weighing a scheme to enable suppliers that operate large-scale thermal power plants to receive a certain amount of revenue for keeping the plants even without

running them — based on their power-generation capacity. The idea represents another relief measure for major power companies whose thermal power plants saw their operating ratio fall with the sharp rise in renewable sources in recent years. The scheme is touted as necessary to maintain thermal power capacity as a buffer in case the supply from renewable sources decreases. But experience in other countries indicates that such a mechanism is not essential to managing possible fluctuations in the supply of renewable energy.

The government has long based its energy policy on the argument that nuclear power is cheaper than most other forms of power generation. But the fact that it is seeking to introduce a relief measure for major suppliers that run nuclear plants indicates that argument is no longer tenable. The government needs to reflect on the real meaning of the measures it is contemplating.

Listen to the public's voice

October 18, 2016

EDITORIAL: Niigata governor election shows anxiety about nuclear power

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201610180023.html>

In an upset, Ryuichi Yoneyama, a rookie candidate backed by the opposition Japanese Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party and the Liberal Party, was elected governor of Niigata Prefecture on Oct. 16. Yoneyama presented a tough stance toward the proposed restart of Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in the prefecture, which was the main election issue. He emerged victorious in a virtual one-on-one contest against Tamio Mori, a former mayor of Nagaoka in the prefecture, who was backed by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and its junior coalition partner, Komeito.

The outcome could be called a manifestation of the public will that wants to halt the headlong way the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is seeking to have Japan's idled nuclear reactors brought back online.

The election highlighted the strong anxiety that Niigata Prefecture residents have concerning nuclear power.

Yoneyama said in his campaign pledge that he would not discuss the restart of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant unless the causes of the 2011 disaster at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, its impact and the challenges it highlighted are scrutinized.

He has the responsibility to follow through on his promise and confront the central government and TEPCO, which are seeking to have the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa's nuclear reactors brought back online, with a resolute attitude.

Hirohiko Izumida, the incumbent governor who has consistently taken a cautious stance toward a nuclear restart, did not seek re-election.

Attention was focused during the gubernatorial race on whether Izumida's policy line would be succeeded. It was initially thought that Mori, a former head of the Japan Association of City Mayors who emphasized the connections he has with the central government, had an overwhelming advantage.

But Yoneyama, who announced his candidacy immediately before official campaigning started and asserted he would follow Izumida's stance over the nuclear restart issue, turned out to have more pull. An Asahi Shimbun survey of eligible voters in Niigata Prefecture found that, while only about 20 percent of the respondents said they approved the restart of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant, more than 60 percent opposed it. Yoneyama was elected by that public opinion.

Kashiwazaki-Kariwa, where seven nuclear reactors are concentrated, is one of the world's largest nuclear plants. A serious cover-up of technical problems there came to light in 2002. The Niigata Chuetsu-oki Earthquake of 2007 resulted in a fire and the leakage of a small amount of radioactive substances there. It stands to reason that many feel anxious about plant operations.

Izumida told the central government that plans for evacuating local residents in the event of a nuclear plant disaster are not covered by the screenings by the Nuclear Regulation Authority, and called for the central government's Nuclear Emergency Response Guideline to be improved. He also used an expert panel of the prefectural government to pursue an independent investigation into the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The governor also questioned TEPCO's delay in announcing that core meltdowns had occurred at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. That led to TEPCO's acknowledgment this year of a cover-up.

One can say that Izumida has demonstrated that a prefectural governor can play various roles without leaving the safety of a nuclear plant up to the central government. The election results have shown that many residents of Niigata Prefecture want their governor to continue that stance.

The Abe administration, which defines nuclear energy as an important mainstay power source, is hoping to restart nuclear reactors that have passed NRA screenings. It also defines the restart of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant as an indispensable step for rehabilitating the embattled TEPCO, which has virtually become a government-owned entity.

The administration, however, should sincerely face up to the public will in Niigata Prefecture.

In Kagoshima Prefecture as well, the winner in a gubernatorial election this summer was a candidate who called for a nuclear plant in the southern prefecture to be taken temporarily offline.

It is the duty of top officials responsible for national politics to listen to the voices of the public.

"They can eliminate nuclear power, so why don't they?"

October 19, 2016

Ex-PM Koizumi: 'Why doesn't gov't eliminate nuclear power?'

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161019/p2a/00m/0na/019000c>

MATSUMOTO, Nagano -- Former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi on Oct. 18 commented on the victory of an anti-nuclear newcomer in the Oct. 16 Niigata gubernatorial election, asking why the government isn't giving up nuclear power when it can.

The newly elected governor, Ryuichi Yoneyama, has expressed a cautious view on the restart of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture.

"He beat a candidate backed by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Komeito and the Japanese Trade Union Confederation, and it was an unexpected upset. I guess that the public has come to understand that

nuclear power plants are dangerous, not safe," Koizumi said during an address in the Nagano Prefecture city of Matsumoto.

He underscored the impact of the election, saying that if the opposition parties jointly field candidates in the next House of Representatives election and make the elimination of nuclear power plants the main focal point, "There's no telling how the LDP will end up."

Koizumi said that while he was in power, he believed the opinions of experts and thought that nuclear power plants were necessary. But his view on nuclear power changed in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

"With the Fukushima nuclear disaster, I realized that the descriptions of (atomic power) as safe, clean and low-cost were all lies."

The former prime minister said he started efforts to eliminate all nuclear power plants in Japan after realizing the mistake and wanting to correct it and make amends. At times during his address, Koizumi raised his voice in earnest like he did when he was prime minister.

"They (the government) can eliminate nuclear power, so why don't they?" he asked. "It's time to turn a predicament into a chance."

Campaign to promote all-electric homes resumes

October 21, 2016

Japanese utility urges all-electric homes to sell expected excess of electricity

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/10/21/business/corporate-business/japanese-utility-urges-electric-homes-sell-expected-excess-electricity/#.WAol08ldeos>

by Stephen Stapczynski
Bloomberg

The first Japanese utility to restart a nuclear reactor under post-Fukushima rules has resumed a campaign urging users to increase power consumption.

The campaign had been discontinued after the unprecedented triple meltdown in March 2011.

Kyushu Electric Power Co., which expects at least two nuclear reactors to be online next year, aims to start a television advertising campaign to promote the adoption of "all electric households," according to spokesman Shinpei Ikeda.

The company began an online campaign earlier this month, and is offering promotions for customers who purchase electric stoves and heaters. By using electricity instead of gas, the Fukuoka-based company is hoping that households boost stagnating demand and eat up some of its excess supply.

The push comes amid market reform introduced in April to increase competition and after power demand from the nation's 10 regional utilities fell to an 18-year low. For the first time since the Fukushima meltdowns, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry announced on Tuesday that it won't request companies and households to implement measures to cut power consumption, known as *setsuden*, this winter due in part to the boost in supplies following the restart of some nuclear reactors.

“Promoting the ‘all electricity household’ is a very big weapon for us now that the power market has liberalized,” Ikeda said by phone on Wednesday. Excess supply from its reactors and the setsuden decision “also played into why we resumed the campaign. The nation’s power supply-demand situation has improved.”

Kyushu Electric, along with other utilities, discontinued a similar campaign in 2011 after Fukushima led to the eventual closure of the nation’s nuclear fleet and resulted in rolling blackouts in parts of the country. In Fukushima’s wake, utilities and the government pushed for the adoption of power-saving measures as they struggled to meet demand and as power prices skyrocketed.

With the decline in consumption, utilities’ sales stagnated. Kyushu Electric’s revenue fell 2 percent in the fiscal year ended in March, and the utility expects it to remain little changed this fiscal year, it said in a presentation dated May 9.

The utilities have been feeling even more pressure this year after the government fully opened the power market in April, allowing Japanese households for the first time to choose their provider. With more than 350 companies now approved to sell power, regional utilities are concocting new strategies to shore up revenue.

Kyushu Electric is better positioned than its rivals as it is one of only two utilities currently operating nuclear reactors, allowing it to easily meet an increase in power demand. The utility has one reactor online at its Sendai facility, after shutting a separate unit for maintenance on Oct. 6.

In addition to the Sendai reactors, Michiaki Uriu, Kyushu Electric president, expects the company’s Genkai Nos. 3 and 4 reactors to restart within the fiscal year ending March 2017, the Nikkei newspaper reported in August. The reactors are in the final stage of the nation’s regulatory review, the paper said.

Kyushu Electric’s campaign “is a customer retention strategy,” Joseph Jacobelli, an analyst at Bloomberg Intelligence, said by email. “But this strategy will not boost consumption to a level to take up all of the electricity from the new plants. Those plants will mostly replace power from expensive fossil fuels.”

Get to the bottom of Fukushima disaster before restarting plants

October 17, 2016

Niigata governor-elect calls for Fukushima nuclear crisis investigation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161017/p2a/00m/0na/008000c>

NIIGATA -- Governor-elect Ryuichi Yoneyama has called for getting to the bottom of the Fukushima nuclear crisis before debating the pros and cons of restarting the local atomic power station.

- **【Related】** Anti-nuclear candidate wins Niigata governor race
- **【Related】** TEPCO suffers blow with anti-nuclear candidate's win in Niigata governor race
- **【Editorial】** Gov't, TEPCO should take Niigata gubernatorial election results seriously

Yoneyama, 49, told reporters on the morning of Oct. 17, "We can't approve a restart as long as the lives and livelihoods of prefectural residents can't be protected."

During his campaigning, Yoneyama had said discussions on the issue "can't be started without clarifying the cause of the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant."

At the same time, he said he is prepared to have dialogue with the central government and Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) instead of confronting these entities. TEPCO is the operator of both the idled Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant in Niigata Prefecture and the tsunami-hit Fukushima plant. Yoneyama said he is prepared to cooperate with an investigation being conducted by a panel comprised of the prefectural government and TEPCO into an incident in which the utility had concealed that meltdowns occurred at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear complex.

"We'd like to get to the bottom of the case by not just confronting but cooperating with TEPCO," he told reporters.

The governor-elect stopped short of ruling out the possibility that the power plant will be restarted if necessary conditions are met.

"I don't think we should rule out the possibility. We can't have discussions with each other unless there is room for compromise with each other," he said.

Yoneyama successfully ran in the Oct. 16 Niigata gubernatorial election with the backing of the opposition Japanese Communist Party, Liberal Party and Social Democratic Party. However, the Liberal Democratic Party, the ruling party in the National Diet, has a majority in the prefectural assembly.

"We've agreed to place priority on dialogue over confrontation, and on bringing benefits to prefectural residents," he said.

Forget nuclear fuel recycling

October 24, 2016

EDITORIAL: Japan should torch hopes of fast reactor to recycle nuke fuel

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201610240030.html>

The government has formed a "committee for fast reactor development" following its recent decision to review the Monju prototype fast-breeder nuclear reactor in Fukui Prefecture, with an eye toward decommissioning it.

If allowed to proceed like this, the government could only repeat the same mistake even if it were to decide to scrap the Monju reactor, on which more than 1 trillion yen (\$9.6 billion) has been spent.

The review should cover the entire nuclear fuel recycling program, of which Monju is a part.

The new expert panel has five members, comprising the industry minister, the science and technology minister, the president of the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, which operates Monju, the chairman of the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan, who is also president of Chubu Electric Power Co., and the president of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd., a nuclear reactor manufacturer.

They are representatives of central players that have promoted nuclear power development, and most of the committee's meeting was held behind closed doors.

The panel apparently has no plans to conduct a comprehensive review of the Monju program, including determining why it ended in this deadlock and questioning who should be held responsible. It would be farcical for officials to argue that the committee, as its name indicates, will be dedicated to the development of a fast reactor.

The nuclear fuel recycling program aims at reprocessing spent nuclear fuel to extract plutonium, which will be burned in nuclear reactors. A fast-breeder reactor such as Monju, which is supposed to produce more plutonium than they burn, is a core component of that program.

Even though a fast nuclear reactor is not aimed at “breeding” plutonium, it has the same basic structure of a fast-breeder reactor. It would face the same technical challenges that stood in the way of Monju.

Some government officials have made comments suggesting a fast reactor is certain to be realized. There is no prospect, however, for materializing a safe and economically viable fast reactor any time in the near future.

Japan is banking on joining France’s program for building an Advanced Sodium Technological Reactor for Industrial Demonstration if it decides to decommission Monju. But ASTRID still remains in the basic planning stage.

Officials say they will decide whether to build the fast demonstration reactor only on the basis of the outcome of research and development, on which more than 110 billion yen will be spent through 2019. Even if a decision is made to build ASTRID, it is only envisaged to enter into service sometime around 2030.

France is planning to have part of its experiments conducted at Monju and elsewhere. A French government official told a team of Japan National Press Club reporters that the plan would have to be amended if Monju were to be scrapped, adding that he looked forward to Japan’s financial contributions. Tokyo is apparently touting that everything will be fine with Japan’s nuclear fuel recycling program because of the ASTRID program, which, in fact, is full of uncertainty.

Japan already possesses 48 tons of plutonium, enough to make 6,000 nuclear bombs, at home and abroad, and the country’s urgent task is to reduce that stockpile.

Japan’s ongoing “pluthermal” (plutonium-thermal) power generation method for burning mixed oxide fuel, composed of plutonium blended with uranium, in a conventional nuclear reactor is not likely to consume the huge amount of plutonium in stock.

Given that, the government’s argument that using a fast reactor to recycle nuclear fuel is therefore the only available option is an illusion that ignores reality.

The government should give serious consideration to the fact that the United States and Britain have long abandoned their nuclear fuel recycling programs.

Nuclear exit issue might ruin LDP

October 22, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

LDP may lose next election if nuclear exit becomes main issue: ex-PM

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161022/p2g/00m/0dm/002000c>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said the pro-nuclear ruling party of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe could lose the next lower house election if whether to give up nuclear power becomes the main election issue.

- **【Related】** Editorial: Gov't, TEPCO should take Niigata gubernatorial election results seriously
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- **【Related】** Kagoshima governor once again requests nuclear reactor halt
- **【Fukushima & Nuclear Power】**

Citing recent gubernatorial election wins for candidates cautious about restarting nuclear power plants in Niigata and Kagoshima prefectures, Koizumi said during a recent interview with Kyodo News, "(Anti-nuclear) opinions are beginning to grow...that could influence the (next) House of Representatives election."

If opposition parties unite in fielding anti-nuclear candidates and make complete phase-out of the country's nuclear plants one of the top election issues, they can defeat the ruling Liberal Democratic Party amid persistent worries among voters about nuclear safety following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis, Koizumi said.

The current term of lower house lawmakers expires in December 2018, but some senior LDP officials have said Abe might dissolve the house for an election early next year.

Koizumi, who had promoted nuclear power generation as prime minister between 2001 and 2006, has become an active antinuclear campaigner. He has repeatedly criticized Abe and the way his government is dealing with the aftermath of the nuclear disaster.

"There is no way that a party which ignores the will of the public can maintain its hold on power," said Koizumi, who retired as a parliamentarian in 2009.

Koizumi also said that the main opposition Democratic Party "has not realized that the nuclear issue can be the biggest election issue."

"The slogan by promoters of nuclear power that (nuclear power) is safe, low cost and clean, are all lies," Koizumi said.

He noted that the government would be forced to pour more funds into Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc., operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant crippled following the 2011 quake-tsunami disaster, to cover costs for decontamination work at the plant and damage compensation.

The government should give up its nuclear fuel recycling policy, including the use of the Monju fast-breeder reactor, Koizumi said. The government has not decided on the fate of the trouble-prone reactor, which was intended to play a key role in the recycling policy.

On Abe's drive to revise the war-renouncing Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, Koizumi said it will not be possible due to a lack of sufficient public support.

On the decades-old territorial dispute over a group of Russian-held islands claimed by Japan off the northernmost main island of Hokkaido, Koizumi said a breakthrough will be difficult as Russia would not accept Japan's ownership of the islands.

Abe hopes to make progress on the issue, which has prevented the two countries from signing a post-World War II peace treaty, when he meets Russian President Vladimir Putin on Dec. 15 in Japan.

Promoting tourism and local foods in Fukushima

October 21, 2016

Fukushima officials luring tourists from Australia

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161021_34/

Government and businesspeople from Japan's Fukushima Prefecture are in Australia to **promote tourism and specialty foods from the region.**

About 60 people attended a tourism seminar in Sydney on Friday. The event is the first of its kind to be held by Fukushima in Australia.

Officials of the prefecture's government and businesses introduced world-class skiing sites and other Fukushima attractions that are popular with overseas visitors.

Participants had a chance to try local specialties including sake and ramen.

One participant said he didn't know Fukushima was such a great place to visit, and expressed hope to go there.

Tourism officials say the number of foreign visitors has not returned to levels before the 2011 earthquake and nuclear crisis.

But Fukushima is becoming a popular destination for Australians. Last year about 1,500 visited -- nearly 4 times the pre-disaster level.

Miyagi: Radioactive waste mostly below "government standard"...

October 24, 2016

Radioactivity level of waste diminishes

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161024_11/

Japan's Environment Ministry officials say they have found that radioactivity levels of waste materials from the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident have significantly decreased.

Officials checked the radioactivity of plants, soils and other waste stored in the northeastern prefecture of Miyagi, which neighbors Fukushima.

The waste had radioactivity higher than the government-set level of 8,000 becquerels per kilogram. The central government is responsible for the disposal of such waste.

But about 2,500 tons have not been designated as high-level radioactivity waste. Local people did not apply for designation mainly because it could create the impression that the area is dangerous.

Environment Ministry officials say the radioactivity levels of about 2,000 tons, or 77 percent of such waste, is now below the government standard.

Miyagi prefectural officials say they want to discuss with municipality leaders next month how to dispose of low-level radioactive waste.

They say they need to consider the fact that the levels of radioactivity have decreased more than 5 years after the nuclear accident.

False certificates and untrained workers

October 25, 2016

Untrained staff did radioactive cleanup work in Fukushima

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201610250053.html>

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[list](#)



Certificates of training in radioactive decontamination work were issued by a company in Nihonmatsu, Fukushima Prefecture, to workers who had received no such training. (Masakazu Honda)

NIHONMATSU, Fukushima Prefecture--A company has admitted to not giving the required special training to workers before dispatching them to carry out decontamination work in radiation-hit Fukushima city. A subcontractor called "Zerutech Tohoku" issued at least 100 bogus certificates to its workers showing they had completed the training, when, in fact, they had done nothing, according to the Fukushima Labor Standards Inspection Office.

The office had warned the subcontractor, which is based in Nihonmatsu and decontaminates parts of nearby Fukushima city, which was affected by the 2011 nuclear disaster, that it should give special training to workers to prepare them for the task.

The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare requires decontamination operators be given at least 5.5 hours of special training to each individual in accordance with the Industrial Safety and Health Law.

The training includes a lecture on potential health hazards and how to operate decontamination equipment as their job involves handling soil polluted by radioactive materials.

The 52-year-old representative of the company admitted wrongdoing in an interview with The Asahi Shimbun.

"We had to hire a large number of workers over a short period of time since we received a contract involving a vast swath of land," he said of the false certificates, of which between 100 and 150 have been discovered.

In addition, the company, a fourth-tier subcontractor, issued seven other kinds of certificates needed to operate an aerial vehicle or chain saw, which were required to land the cleanup contract.

For issuing false certificates, offenders could be imprisoned for up to six months or fined 500,000 yen (\$4,800).

But the law has been criticized for having numerous loopholes.

One is that **there is not test of workers' knowledge after they have received the training.**

The operators are also not required to register the certificates with municipal authorities.

And **it is not specified what qualifications are required for the person who conducts the training.**

The Labor Standards office, a regional arm of the health ministry, has been inspecting the company for breaches of the law and regulations on decontamination work since Oct. 19.

The Zerutech Tohoku representative founded the company in March last year.

(This article was written by Masakazu Honda and Yuki Chai.)

Fukushima update by G. Edwards

By Gordon Edwards (ccnr.ca)

FUKUSHIMA UPDATE -- OCTOBER 2016:

The government of Shinzo Abe has passed draconian legislation to prevent ongoing information about the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster from leaking out to the world at large. Ordinary citizens, and even professional journalists, can be imprisoned for reporting on conditions that the government deems to be contrary to the public interest -- as defined by the government.

Nevertheless, some information does seep through the seemingly impregnable wall of governmental-industrial secrecy.

DECOMMISSIONING COSTS MORE THAN DOUBLE

(1) The cost of dealing with the triple meltdown, previously estimated at about 800 million dollars per year, and expected to take 40 years or more, has now been recognized as massively underestimated. It appears that the desperate cleanup measures will cost several billion dollars per

year if any real progress is to be made. This alarming state of affairs was documented by Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, in presentations made before a panel struggling to devise a viable financial plan for TEPCO, the electric utility that owns the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, according to an article that appeared in the South China Morning Post on October 25 2016.

See <http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/east-asia/article/2039929/cost-scrap-fukushima-nuclear-plant-massively-underestimated> .

ICE WALL PARTIALLY COLLAPSES

(2) The Fukushima Daichi nuclear power plant was constructed over a major aquifer. When the three reactor cores melted down five and a half years ago, the slow inexorable flow of groundwater beneath the crippled reactors flushed out radioactive materials from the molten cores, delivering hundreds of tonnes of radioactively contaminated water into the Pacific Ocean every day. The Abe government promised to invest hundreds of million of dollars to install and maintain an enormous underground ice wall surrounding the entire nuclear site to divert groundwater away from the molten reactor cores, thereby reducing the rate of contamination of the Ocean waters. On September 2, 2016, an article in the Asahi Shimbun reported that drenching rain from the recent typhoons melted at least two sections of the ice wall and allowed highly contaminated water from around the damaged reactor cores to migrate, still underground, but downstream towards the sea. A TEPCO official admitted that the underground ice wall of frozen dirt is not working. If there had been another 15 cm. of rain, he said, the highly radioactive water would have reached the surface and flowed overland directly into the sea.

See <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201609020020.html>

Reorganising TEPCO's nuclear power business

October 26, 2016

Spinoff eyed for TEPCO's nuclear power business to secure profits

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201610260060.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

The industry ministry has proposed starting a subsidiary to manage the nuclear power business of Tokyo Electric Power Co. Holdings Inc., hoping it will lead to an earlier restart of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry also hopes the spinoff would boost profits to help the parent company cover the ballooning costs for the decommissioning of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant and for compensating victims of the nuclear accident there.

The subsidiary's headquarters would likely be set up in Niigata Prefecture, the location of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa facility, one of the world's largest nuclear power stations in output capacity.

The ministry's proposal came at a meeting Oct. 25 of a panel of academics and business executives discussing reform of TEPCO. The ministry believes the new entity would find it easier to make profits by collaborating with other leading electric power companies.

Decommissioning the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and compensating victims of the 2011 nuclear disaster will remain under the responsibilities of TEPCO Holdings.

TEPCO owns the Fukushima No. 1 and No. 2 nuclear plants and the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa facility.

The new subsidiary would sit alongside three other operating companies set up in April. They oversee the operation of thermal power generation, electric retailing, and electricity transmission and distribution.

The ministry also said the annual decommissioning costs of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant could increase from 80 billion yen (\$76.9 million) to hundreds of billions of yen.

The costs are expected to surge in the coming years since the retrieval of melted nuclear fuel rods involves technological difficulties.

The combined costs for decommissioning and compensating victims are likely to jump from an estimated 11 trillion yen to 18 trillion yen.

The ministry hopes the proposal for founding a subsidiary to focus on the operation of the nuclear power business will lead to greater support from the public for a restart of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant.

Two of the seven reactors there have been scrutinized by the Nuclear Regulation Authority on whether they meet safety guidelines set after the Fukushima catastrophe.

Starting a reactor would add about 100 billion yen in operating profits a year to TEPCO's coffers since fossil fuels to fire thermal plants are expensive.

Setting up the main office of the subsidiary in Niigata Prefecture is intended to appease local residents. Former Governor Hirohiko Izumida, who was cautious about a restart of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, called for the move while he was in office.

New Niigata Governor Ryuichi Yoneyama, who has succeeded Izumida's stance and took office on Oct. 25, welcomed the ministry's idea for a spinoff, calling it "a good direction."

But he denied a restart "under current circumstances."

The new governor has urged a more detailed inquiry into what went wrong during the Fukushima disaster before discussing the possible restart of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa facility.

(This article was written by Yoichi Yonetani and Yuko Matsuura.)

Industry ministry unveils plan to split nuclear power division from TEPCO

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161026/p2a/00m/0na/004000c>

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry is planning to spin off Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) Holdings Inc.'s nuclear power generation division and aim for an alliance between the new subsidiary and another power company.

- **【Related】** Fukushima nuclear plant decommissioning cost to surge
- **【Fukushima & Nuclear Power】**

The ministry unveiled the plan at an Oct. 25 meeting of an expert panel on reform of TEPCO and issues related to the tsunami-hit Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. The possibility has emerged that realignment of

the major utilities' nuclear power divisions will be led by the government as the planned reactivation of idled nuclear reactors has stalled.

As part of TEPCO reforms this past April, the company's thermal power, power retail and power transmission and distribution divisions were transformed into subsidiaries and placed under the umbrella of the newly established TEPCO Holdings.

However, TEPCO Holdings has retained its nuclear power division because the company needs to decommission the crippled Fukushima nuclear complex and pay compensation to victims of the nuclear disaster, which broke out in March 2011.

Under the ministry's plan, a subsidiary would be set up to take over TEPCO's nuclear power business, excluding the Fukushima No. 1 plant, with an eye to forming an alliance between the new firm and another major utility.

The costs of decommissioning the crippled power station's reactors are likely to far surpass the initial estimate. The ministry released a revised projection at the Oct. 25 expert panel meeting stating that the annual decommissioning bill will likely balloon from the current 80 billion yen into the hundreds of billions, due to work to remove melted nuclear fuel from the reactors and other factors.

The panel discussed TEPCO reforms to raise funds to cover the massive expense of dealing with the accident, such as compensation payments and decontamination of areas tainted with radioactive substances emanating from the nuclear disaster, plus decommissioning.

The committee is aiming to increase TEPCO's profitability by promoting the realignment of the firm's nuclear power division and other cost-cutting efforts.

TEPCO set up a joint venture, JERA Co., with Chubu Electric Power Co. in April 2015 to gradually integrate their thermal power station fuel procurement and overseas power generation divisions. TEPCO has also formed a business tie-up with SoftBank Group Corp. to bundle electricity and communications device contracts.

The industry ministry furthermore proposed that TEPCO's power transmission and distribution subsidiary, which is highly profitable thanks to a large number of customers in the Tokyo metropolitan area, strengthen its alliances with other utilities.

The expert committee is poised to work out the details of a plan to spin off TEPCO's nuclear power division and how the subsidiary should join hands with other companies. The panel will draw up a draft of its proposals possibly by the end of this year, and incorporate the recommendations in TEPCO's corporate rehabilitation plan to be released next year.

October 25, 2016

TEPCO should consider reorganization

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161025_21/

The Japanese government may call on Tokyo Electric Power Company to reorganize its nuclear power business.

The plan was proposed at a meeting of a panel formed by the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry.

The panel of experts is discussing ways to cover the ballooning costs of decommissioning crippled

reactors at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The government expects the costs to expand to several billions of dollars due to the technically difficult work of removing melted nuclear fuel from the reactors.

That's a huge increase from the current annual amount of about 770 million dollars.

The government officials also said TEPCO needs to carry out drastic managerial reforms to cover the costs. The government plan includes asking TEPCO to spin off its nuclear power business and promote ties with other power companies.

Some meeting participants asked how the government would help if TEPCO cannot cover the costs only by improving earnings through reforms.

The panel plans to discuss further how the government could provide public support for the decommissioning work.

Decommissioning Fukushima No.1: How much?

October 25, 2016

Cost of decommissioning Fukushima No. 1 to reach hundreds of billions of yen a year

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/10/25/national/cost-decommissioning-fukushima-no-1-reach-hundreds-billions-yen-year/#.WA8kQcldeos>

Kyodo

The cost of scrapping the damaged Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant is set to rise to hundreds of billions of yen annually from the previously projected ¥80 billion a year, according to a new government projection disclosed Tuesday.

Under the projection by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, and based on the estimated 30-year time frame to complete the decommissioning, the total cost will likely exceed the ¥2 trillion initially forecast by Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.

The plant was ravaged by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and three of its reactors subsequently suffered meltdowns.

METI presented the estimate at a meeting of a panel of experts set to discuss reforming Tepco's management and helping finance the decommissioning work.

The ministry also presented the panel with a plan to spin off Tepco's nuclear power business, aiming to cover the decommissioning cost through aligning with other utilities.

"The panel is considering ways in which Tepco can secure (decommissioning) funds while avoiding an increase in public burden," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said at a news conference. "It is still discussing the issue."

The utility's business has taken a heavy blow in the years since the nuclear crisis first began as it wears the costs of cleaning up contaminated areas as well as compensating the people and businesses affected by the incident.

The growing costs of decommissioning Fukushima No. 1 and rising competition in electricity sales as a result of market deregulation prompted Tepco to seek fresh government assistance in July.

Estimating decommissioning costs has serious flaws

October 27, 2016

EDITORIAL: Cost estimate needed first to decommission Fukushima plant

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201610270028.html>

An industry ministry panel of experts is tackling two key questions concerning the decommissioning of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

One is how much money will be needed to decommission the plant's reactors, three of which melted down. The other is who should foot the bill and how.

However, there are some serious flaws in the way the expert panel is working on these knotty questions, which could lead to a huge financial burden on the public.

First of all, **the panel's meetings are not open to the public.** The main points of the discussions are published later, but many details, including who made specific remarks, are omitted.

The fate of Tokyo Electric Power Co., which operates the Fukushima plant and is responsible for its decommissioning, will be largely determined by whether it can restart its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture.

Panel members include many business leaders who have been promoting nuclear power generation.

The outcome of the recent Niigata gubernatorial election underscored the strong opposition of local residents against TEPCO's plan to bring the plant back online.

The panel's lineup raises concerns that its discussions may be based on the assumption that the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant will eventually be restarted, despite the situation in the prefecture.

Another troubling fact is that **the government has yet to announce any estimate of the total decommissioning cost.**

In the panel's first meeting, some members urged the government to swiftly present an estimate of the cost. In the second meeting, however, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry only said that annual spending could grow to several hundreds of billions of yen from about 80 billion yen (\$703 million) spent now.

The ministry says a specific estimate of the total cost will be announced as early as the end of the year, along with a plan for management reforms at TEPCO and a package of related measures the government will take.

But this timetable doesn't make sense. Pinning down the overall decommissioning cost should be the starting point for the panel's discussions.

With the conditions of the melted nuclear fuel remaining unclear, it is certainly difficult to accurately estimate the cost.

Still, **an estimate should first be shown to ensure substantive debate on whether the method used for the work is appropriate and whether there are ways to curb the cost.**

As for financing, the panel has supported the proposal that TEPCO should secure the necessary funds on its own through management reform over other options, such as the utility's liquidation involving debt forgiveness by its creditors, tax financing by the government and a continuation of the current state control of TEPCO.

In an apparent attempt to stress the importance of TEPCO's own efforts to save itself, the panel has also recommended that the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant should be spun off from TEPCO and integrated with the nuclear power business of another utility.

There is no disputing that TEPCO should push through thorough management reforms to prevent the public from shouldering part of the cost through tax financing or hikes in electricity rates.

The question, however, is whether the embattled utility's own efforts will be enough to cover the entire decommissioning cost, expected to reach several trillions of yen.

If a plan based on the company's own efforts fails and disrupts the decommissioning process, the reconstruction of disaster-hit areas in Fukushima Prefecture could be seriously delayed.

It is vital for the panel to win broad public support for its proposals on the national challenge of decommissioning the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

This requires careful, exhaustive and reasonable debate, open to the public, on the cost and the financing method.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Oct. 27

New power firms to pay for decommissioning old plants

October 25, 2016

New power firms likely to share decommissioning costs for aging nuke reactors

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161025/p2a/00m/0na/013000c>

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is set to have new smaller electric power companies shoulder part of the costs of decommissioning nuclear reactors that major utilities decided to scrap for reasons other than nuclear disasters, it has been learned.

- **【Related】** New power firms may have to pay some costs for nuke reactor decommissioning
- **【Related】** Editorial: Making new power suppliers pay for reactor decommissioning costs unacceptable

The new power suppliers will be required to share the costs of decommission work for nuclear reactors that major utilities voluntarily decided to scrap after the Nuclear Regulation Authority introduced new safety standards following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis.

Currently, this covers six reactors -- the No. 1 and 2 reactors at Mihama Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture operated by Kansai Electric Power Co., the No. 1 reactor at Japan Atomic Power Co.'s Tsuruga nuclear station also in Fukui Prefecture, the No. 1 reactor at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Genkai nuclear plant in Saga Prefecture, the No. 1 reactor at Shimane nuclear station operated by Chugoku Electric Power Co. in the Shimane Prefecture capital of Matsue and the No. 1 reactor at Shikoku Electric Power Co.'s Ikata

nuclear power plant in Ehime Prefecture. It is expected, however, that the number of reactors that utilities will scrap is going to increase due to aging reactors across Japan.

The current system in which utilities are required to save up money necessary for reactor decommission projects, collected from electricity bills, will be maintained for reactors that are under operation or under work to be restarted. When utilities decide to scrap such reactors due to aging, however, new power companies will be required to pitch in for the decommission work.

Major utilities currently include a surcharge in electricity fees to cover the costs of decommissioning nuclear reactors, but the economy ministry is concerned that when deregulation of the electricity market is completed by around 2020, the shortfalls for decommissioning costs may not be covered in the current system. The ministry concluded that to make sure that the fees are collected, it needed new power companies to share the burden from 2020.

The ministry plans to have new power suppliers cover the shortfalls of the decommissioning costs as well as pay for depreciation -- money spent on the construction of nuclear plants and capital investment that is allocated later in the assets' useful life -- by adding extra costs on top of fees they pay to major utilities to use their power grids. It is likely that the extra costs the new power companies will pay will be added to electricity bills for those who use power supplied by the new utilities.

The economy ministry had initially considered having new companies share the costs of the decommission work for nuclear reactors whether they are being scrapped or under the process of being restarted, but decided to give up the initial plan after being met with a public backlash.

Nuclear pact with India

November 1, 2016

Japan to sign nuclear pact with India

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161101_03/

Japan will sign an agreement on nuclear energy technology with India during a visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi scheduled to start on November 10th.

The agreement will be Japan's first such deal with a non-signatory of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. It will allow Japan to export nuclear power technology to India.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met with Modi in India last December and they came to a basic agreement regarding the deal.

The two governments have been negotiating the details of the agreement and the date of the signing.

There is concern in Japan about forming a deal with India, which has conducted nuclear tests.

The pact is expected to include a provision that prohibits the technology from being used for military purposes. If India conducts further nuclear tests, the deal would likely be suspended.

Japan has similar deals with 14 countries and territories.

Japan, India to sign energy pact on condition of no nuclear tests

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611010047.html>

Japan and India will sign a nuclear energy pact in mid-November that allows Tokyo to opt out if the South Asian nation tests its nuclear weapons, sources said.

The agreement, the first by Japan with a nation that has not ratified the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, will be signed when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visits Japan later this month, a high-ranking Foreign Ministry official said.

The agreement will enable Japan to export its nuclear energy technology for private-sector use in India. But the sources said wording in the pact will give Japan, which has long pushed for nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation, the option of ending cooperation if India conducts a nuclear test.

At a meeting in New Delhi in December 2015, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Modi agreed in principle to sign a nuclear energy agreement. However, Abe told his Indian counterpart, "We will discontinue cooperation should India conduct a nuclear test."

Diplomats of the two nations have since held discussions on the agreement.

Japanese diplomats asked for wording that could be interpreted to mean Japan can cease cooperation in the event of an Indian nuclear test after the bilateral agreement takes effect.

Although Indian officials were hesitant about such wording because of concerns it could constrain India's national security policy, they also showed an understanding toward the Japanese position.

The two nations are currently hammering out the final wording of the agreement. There is a possibility that the terminology will be vague enough to allow both nations to interpret the agreement in a way that is closer to their own national interests.

Call to end Govt.'s legal support of TEPCO

November 2, 2016

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2016/11/02/voices/japans-government-stay-u-s-sailors-lawsuit-tepco/#.WBn6-smDmos>

Japan's government should stay out of U.S. sailors' lawsuit against Tepco

Dear Prime Minister Shinzo Abe,

Let me first acknowledge that after four long years of silence, the Japanese government has finally taken a position regarding the lawsuit filed against Tokyo Electric Power Co. in the U.S. by more than 450 American sailors, marines and civilians who were on board the USS Reagan and accompanying military ships off the coast of Tohoku after 3/11.

These young people experienced serious health problems resulting from, they allege, radiation exposure while participating in Operation Tomodachi, the U.S. military's humanitarian rescue mission launched in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and multiple meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant on March 11, 2011.

While the Japanese government's acknowledgement of the suit is welcome, the unconditional support it has given to Tepco is a matter of deep concern. Even now, U.S. service personnel find themselves

prevented from seeking justice because Tepco, with the support of the Japanese government, is doing its utmost to ensure the case will never be heard in an American court.

The Japanese government submitted an amicus curiae brief to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals on Feb. 3. An amicus curiae (friend of the court) brief is one presented by a party not directly involved in the suit in the hope of influencing the outcome. The brief contains two points:

1. "The Government of Japan has developed a comprehensive system to ensure compensation for victims of the Fukushima Nuclear Accident."
2. "Damage claims brought in tribunals outside of Japan threaten the continuing viability of the compensation system established by the Government of Japan."

Examining the first point, if the Japanese government truly had "a comprehensive system to ensure compensation for victims," there would be no need for the U.S. service members' lawsuit. Yet, as you know, **the Japanese government and its subsidiaries have, to date, not paid a single yen to any non-Tepco-related victim of radiation exposure from Fukushima No. 1. This includes, as of March this year, a total of 173 children from the prefecture who underwent surgery after being diagnosed with suspected thyroid cancer, 131 of whom were confirmed to have had cancer.**

If the Japanese government will not admit that the suffering of its own children was caused by radiation exposure, how confident can young Americans be that the apparently radiation-induced injuries they experienced will be recognized as such, let alone compensated for, in Japan?

Further, at least seven of these previously healthy young Americans have already died and many others are too ill to travel to Japan even if they could afford to, let alone reside in this country during lengthy legal procedures, which typically take years to resolve. This is not to mention the prospect of expensive legal costs, including for court fees, hiring Japanese lawyers, translation of relevant documents, etc. And let us never forget, Prime Minister, it was the Japanese government that requested the assistance of these American military personnel.

As for the second point above, I agree the U.S. military personnel's lawsuit threatens "the continuing viability of the compensation system established by the Government of Japan." For example, **if a U.S. court were to ascribe the plaintiffs' illnesses to radiation exposure, how could the Japanese government continue to claim that none of the many illnesses the children and adults of Fukushima presently experience are radiation-related?** The American service personnel truly serve as "the canary in the coal mine" when it comes to demonstrating the damaging effects of radiation exposure. Moreover, this canary is out of the Japanese government's ability to control.

Let us further suppose that an American court were to award \$3 million per person as compensation for the deaths, currently standing at seven, of the military personnel who were irradiated. By contrast, the Japanese government continues to deny compensation, for radiation-induced illnesses let alone deaths, to its own citizens. This would surely impact the "viability" (not to mention reputation) of the Japanese government in its ongoing denial of radiation-related injuries to non-Tepco employees.

Let me close by noting that there is one Japanese political leader who has accepted personal responsibility for the injuries inflicted on American service personnel. I refer to former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi who, after meeting with injured servicemen and women in San Diego in May, initiated a fund to meet as many of the medical needs of these sailors and marines as possible.

Fortunately, thanks to the support of thousands of ordinary Japanese, he has already raised \$700,000 toward his \$1 million goal. With tears in his eyes, Koizumi explained that he could not ignore the suffering of hundreds of formerly healthy young Americans who willingly put themselves at risk in order to render aid to the Japanese people.

Prime Minister Abe, I call on you to end the Japanese government's unconditional legal support of Tepco. Further, if the Japanese government has a conscience, please immediately provide medical aid and compensation to the hundreds of American victims of Operation Tomodachi.

BRIAN VICTORIA

Kyoto

Send your comments or submissions (addressed to local or national politicians, officials or other authorities) here: community@japantimes.co.jp

TEPCO's profits down in last half-year

November 1, 2016

TEPCO net profit plunges 66.3% in April-Sept.

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161101/p2g/00m/0bu/016000c>

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. said Monday its consolidated net profit for the half year through September plunged 66.3 percent from a year earlier, as it received no money from the government to pay damages caused by a 2011 nuclear plant disaster.

The operator of the disaster-struck Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant posted a group net profit of 94.17 billion yen (\$897 million), down from 279.48 billion yen a year earlier.

Revenue declined 15.5 percent to 2.64 trillion yen reflecting a drop in electricity rates necessitated by lower fuel procurement costs.

The utility, known commonly by the acronym TEPCO, **again provided no full-year guidance as its business outlook heavily depends on if and when regulators approve its plan to restart the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture.**

TEPCO booked an extraordinary charge of 168.54 billion, down from 465.26 billion yen a year earlier, related to compensation for damages caused by the 2011 nuclear plant disaster.

But unlike in the same period last year, TEPCO did not receive any subsidies from the state-backed Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp. TEPCO logged extraordinary income of 36.46 billion yen, but none of that came from the NDCDFC which a year earlier provided 426.76 billion yen in compensation payment subsidies.

The utility still faces massive costs for compensation, decommissioning damaged reactors and decontaminating areas affected by the world's worst nuclear catastrophe since the 1986 Chernobyl disaster.

Company President Naomi Hirose told a news conference on Monday that TEPCO does not intend to put additional burden on the public in terms of taxpayer money, despite the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry last week saying it now projects the cost of scrapping the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant to rise to hundreds of billions of yen annually from an initially projected 80 billion yen per year.

New utilities to share cost of Fukushima compensation

November 2, 2016

New utilities may have to chip in for Fukushima compensation costs

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/02/business/new-utilities-may-chip-fukushima-compensation-costs/#.WBtQ8cmDmos>

Kyodo

The industry ministry is planning to demand that new power industry entrants shoulder a portion of the compensation payments stemming from the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and to do the same for any future nuclear accidents, sources said Wednesday.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry also intends to introduce a system to allow Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. to steadily accumulate funds necessary for decommissioning Fukushima No. 1, the sources said.

Since the system allows Tepco to effectively pass on the decommissioning cost in utility bills, METI's plan means the burden of the nuclear crisis aftermath will be shouldered by new utilities and by power users in the form of higher bills or reduced price cuts.

The amount of damages payments to those affected by the Fukushima crisis has already eclipsed ¥6 trillion. The cost of scrapping the plant is expected to far exceed the initially estimated ¥2 trillion.

Under the current system, Tepco must lower its transmission and distribution fees when it makes a profit above a certain level. But under the envisaged system, part of that excess profit will go to the fund for scrapping Fukushima No. 1 and not returned to the users.

METI, which says users should shoulder their share of the burden as they have widely benefited from nuclear power, plans to submit its proposals to a government working group discussing the matter.

So far, Tepco and 10 other conventional utilities are paying for the compensation by making general contributions to the Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp., a fund set up in the wake of the Fukushima crisis.

New utilities that joined the industry after Japan's liberalization of retail electricity market in April have not made such payments.

The conventional utilities, which have been less price-competitive than new players due to their need to reflect the Fukushima expenses in their bills, have been seeking to raise their transmission and distribution fees for the newcomers that use their infrastructure to make them shoulder the costs as well.

Should victims have to depend on charity?

Das Geschäft mit dem Krebs

Ein Meinungsartikel von Dr. Alex Rosen

<https://www.ipn.de/atomenergie/gesundheit/artikel/de/das-geschaeft-mit-dem-krebs.html>

11.10.2016

Der Umgang mit Betroffenen einer Katastrophe sagt viel mehr über eine Gesellschaft aus als statistische Daten wie Bruttosozialprodukt oder Wirtschaftswachstum. Seit 2011 werden die Schilddrüsen aller Bewohnern der Präfektur Fukushima, die zum Zeitpunkt des Super-GAU von Fukushima unter 18 Jahre alt waren, regelmäßig auf Krebs- und Krebsvorstufen untersucht. Während die Kosten für Kinder unter 18 Jahren von der Regierung generell gedeckt werden, müssen die Familien diese zunächst für einige Zeit vorstrecken und bekommen sie erst mit einer Verzögerung zurück erstattet. Zudem wird im japanischen Gesundheitswesen generell verlangt, dass ab dem 18. Lebensjahr 30% aller medizinischen Behandlungskosten von den Patienten selbst getragen werden.

Dies gilt pikanterweise auch für die Schilddrüsenuntersuchungen bei Menschen, die radioaktivem Niederschlag ausgesetzt wurden, sowie für eventuell notwendige Biopsien, Operationen oder Langzeittherapien. Für eine Schilddrüsenuntersuchung fallen für die Betroffenen somit Kosten von ca. 10.000 Yen (ca. 87 Euro) an, für eine Operation zwischen 150.000 und 300.000 Yen (zwischen 1.300 und 2.600 Euro). Für viele der betroffenen Familien, die durch Evakuierung und den Verlust ihrer Heimat und Arbeit ohnehin schwer getroffen sind, sind diese Kosten nicht tragbar und verschärfen die soziale Abwärtsspirale von Verschuldung und Verarmung, in der sich viele von ihnen bereits befinden. Angesichts der Tatsache, dass im Zuge der Atomkatastrophe von 2011 von Seiten der Behörden bewusst auf die Ausgabe von Jodtabletten verzichtet wurde und Millionen von Menschen somit radioaktivem Jod ausgesetzt wurden, hat die Präfektur Fukushima letztes Jahr begonnen, auch den mittlerweile über 18 Jahre alten Patienten die Kosten für die Schilddrüsenuntersuchungen zu erstatten. Allerdings dauern auch diese Erstattungen Zeit und die Familien müssen die Kosten zunächst vorstrecken. Zudem sind Erstattungen nur möglich, wenn die Patienten sich in den offiziellen Einrichtungen der Fukushima Medical University untersuchen lassen. Jegliche Form von Zweitmeinung außerhalb des staatlich kontrollierten Systems würde so zu finanziellen Mehrbelastungen führt. Auch werden Begleitkosten, wie der Transport zu den Untersuchungen oder Kompensationen von Lohnausfällen der Eltern nicht berücksichtigt.

Da diese Kosten und die komplexen Erstattungsverfahren viele Familien weiterhin vor große finanzielle Probleme stellt, hat sich nun zusätzlich eine karitative Nicht-Regierungs-Organisation gegründet. Der „3/11 Children's Fund for Thyroid Cancer“ will hilfsbedürftigen Familien in Fukushima bei den Kosten der Untersuchungen und Behandlungen selbst, wie auch bei eventuell anfallenden Begleitkosten unterstützen. Spenden aus der Bevölkerung sollen ab sofort entgegen genommen werden und man hofft, mehrere hundert Betroffene mit Beträgen ab 50.000 Yen (ca. 430 Euro) unterstützen zu können.

Der Umgang mit Betroffenen einer Katastrophe sagt viel mehr über eine Gesellschaft aus als statistische Daten wie Bruttosozialprodukt oder Wirtschaftswachstum. Der Untersuchungsausschuss des japanischen Parlaments kam nach dem Super-GAU von Fukushima zu dem Schluss, dass die Atomkatastrophe „menschengemacht“ war – und dass die Atomindustrie, die Aufsichtsbehörden und die Politik, die allesamt die Gefahren der Atomenergie und der grassierenden Korruption in der japanischen Atomwirtschaft jahrzehntelang ignoriert haben, eine bedeutende Mitschuld tragen. Angesichts des institutionellen Versagens der zuständigen Behörden und der anhaltenden Verschleierung des wahren Ausmaßes der Atomkatastrophe ist es besonders bitter, dass die vom radioaktiven Niederschlag betroffenen Familien, deren Angehörige ein signifikant erhöhtes Erkrankungsrisiko davontrugen, nun auch mit den finanziellen Lasten dieser Erkrankungen allein gelassen werden.

Es kann nicht sein, dass in einem der reichsten Länder, mit einem der fortschrittlichsten Gesundheitswesen der Welt, Menschen die durch staatliches Versagen zu Schaden gekommen sind, von barmherzigen Spenden und dem Engagement einiger Freiwilliger abhängig gemacht werden. Eine

vernünftige Aufarbeitung der ökologischen, gesundheitlichen, psychologischen, sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Folgen der Atomkatastrophe ist in Japan dringend notwendig, wie auch eine Kehrtwende im Umgang mit denjenigen, die von der Atomkatastrophe und der freigewordenen Radioaktivität betroffen wurden und weiterhin in Gegenden mit erhöhten Strahlenwerten leben müssen.

see also : <http://www.fukushima-is-still-news.com/2016/09/3-11-children-s-fund-for-thyroid-cancer.html>

Make customers pay

November 2, 2016

Gov't to seek disaster compensation funds from consumers who used nuclear energy

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161102/p2a/00m/0na/004000c>

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is **considering making customers of new, smaller power companies who previously used nuclear energy from Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and other utilities shoulder part of the surging compensation costs for the Fukushima nuclear disaster.**

- **【Related】** Industry ministry to create new fund to decommission Fukushima No. 1 plant reactors
- **【Related】** New power firms likely to share decommissioning costs for aging nuke reactors
- **【Fukushima & Nuclear Power】**

Under the Act on Compensation for Nuclear Damage, nuclear power operators must each provide 120 billion yen to be used together with money paid by TEPCO and other major utilities to the Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corporation to provide compensation. However, **the compensation bill for the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster continues to grow, and the compensation fund is expected to be left trillions of yen short.**

The ministry takes the view that major utilities should have gathered more compensation funds from their customers, and it therefore plans to seek compensation funds from those who were previously in contracts with major power companies, using their nuclear energy.

A plan has surfaced to charge small-scale power companies more to deliver electricity through the power grids of major utilities, with the extra costs to be used for compensation. This and other plans will be debated on Nov. 2 at a working group of a ministry committee on energy reform. However, as some customers could face higher bills as a result, the move could trigger a public backlash.

An additional 17 billion yen will be needed

November 6, 2016

Decontamination to cost additional \$17 bil.

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161106_18/

It has been revealed that the cost of decontaminating areas affected by the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident is **nearly 1.5 times the initial estimate.**

NHK has learned that about 19.5 billion dollars had already been spent on decontamination projects by March this year. The Environment Ministry and the Reconstruction Agency say an additional 17 billion dollars will be needed.

The government cites an increase in personnel costs as one reason for the rising expense.

Tokyo Electric Power Company, the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, is primarily responsible for shouldering the financial burden.

The government now plans to pay for the decontamination by selling the TEPCO stocks it bought in 2012.

But these shares would have to triple in value to cover the full cost.

The government also says that **more than 10 billion dollars of taxpayers' money will be needed to build facilities to store the waste from the decontamination process.**

Just another way of giving preferential treatment to nukes

November 8, 2016

EDITORIAL: Ministry devises crafty finance scheme favoring nuclear power

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611080049.html>

The industry ministry, the supposed champion of electricity market deregulation, is making a move that runs counter to the principles of reform by giving preferential treatment to nuclear power.

A proposal by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry would force new electricity suppliers that have entered the market in response to its liberalization to shoulder part of the costs of decommissioning the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The plan was submitted to an expert council discussing the issue.

The ministry, which regulates the power industry, has already presented a plan to make such new utilities bear part of the costs of decommissioning aging reactors at other nuclear power plants.

The power market reform, which was expanded this spring to cover retail electricity sales as well, is designed to abolish the regional monopolies of established utilities, thereby encouraging new entries into the market.

It is also aimed at lowering electricity rates by separating the operations of power plants and transmission grids to promote fair competition.

The ministry cannot claim it is working for fair competition if it is now creating rules that force new electricity providers that have nothing to do with any nuclear power plant or the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster to pay part of the decommissioning bills.

In its attempt to get new utilities involved in the financing plan, the ministry is targeting the fees they pay to use the power transmission lines operated by established utilities.

The total cost of decommissioning the stricken Fukushima nuclear plant is estimated at several trillion yen.

The ministry has stressed its intention to protect the public from the huge financial burden. It has promised to make Tokyo Electric Power Co., operator of the Fukushima plant, pay for the work by saving necessary funds through streamlining its operations.

But the ministry has proposed a new system to use the money saved from more efficient power grid operations primarily to cover decommissioning costs.

The current rule requires major utilities to lower the charges they impose on smaller power suppliers using their transmission lines when higher efficiency lifts their profits. But the proposed system would exempt the big power companies from the rule when they spend the money saved on decommissioning reactors.

The ministry seems to be trying to convince the public that this approach would not increase the financial burden on consumers because it doesn't involve price hikes.

But this idea raises some questions that cannot be overlooked.

The costs of decommissioning reactors are by nature expenses related to power generation. But the ministry's proposal would transfer part of the expenses to the operations of transmission lines.

As a result, new power suppliers using TEPCO's transmission cables would have to pay higher fees.

Subscribers to such new utilities would also have to shoulder part of the burden. In particular, **the envisioned system would be totally unacceptable for consumers who have switched to new power providers to avoid using electricity generated by nuclear plants.**

The ministry appears to be targeting an "easy source" of revenue. The charges on using transmission lines are not highly visible to general consumers.

The ministry's plan to use power transmission charges as a source of funds to decommission reactors is a crafty scheme to give preferential treatment to nuclear power. Its aim is to ensure nuclear plants will not lose their cost competitiveness against other electricity sources like thermal power generation.

For many years, both the government and established utilities have been emphasizing that atomic energy is a low-cost source of electricity.

They are grossly irresponsible and insincere if they are trying to impose part of the inevitable cost burden of decommissioning reactors on competitors.

The ministry should rethink the idea from the viewpoint of the basic principles of market deregulation.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Nov. 7

Has Abe forgotten?

November 12, 2016

EDITORIAL: Japan's nuclear deal with India undermines its key principles

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611120028.html>

Given the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki caused by the 1945 atomic bombings of these cities, many Japanese harbor a profound desire to see the world rid itself of nuclear weapons.

Yet, the Abe administration is behaving as if it has forgotten Japan's fundamental principles concerning these weapons of mass destruction based on its status as the only nation that has ever sustained nuclear attacks.

The government signed an agreement Nov. 11 that opens the door to nuclear trade with India.

India has developed and now possesses nuclear arms. It has not joined the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

Signing a nuclear trade deal with a country that has shunned the treaty designed to stop the spread of nuclear weapons is itself a big mistake. Besides, the agreement contains many questionable and worrisome elements.

The pact allows Japan to provide nuclear technology to India without sufficient guarantee that New Delhi will not conduct nuclear arms tests.

New Delhi has imposed a voluntary moratorium on nuclear tests. The focus of the negotiations between the two countries over the agreement was what kind of action Japan can take in case India resumes testing nuclear arms.

A clause that allows Tokyo to suspend and revoke the agreement if India conducts a nuclear test has not been inserted into the main body of the agreement. Instead, it has been relegated to a related document.

Not only that, a separate clause suggests that when India detonates a nuclear device as a test, Japan will consider whether the test is a countermeasure against actions by countries like archrival Pakistan.

There is even a provision to keep the door open to India's production of highly enriched uranium, a key ingredient for an atomic bomb.

None of the nuclear trade agreements Japan has signed with countries that are parties to the NPT contains such a provision.

This stipulation has been included in the accord, apparently at India's insistence. But it is simply too risky. The pact doesn't make it clear whether India has to immediately shut down reactors using Japanese technology when it carries out a nuclear test. On the other hand, it says Japan must pay compensation to India when Tokyo decides to withdraw the materials and equipment it has provided for the operation of the nuclear power plants.

These elements of the agreement can only be described as major concessions. Japan clearly has fallen for the allure of India's rapidly growing market, which offers great opportunities to make profits quickly.

The Japanese Foreign Ministry asserts that the agreement is similar to India's deal with the United States, which is the strictest among all the nuclear trade agreements the South Asian power has concluded with other countries.

However, it doesn't reflect Japan's unique position as the only nation to have sustained atomic bombing, nor include any additional measure to prevent nuclear proliferation.

The mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have repeatedly voiced strong objections to the agreement. They argue that the deal could be a serious impediment to efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons. They also warn that the nuclear materials, technologies and equipment provided by Japan under the deal could be used for the development of nuclear arms.

It's hard to fathom why the Abe administration has turned a deaf ear to their pleas.

India already has a nuclear agreement with Russia as well as the United States and France.

As it has weighed options for introducing nuclear technology, New Delhi has been focusing on the choice between two camps--Japan or the United States and France, where Japanese technology is used in reactors, on the one hand and Russia on the other.

Efforts by the United States, France and Japan to supply nuclear technology to India are driven partly by the geopolitical motive of countering Russia's strategic moves while putting pressure on China, which has been expanding its influence in the region.

Even so, Tokyo strongly resisted pressure from Washington and Paris in striking a nuclear trade agreement with New Delhi.

That's because Tokyo was concerned that such a deal could contribute to emasculating the global nuclear nonproliferation system based on the NPT.

As a country that has first-hand experiences of nuclear devastation, Japan must never take an action that can ruin the global nonproliferation safeguards. We demand that both the ruling and opposition camps engage in exhaustive Diet debate on the agreement.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Nov. 12

Nuke technology should not be exported

November 12, 2016

VOX POPULI: Nuclear disaster surely taught us not to export this technology

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611120023.html>

The town of Futaba, which co-hosts the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, used to boast signage promoting nuclear power generation.

One sign proclaimed, "Genshiryoku--Akarui Mirai no Enerugii," which translates literally as "Nuclear power: The energy of a bright future."

This and other signs were removed in the aftermath of the March 2011 nuclear disaster. They were relocated last month to the Fukushima Museum in the city of Aizuwakamatsu, according to the Fukushima edition of The Asahi Shimbun.

The museum is said to be considering an eventual exhibition of these acquisitions, which include a panel bearing the slogan, "Genshiryoku Tadashii Rikai de Yutakana Kurashi" (Proper understanding of nuclear energy enriches life).

These upbeat messages convey the hope, once held by the town of Futaba, that hosting the nuclear power plant will bring prosperity to the community.

But now, the reality gap is all too stark. Completely evacuated in the aftermath of the disaster, Futaba remains a dead town.

Is nuclear power still "the energy of a bright future"?

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe signed a Japan-India nuclear deal on Nov. 11 during his summit with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, opening the way for Japan to export nuclear reactors to India.

This bilateral treaty came about at India's request for Japanese technological cooperation.

In the vicinity of the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, more than 50,000 citizens are still living as forced evacuees, while work continues on the dismantling of the plant's disabled reactors.

How could any country that let this happen have no qualms about providing its nuclear technology to another country? This is simply beyond comprehension.

While campaigning for India's general election two years ago, Modi stressed that the nation could not hope for industrial or agricultural progress without electricity.

Of India's population of 1.3 billion, about 300 million are still living without electricity. Correcting this power deficiency is obviously an urgent task, but is providing nuclear technology to India the only help that Japan can offer?

With evacuation orders still in effect for Futaba citizens, there is still nothing to indicate that the town will be habitable again.

And we, the Japanese people, know at first hand how difficult it is to rebuild people's lives that were destroyed by a nuclear accident.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Nov. 12

Economic gain before disarmament

November 12, 2016

November 12, 2016

Japan's Nuclear Industry Finds a Lifeline in India After Foundering Elsewhere

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/SDI201611122242.html>

By JONATHAN SOBLE/© 2016 The New York Times

TOKYO--Despite objections from anti-nuclear campaigners, Japan's government cleared the way on Friday for companies that build nuclear power plants to sell their technology to India -- one of the few nations planning big expansions in atomic energy -- by signing a cooperation agreement with the South Asian country.

The deal is a lifeline for the Japanese nuclear power industry, which has been foundering since meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant in northeastern Japan in 2011. Plans to build a dozen new reactors in Japan were canceled after that, a gut punch for some of the country's biggest industrial conglomerates, including Toshiba and Hitachi.

With the domestic market moribund, Japanese companies had been pursuing deals abroad, but success was elusive.

The economic case for nuclear energy has weakened as a result of low oil and gas prices, prompting utilities and governments around the world to rethink construction. The Fukushima disaster increased safety concerns. And Japanese vendors have had to fight lower-cost rivals from places like Russia and South Korea for a shrinking number of customers.

India looks like a rare opportunity. It is planning 20 new reactors over the next decade or so, and as many as 55 more have been proposed. Shinzo Abe, the Japanese prime minister, and Narendra Modi, his Indian counterpart, are hoping that trade can underpin a broader strategic relationship, aimed in part at fending off China.

The nuclear deal has nonetheless drawn criticism in Japan. India possesses atomic weapons and has kept itself outside the international legal framework against proliferation. Because of that, many in Japan, which was hit by two nuclear bombs in World War II, would prefer not to establish ties with nuclear power.

Left-leaning Japanese newspapers have published editorials against the Indian deal, and the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the bombed cities, have issued pleas to stop it. Formal negotiations by the two governments lasted six years. Other countries have already begun allowing nuclear-related exports to India, including the United States, which signed a similar accord a decade ago.

“There was a huge outcry when the government first said it would pursue this” in 2010, said Masaaki Fukunaga, a professor at the Center for South Asian Studies at Gifu Women’s University in Gifu, Japan, who has followed the issue closely. “The industry and the government were determined.”

Abe said Japan had reserved the right to stop nuclear exports if India conducted another nuclear weapons test.

“There is a legal framework to ensure India’s responsible and peaceful use of technology,” he said.

Japanese leaders say they are looking to support more than just the nuclear industry. National economic growth may be at stake. As Japan has become less competitive in sectors like consumer electronics, big industrial projects are being counted on to fill the gap.

In addition to the nuclear accord signed Friday, Abe and Modi agreed to explore plans to build additional high-speed rail lines in India based on Japan’s Shinkansen bullet-train technology. Construction on a previously agreed line from Mumbai to Ahmedabad will begin in 2023, the leaders said. Japan will help finance the project with low-interest loans.

Japan’s push to become a global infrastructure powerhouse has had setbacks. Vietnam’s legislature scrapped plans in 2010 for a Shinkansen train line, citing costs, and is reportedly close to canceling plans for a proposed Japanese-built nuclear power station. Indonesia chose a Chinese group’s bid last year to build a high-speed rail line over a Japanese bid that had been considered the favorite.

South Korea underbid Japan to win a contract to build the first nuclear reactors in the United Arab Emirates. And Tokyo Electric Power, owner of the ruined power station in Fukushima, pulled out of a bid to build and run a nuclear power station in Turkey. A Japanese-French consortium ultimately won the Turkish contract in 2013, after a strong diplomatic push from Abe, but it remains the only successful Japanese nuclear-plant sale since the Fukushima accident.

The bet on India is no sure thing. Nuclear plants can take decades to plan and build, and proposals to develop them are vulnerable to political and economic shifts. The Indian government must find new locations for some proposed plants because of local protests. And even for countries that have already signed nuclear trade agreements with India, little actual business has materialized so far, in part because of an Indian law that opens hardware vendors to potentially unlimited liability claims in the case of accidents.

India has been working with the United States and other countries to create a framework for minimizing vendors’ liability risk, including the creation of a domestic accident compensation fund. Officials hope to complete it next year.

If that hurdle can be overcome, the first Japanese company to benefit from the agreement with India will most likely be Toshiba, whose U.S. subsidiary Westinghouse has won conditional approval to build six reactors in India. Westinghouse uses components from Japan, including reactor-containment vessels built in Japanese steelworks, so the deal signed Friday is essential to moving forward.

Toshiba needs the boost. It acquired Westinghouse in 2006 for \$5.4 billion, a princely investment upon which it was struggling to earn a return, even before Fukushima. Investigators examining a \$1.2 billion

accounting scandal at Toshiba last year concluded that managers had inflated revenue figures at the company in large part to cover up the poor financial state of its nuclear power business.
(Nov. 11, 2016)

Japan-India pact puts economic gain before disarmament: critics

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/12/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-india-pact-puts-economic-gain-disarmament-critics/>

Kyodo

The government signed a controversial civilian nuclear cooperation pact with India on Friday, disappointing A-bomb survivors and other opponents of the deal who believe Tokyo has placed economic gain ahead of its stated goal of global nuclear disarmament.

The pact opens up a massive market for Japan's nuclear energy industry, which suffered a huge setback from the March 2011 Fukushima disaster, and falls in line with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's infrastructure export-focused growth strategy.

But opponents argue that India, which tested nuclear weapons in the 1970s and 1990s, could end up using technology obtained through the pact for military purposes. India is a nonsignatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The government has downplayed the concerns, saying strictly peaceful use of the nuclear technology is ensured by provisions stating Japan that can terminate the pact if India breaks its 2008 promise to maintain a moratorium on nuclear testing.

"(The pact) matches with our country's stance to promote nonproliferation and a world without nuclear weapons," Abe told a joint news conference Friday after the deal was signed in Tokyo at a meeting with Indian counterpart Narendra Modi.

"(It) will ensure India will take responsible action regarding the peaceful use of nuclear energy," Abe said. But the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which were devastated by atomic bombs in 1945 in the closing stages of World War II, said the deal defies the will of the Japanese people.

Nagasaki Mayor Tomihisa Taue called the pact "extremely regrettable."

"Nuclear-related technology and nuclear material could be diverted to development of nuclear weapons," Taue said in a statement. "I have concerns the NPT regime could be hollowed out."

Hiroshima Mayor Kazumi Matsui issued a similar statement, saying he remains concerned about possible diversion of nuclear materials and technology for military use.

Matsui also urged the Abe government to pressure India to join the NPT as soon as possible so the South Asian country will end its nuclear weapons development.

The deal hinged on a compromise by Tokyo, which walked back its demand for a guarantee that India would not resume nuclear testing, according to a source close to the negotiations, which began in 2010. Japan had long demanded an explicit provision stating that the deal is off if India restarts nuclear tests, but this was dropped at the last minute, apparently out of consideration for India's reluctance to renounce its nuclear capabilities in the face of border disputes with both China and Pakistan.

Critics say the pact is unprincipled and driven only by the lure of the 1.3 billion-strong Indian market. They say it sullies Japan's mission to rid the world of nuclear weapons as the only country in history to have come under nuclear attack.

The government is “only thinking about immediate profit,” said Takeshi Yamakawa, 80, who is a member of an anti-nuclear group in Nagasaki.

So Horie, a 76-year-old hibakusha, said that exporting nuclear technology to India is the “coercive selling of unhappiness” and shows that the government is “prioritizing the economy.”

The decision to sign the pact with India also spurred anger among the people displaced by the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, including 67-year-old Fukushima Prefecture resident Haruko Kanai.

“I don’t want another restart of nuclear power plants ... I don’t want (nuclear technology) to be sold,” she said.

As China’s growing influence in the Asia-Pacific region extends to its economic push in India, analysts say Abe is keen to counter with infrastructure investment, including nuclear energy.

China has poured money into port facilities in India and its neighbors on the Indian Ocean, which are close to sea lanes Japan relies on for its oil imports from the Middle East.

The opening of the Indian market is welcome news for Japan’s nuclear technology firms, whose domestic market ground to a halt after the Fukushima disaster was triggered by a powerful earthquake that spawned a massive tsunami.

The Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan, an electric utility lobby, stressed the importance of Japan “using its experience to make a contribution to the world, on the basic premise of the peaceful use of nuclear energy.”

Tightened safety guidelines and legal fights, along with public safety concerns, have delayed the government’s push to put its shuttered reactors back into service. Vietnam also recently scrapped plans to build its first nuclear reactors due to budgetary concerns. Some of the contracts had been awarded to Japanese concerns.

For India, whose economy grew 7.6 percent in 2015, the pact may help it meet its urgent need for stable power. With more than 300 million people in India living without electricity, the country aims to increase the proportion of nuclear-generated electricity from 2 percent now to 25 percent by 2050.

Standing next to Abe in Tokyo Friday, Modi said India’s economy is “pursuing many transformations.”

“Our aim is to become a major center for manufacturing, investment and for 21st century knowledge industries, and in this journey we see Japan as a natural partner,” he said.

Japan confirms unraveling of NPT

November 12, 2016

Editorial: Japan-India nuclear accord shows Japan's lacking will as A-bombed nation

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161112/p2a/00m/0na/004000c>

Japan signed a nuclear energy agreement with India on Nov. 11, on the occasion of a visit to Japan by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, opening the way for Japan to sell civil nuclear power equipment and technology to India.

- **【Related】** Japan, India sign agreement on civil nuclear power

India, which possesses nuclear weapons, has not joined the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), an international framework that regulates the use of nuclear energy. The latest deal allows Japan to cooperate with the nuclear state, which is not recognized as such under international law, in the field of atomic energy. Doesn't this signal that **Japan is confirming the unraveling of the NPT framework?**

Moreover, a promise -- which Tokyo had strongly demanded -- that cooperation would be suspended if India were to conduct a nuclear test was not written into the agreement. India refused to incorporate such a pledge into the bilateral agreement on the grounds that similar agreements it has with eight other countries, including the United States and France, do not have such a clause.

Instead, Japan and India signed a separate document instead, but it, too, does not mention nuclear testing. Japan is taking the position that the promise it sought has been made, since the document mentions a 2008 international agreement in which India pledged to continue its moratorium on nuclear tests and keep its civilian and military uses of atomic energy separate. Tokyo explains that the document is legally binding and effectively obligates India to participate in the international nuclear non-proliferation framework.

However, Tokyo should have persuaded New Delhi to incorporate the suspension of nuclear tests into the agreement. It is regrettable that Japan failed to stand firm in its demand as the only atomic-bombed country in the world. India apparently does not want to give up its right to conduct nuclear tests, as its neighbor Pakistan possesses nuclear arms and is not a member of the NPT.

The agreement also states that spent nuclear fuel in India can be reprocessed only for peaceful use. However, the International Atomic Energy Agency is authorized to inspect only civilian facilities in India to verify if India is indeed limiting its use of reprocessed nuclear fuel to peaceful purposes. Under such circumstances, it is impossible to completely prevent India from converting spent nuclear fuel to military use.

The NPT began to lose its substance when 45 countries belonging to the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) decided to permit the supply of nuclear reactor equipment to India, which is not party to the NPT, as an exception. Japan was one of those countries. The signing of the latest Japan-India atomic energy agreement could be seen as a consequence of the NSG decision made eight years ago.

Japan's business community will likely welcome the fact that they can export nuclear plant equipment to India where the demand for such power stations is high. As a result of Japanese nuclear energy companies strengthening partnerships with their counterparts in the United States and France, these countries, which would have been adversely affected if Japan had failed to reach an atomic energy agreement with India, strongly pressured Japan to sign the pact. The administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe appears to be enthusiastic about stepping up cooperation with India to counter the rise of China.

India is an important partner for Japan in terms of both the economy and security. Strengthened relations between Tokyo and New Delhi should be welcomed. However, the latest agreement has tarnished the moral principles that Japan has maintained as the world's only atomic-bombed country.

Luxury hotel in Fukushima



November 12, 2016

A new luxury hotel — in Fukushima?

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2016/11/12/travel/new-luxury-hotel-fukushima/#.WCgaoMmDmot>

by Robert Michael Poole
Special To The Japan Times

On March 11, 2011, the residents of Fukushima Prefecture felt the earth shake as a massive quake struck off the northeastern coast of Japan. But few could have predicted the explosions that would later follow or that the reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant would go in to meltdown. The region has been physically changed, tainted by radiation, but also altered in other ways: The government's investigation and ensuing media attention has ensured the words "Fukushima" and "radiation" are forever linked.

One of the most unique disaster images from Fukushima though, is not a photograph of earthquake-cracked villages or exploding reactor buildings. It is an ukiyo-e print by Meiji Era (1868-1912) artist Tankei Inoue. The print depicts the 1888 eruption of Mount Bandai in Yama-Gun, Fukushima, which wiped out villages and transformed the region's farmland. It was the first major natural disaster that the forward-thinking Meiji Era government faced.

The damage to Fukushima's reputation from that catastrophe eventually faded. In fact, the disaster created a new, rich landscape, one that forms part of the present Bandai-Asahi National Park. The region

is home to a rather unique hotel that is actively seeking to allay fears that Fukushima is once again a dodgy destination for tourists.

“We want to provide facts about what is happening in this region,” says Takeshi Munakata, owner of Hotelli Aalto, which provides radiation readings on its website that are taken at the hotel and other areas of Japan. “There are many areas with higher radiation than this place, so it’s important to show the facts to the public.”

Hotelli Aalto is surrounded by lakes and ponds created by the Mount Bandai eruption, and it offers access to nature at its most raw. The 13 rooms here (priced from ¥28,000 per person) are divided between those with a forest or mountain view. There is also the new Aalto Lodge a short distance from the main hotel, designed for families and even pets. Renovated in 2007, the hotel has a European mountain-lodge feel with an open-plan lobby where guests to relax and mingle. As well as indoor and outdoor natural *onsen* (hot springs), Aalto also offers Nordic and Japanese fusion cuisine.

The hotel is perched high in the mountains some 100 kilometers from the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, in the far west of the prefecture. But being located within Fukushima has left it with an image problem — everything within the prefecture borders can sound toxic, even though neighboring Ibaraki and Miyagi prefectures are closer to the plant and have been more affected by the events of March 2011.

“In the first two years before the earthquake we were just growing, working toward our targets,” Munakata says. “Only now we are getting to that target. In 2010, we had 30 percent capacity and now it’s getting to 50 percent.”

The Reconstruction Agency, tasked by the government with the rebuilding after the Great East Japan Earthquake, stated earlier this year that Fukushima tourism is still in a “severe situation” and that, due to reputational damage, Fukushima “has not been able to enjoy the effects of the national inbound surge.” In 2010, 8.6 million overseas visitors came to Japan, according to the Japan National Tourism Organization. After the 2011 disaster, every region except Okinawa saw a decrease in foreign tourists, but none more so than Tohoku, which dropped to 40 percent of its normal influx. By 2013, all regions bar Tohoku had rebounded past their 2010 numbers. Fukushima remains hit the hardest. The Reconstruction Agency shows that the number of foreign tourists staying overnight in Fukushima Prefecture fell by 70 percent in 2011 and has barely increased since.

“It’s difficult to communicate the safety of the region — when information comes from the government, non-Japanese will not trust the credibility,” Munakata says. “Also, saying ‘It is safe’ only draws attention to the issue, so it doesn’t really help.”

Fukushima Prefecture is itself divided into three regions: Aizu, Nakadori and Hamadori. Some in westernmost Aizu considered whether it would be beneficial to incorporate it within a neighboring prefecture in order to lose the damaging Fukushima tag. But Munakata, whose Hotelli Aalto is located in Aizu, disagrees.

“I also feel that I am responsible, we all are, to support the people on the coastal side. There are many ways to help, but what we think is important is to be able to sustain our business without (governmental) support, standing on our own feet.”

Rebuilding the infrastructure to attract foreign tourists back to Fukushima, however, has required the financial support of the national government and Tepco, the owner of the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, due to the massive loss in business revenue the region has faced. According to Yoshihiro Sonobe, director of Hakko construction — the company that renovated Hotelli Aalto’s 40-year-old building — financial assistance has had to come from various sources.

“Fukushima Prefecture created a system of interest compensation for loans taken out by businesses from financial institutions,” he says.

Tepco's official figures show it has paid ¥6 trillion (\$57.6 billion) in reparations, of which ¥4,780 billion (\$4.59 billion) went to local businesses. The compensation includes an amount for lost sales due to misinformation or damage to the business's reputation, totaling ¥1,460 billion (\$1.4 billion).

"How much of this is related to tourism though is unclear," Sonobe says.

Since 2011, the prefectural government and Tepco have been providing an ongoing fund to each hotel to fill in their average revenue, covering the gap that they have lost. They also paid up to ¥8,000 per day for evacuees to stay in hotels until temporary homes were built, which lasted about half a year.

"We struggle because of our location, but some have recovered better," Munakata says.

In March, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe set a target to triple international overnight visitors staying in Tohoku hotels from 500,000 in 2015 to 1.5 million by 2020, promising to boost the budget for research, promotion and marketing of a "new Tohoku" from ¥500 million (\$5 million) to ¥5 billion (\$50 million). The Reconstruction Agency also recommended an initiative for boosting domestic educational travel. Hotelli Aalto is perhaps better positioned than most to benefit from the government's new drive, due to its distinct international flavor. Designed by Yoshihiro Masuko, chairman of The Scandinavian Architecture and Design Institute of Japan, it blends Japanese and north European design.

The building first opened in the 1960s as a traditional *sanso* (Japanese mountain villa). Munakata had helped maintain the villa in the 10 years before it closed in 2007 and, not wanting to see the space go to waste, decided to revive it himself.

"I was in Finland when I had to make the name of the hotel and, while I was driving, I saw the word 'Aalto' come on the tuner of the radio, and that inspired me," he says. The name, meaning "small waves" in Finnish, also happens to be the surname of Finland's most famous architect: Alvar Aalto.

Munakata hired Yoshikazu Masuko, one of Japan's own "famous architects," who also has a long track record of designing Nordic architecture. The Japan-meets-Scandinavia concept for the hotel is an idea supported by a shared climate — temperatures can get down to -20 degrees Celsius in both Finland and Aizu.

"The people in Finland enjoy winter, with long nights and little sunlight, by staying inside. I wanted to have that mindset within this hotel," says Munakata.

Building on a strong demand in Japan for northern European style, the hotel is offering a lifestyle and design concept with an interior that uses only natural elements.

Unlike Japan, Scandinavia has a "culture of using chairs," Munakata says, "but what we did was to use wood in a unique Japanese way, combining the culture of chairs with the Japanese birch of Shirakawa. We wanted to use only local wood to create this."

This month the hotel is expanding, with the opening of Aalto Lodge, a private villa with a wooden bath separate from the main hotel. Munakata hopes it will further the hotel's appeal to foreign tourists. Priced at around ¥80,000 for a two-night stay, the family-sized house is set within a forest a short drive from the main hotel.

"It's all about communicating the beauty of this region, like the charming Kitashiobara Village and Ura Bandai ski resort on our doorstep," Munakata says.

"If that eruption of Mount Bandai didn't happen 128 years ago, we wouldn't have this beautiful region of rich soil and fresh lakes. Japan has faced many challenges **from natural disasters** but it's also our strength. No matter how tough the challenges are, we want to stand up and get moving again."

For more details, visit www.hotelliaalto.com.

See also : <http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161110/p2a/00m/0na/005000c>

Remember Fukushima

November 14, 2016

Fukushima wants policy to reflect Daiichi lesson

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161114_22/

The governor of Fukushima Prefecture says Japan's nuclear energy policy should be based on lessons learned from the 2011 nuclear accident.

Masao Uchibori made the remarks on Monday 3 days after leaders from Japan and India signed an agreement that will allow the export of nuclear power technology to India.

The pact limits the use of nuclear-related technology to peaceful purposes and both countries will exchange information on materials and equipment.

Uchibori told reporters that the prefecture is still enduring hardship more than 5 years after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident.

The governor said it is important for the prefecture to tell the country and the world about the massive problems and challenges it is experiencing.

He also stressed the importance of pressing the government and Tokyo Electric Power Company, the Daiichi plant's operator, to scrap all nuclear reactors in Fukushima.

Pakistan & nukes: Why not us?

November 12, 2016

Pakistan raps what it called Japan's 'discriminatory' nuclear deal with India

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/12/national/politics-diplomacy/pakistan-raps-called-japans-discriminatory-nuclear-deal-india/#.WCjVLsmDmos>

Kyodo

ISLAMABAD – Pakistan fears Japan's signing of a civilian nuclear technology deal with India could undermine regional stability, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said, while asking the international community not to discriminate against his country in favor of its neighboring archrival.

The official, Nafess Zakaria, responding to a Kyodo News query on Friday's deal inked during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Tokyo, urged Japan and other countries "to objectively assess the consequences of discriminatory approaches to our region."

Pakistan, he said, considers the exemption granted to India by the Vienna-based Nuclear Suppliers Group, effectively allowing the South Asian country to expand its nuclear power industry, “has negatively impacted the strategic balance in the region.”

“It has allowed India to gain access to foreign sources of nuclear fuel and freed up its domestic reserves which are being utilized for rapid expansion of its military nuclear program,” he said, adding, “We have taken up the issue ... with the Japanese side.”

Pakistan has sought similar treatment since 2008 when the NSG — a group of nuclear supplier countries that seek to prevent proliferation by controlling the export of materials, equipment and technology that could be used to manufacture nuclear weapons — exempted India from its ban against selling to countries that have not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

But Pakistan’s track record as a nuclear proliferator has made that difficult to achieve.

Neither Pakistan nor India, which have both tested nuclear weapons and fought three wars since their 1947 split, have signed the NPT.

Under the civilian nuclear cooperation pact inked in Tokyo, which paves the way for Japan to export nuclear materials and technology to India, the latter is required to use them for peaceful purposes only, and not for research or development aimed at improving their nuclear weapons capability.

Under the pact, India will be allowed to reprocess supplied and produced nuclear materials and byproducts, but cannot make highly enriched uranium, which potentially could be used in the production of nuclear weapons, without Japan’s consent.

Tokyo can halt its nuclear cooperation if New Delhi breaches its 2008 commitment to a moratorium on nuclear testing.

India has already signed such nuclear deals with France, Russia and the United States, among other countries. Pakistan, by contrast, enjoys nuclear cooperation only with China.

Zakaria said all the NSG countries including the United States — which backs India’s membership in the 48-member body but not that of Pakistan — should adopt objective, nondiscriminatory criteria “which are not only promoting nonproliferation objectives but they promote strategic stability in South Asia.”

"Economically practical": 20 more years for Mihama No.3

November 16, 2016

NRA exception gives new lease on life to another aging reactor

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611160045.html>

By HIROSHI ISHIZUKA/ Staff Writer



The No. 3 reactor of the Mihama nuclear power plant stands in the background. The two reactors in the foreground will be decommissioned. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

The nation's nuclear watchdog granted approval Nov. 16 for the aging No. 3 reactor at the Mihama nuclear plant to operate for an additional 20 years, making an exception for the second time.

The plant in Fukui Prefecture operated by Kansai Electric Power Co. will reach its 40-year-lifespan at the end of the month.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority previously allowed the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at the Takahama nuclear plant, also in the prefecture, to extend operations for 20 years. That authorization was given in June.

Limiting nuclear plant operations to 40 years, in principle, was decided on in the aftermath of the 2011 accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The decision, made while the Democratic Party of Japan was in control of government, was supported by the Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito, then in opposition but now ruling as a coalition. Under that new rule, there was a provision for a one-time exemption to allow extension of operations for 20 years. But **the DPJ government said such extensions would be "extremely exceptional."**

The latest approval does not mean the Mihama No. 3 reactor will be resuming operations any time soon. Kansai Electric Power must first implement the measures it promised to heighten safety.

Anti-quake measures and the switching of electric cables that total about 1,000 kilometers in length is expected to take more than three years, meaning that operations will only resume by March 2020 at the earliest.

In order to allow for an extension, a nuclear plant operator has to pass three screenings based on tougher safety standards before the 40-year deadline is reached.

Kansai Electric Power submitted an application to the NRA in November 2015 for an extension of the Mihama reactor.

Under safety screening based on new standards, the estimated size of the shaking of a possible earthquake that might hit the area around the plant was raised from 750 gal to 993 gal. A gal is a measure of ground acceleration related to seismic shaking.

The higher standard meant Kansai Electric Power had to demonstrate that equipment at the Mihama plant could withstand shaking of that size. The utility was also told to switch the electric cables used on the plant site to ones that were less flammable.

With the November deadline approaching, the NRA pushed the Mihama No. 3 reactor safety screening to the top of its list. In October, the agency approved the utility's basic policy for safety measures. It later also approved the detailed design plans for plant equipment.

The latest decision by the NRA means Kansai Electric Power now has the three approvals it needs to extend operations for 20 years.

Operation extension approved for Mihama reactor

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161116_18/

Japan's nuclear regulator has said an aging reactor will be allowed to operate beyond its 40-year maximum life span.

The No.3 reactor at the Mihama nuclear power plant, on the Sea of Japan coast, has been given a 20-year extension. The Nuclear Regulation Authority made the unanimous decision on Wednesday.

The reactor, in Fukui Prefecture, went offline in March 2011 for a regular checkup and has not been restarted.

The Mihama reactor turns 40 years old later this year, and it will now be permitted to run until November 2036.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority heard evidence on Wednesday that the reactor's pipes and electric cables are expected to meet required standards for up to 60 years since operations began in 1976.

Some members referred to a 2004 accident at the reactor in which 5 workers were killed after high-temperature steam leaked from a damaged pipe. They urged the operator, Kansai Electric Power Company, to keep checking for possible decay to the facility.

The reactor is the third in Japan to be granted an extension, after 2 reactors at the nearby Takahama plant were approved for restarts in June.

Kansai Electric said it will not restart operations until additional safety work has been completed, by March 2020 at the earliest. It said **it believes the restart will be economically practical.**

See also: <http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161116/p2g/00m/0dm/047000c>

Decommissioning: What cooperation?

November 16, 2016

TEPCO may struggle to find partners due to Fukushima decommissioning costs

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161116/p2a/00m/0na/008000c>

Naomi Hirose, president of Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. (TEPCO), presented a proposal to reform the operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant to the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry's expert panel on Nov. 15.

Under the proposal submitted by Hirose on the reform of TEPCO and issues related to the crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant, TEPCO is to collaborate with other power companies in the areas of nuclear power generation and energy transmission and distribution in an effort to boost its earning power. But if other major utilities were to work with TEPCO on a nuclear power project, questions would be raised about how to split risks such as decommissioning costs for the crippled Fukushima plant among companies concerned. Such being the case, TEPCO will likely have difficulty finding partners.

Hirose attended the closed-door expert committee meeting as an observer. Committee chairman Kunio Ito (specially-appointed professor at Hitotsubashi University) and a senior industry ministry official revealed the details of Hirose's reform proposal at a news conference after the panel meeting.

According to details revealed at the news conference, Hirose proposed to step up TEPCO's cooperation with other power companies on its nuclear power business including the areas of safety measures, joint technological development and overseas business operations. The industry ministry had already proposed at an expert panel meeting that TEPCO spin off its nuclear business into a subsidiary and collaborate with other utilities, among other moves. TEPCO is expected to incorporate these plans into the "New Comprehensive Special Business Plan" that is set to be revised early next year in line with discussions at expert panel meetings.

Under the current New Comprehensive Special Business Plan, TEPCO assumes reactivation of its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant as a source of earnings to be used to rebuild itself. But there are no prospects of the power plant being reactivated as the governor of Niigata Prefecture, which hosts the nuclear facility, is taking a cautious stance toward reactivation. The industry ministry wants to secure understanding of a plan to reactivate the nuclear power plant by improving the creditworthiness of TEPCO's nuclear business through collaboration with other utilities. But because there is a possibility of other power companies being forced to shoulder the costs of decommissioning the crippled Fukushima plant, it remains unclear whether TEPCO will be able to cooperate with those utilities as envisioned.

A member of the expert panel was quoted as saying at the meeting, "A proper alliance cannot be formed unless ways of shutting off the risks (for possible alliance partners) are considered. Hirose also proposed that TEPCO work with other firms in the area of power generation and transmission, as well as jointly procure materials with other firms.

As for the costs of decommissioning the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, which are expected to exceed the initial estimate by several trillion yen, and expenses for paying compensation to nuclear disaster victims, the expert panel confirmed plans for TEPCO to minimize financial burdens on the public through management efforts. An expert panel member was quoted as saying at the Nov. 15 meeting, "If TEPCO's liability is defined as limited, the general public will see the move as relief measures for TEPCO. We should carefully consider public opinion."

Nuclear pact with India: How "safe"?

November 15, 2016

A questionable nuclear deal

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/11/15/editorials/questionable-nuclear-deal/#.WCr5KMMdmos>

The civilian nuclear cooperation deal signed by Tokyo and New Delhi last week paves the way for Japan to export nuclear power equipment and technology to India, which is a non-signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and possesses nuclear weapons. When the pact is submitted for its endorsement, the Diet needs to scrutinize whether it is appropriate from the viewpoint of the international regime against nuclear proliferation and consistent with the efforts of Japan — the sole country to have experienced nuclear attacks — to promote nonproliferation and the abolition of nuclear arms. In concluding the deal with his visiting Indian counterpart Narendra Modi last week, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe — who is pushing the export of nuclear technology in his efforts for promote overseas infrastructure sale as a key pillar of his growth strategy — emphasized that the deal will lead to India effectively joining the nonproliferation regime. The two countries have concurred that Japan can terminate the accord if India ends its voluntary moratorium on nuclear weapons testing, which has been in place since 2008. Questions persist, however, as to how tight will be the guarantee that nuclear technology and materials made available through the pact will not be diverted to military purposes. In recent years, Japan has concluded a series of civilian nuclear cooperation pacts with such countries as Vietnam, Jordan and Turkey in an effort to export its nuclear power plant technology and equipment. But the latest deal with India carries different ramifications. **It marks a deviation from Japan's emphasis on the NPT regime as the international framework for nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, which is already threatened by North Korea's repeated nuclear weapons tests.**

India carried out nuclear weapons tests in 1974 and 1998 and is believed to possess at least 100 nuclear warheads. It has refused to join the NPT, which limits possession of nuclear arms to the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China, nor has it signed the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The international community for years prohibited civilian nuclear cooperation with India, but the U.S. administration of President George W. Bush in 2008 concluded such a pact with New Delhi with an eye on building nuclear power plants in the rapidly growing South Asian economy — a move followed by other countries including Japan.

Japan's negotiations with India on civilian nuclear cooperation began in 2010, but were suspended when Tokyo Electric Power's Fukushima No. 1 plant was hit by triple meltdowns in the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. Abe resumed the talks for the pact when Modi's predecessor Manmohan Singh came to Tokyo in 2013, and agreed in principle to the deal when he visited New Delhi last December.

The nuclear pact with India is **part of the Abe administration's broad strategy of beefing up both economic and security relations with India as a counterweight to China's expanding clout in Asia.** There are also views that **it makes sense for Japan and the U.S. in terms of security considerations to extend civilian nuclear cooperation with India, which is counting on nuclear energy to cover an acute power supply shortage, since it will otherwise turn to Russia or China for help in developing its nuclear power industry.**

Japanese businesses involved in nuclear power meanwhile see promising markets overseas for export of their technology and equipment since the Fukushima disaster made it difficult for utilities to build new nuclear plants in Japan and the restart of idled plants remains slow. These strategic and business considerations were prioritized as Tokyo pushed for the nuclear deal, which also authorizes India to reprocess spent nuclear fuel to extract plutonium. **Japan is reported to have compromised on its earlier demand that the pact include an explicit provision that cooperation would be halted if India resumed nuclear weapons tests.** The final accord merely states that each of the parties can terminate the cooperate by notifying the other one year in advance. It is only stipulated in a separate document exchanged along with the accord that India's 2008 nuclear test moratorium serves as the basis of civilian nuclear cooperation and that the Japanese government can initiate a process to terminate the pact if it ends. The accord says the cooperation will be restricted to peaceful purposes — and that nuclear materials and technology provided through the pact must not be diverted to other purposes. Doubts persist that these provisions will guarantee that India will not resume nuclear weapons testing or divert plutonium extracted by reprocessing spent fuel to use in nuclear arms. These and other questions over the pact must be fully addressed when it comes up for deliberations in the Diet.

Extending 40-year lifespan once again might set a trend

November 17, 2016

EDITORIAL: NRA decision on aging reactors is irresponsible and unnecessary

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611170033.html>

The Nuclear Regulation Authority on Nov. 16 gave the green light to Kansai Electric Power Co.'s application to extend operations of the aging No. 3 reactor at its Mihama nuclear power plant for up to 20 years. The plant in Fukui Prefecture will reach its 40-year-lifespan at the end of the month.

The Mihama No. 3 unit is the third reactor to be granted a license renewal by the nuclear safety watchdog following the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at the same utility's Takahama nuclear power plant, also in Fukui Prefecture.

In the aftermath of the disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in 2011, the law was revised to set 40 years, in principle, as the lifespan of nuclear reactors. The licenses for reactor operations can be renewed once for up to an additional 20 years, but license renewal is supposed to be highly exceptional.

We are deeply concerned that the NRA's decision to approve the extended operation of an aging reactor could set a trend, gradually eviscerating the principle. We feel obliged to express again our opposition to the decision.

There are reactors that have been in service for more than 40 years in the United States and Europe. But experts have warned about a possible significant decline in the level of safety due to such aging issues as deterioration of the reactor vessel, which cannot be replaced.

The No. 3 reactor at the Mihama nuclear plant had a serious accident in 2004 when 11 workers were killed or injured by high temperature steam blowing out of a worn-out pipe in a turbine facility.

One of the factors behind the deadly accident was inadequate inspection over many years.

Older nuclear power plants require more careful maintenance and safety checks.

The extended operation of the aging reactors will impose a heavy burden on Kansai Electric Power, which is responsible for securing their safety.

The utility has promised to raise its estimation of ground motion due to possible earthquakes that might strike areas around the plants and take appropriate measures to bolster the quake-resistance of the reactors by spring 2020. It will also have to take additional safety measures, including steps to make electric cables less flammable.

The company will have to spend more than 380 billion yen (\$3.47 billion) to meet the requirements to extend the operation of the three reactors. This sum doesn't include the costs of building new facilities to respond to terrorist attacks required under the new stricter safety standards.

The amount of money involved could have covered the entire cost of building a 1,000-megawatt nuclear power plant before the Fukushima disaster.

Still, Kansai Electric Power claims the massive investment makes economic sense. It said it plans to also seek license renewal for the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at its Oi nuclear power plant, which will reach the 40-year legal lifespan in three years.

Of the 11 reactors it owns, the utility has decided to decommission only the two oldest--the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at the Mihama plant.

Before the 2011 accident, Kansai Electric Power promised local communities that it would replace the aging Mihama No. 3 reactor with a new one. This promise seems to have played a role in its decision to keep the Mihama No. 3 unit running.

The license renewals offer no respite from concerns about the situation in areas around Wakasa Bay in Fukui Prefecture, which are dotted with many aging reactors.

Instead of making decisions only from a business point of view, the utility should opt to decommission these reactors to lower the risk of nuclear accidents.

The NRA's stance toward the issue is also questionable.

The three reactors at the Takahama and Mihama plants faced decommissioning unless their licenses were renewed before the expiration of the 40-year term.

The NRA gave precedence to the inspections of these reactors for license renewal and allowed the utility to delay required earthquake-resistance tests for important equipment until after the completion of the planned work.

These actions indicate **the nuclear regulator tried to complete the license renewal review process before the expiry dates kicked in.**

The pools for storing spent nuclear fuel at the nuclear plants operated by Kansai Electric Power are close to reaching their capacity.

The utility says it will build an interim storage facility outside Fukui Prefecture. But there is no workable and specific plan to realize this idea.

The utility is acting in an irresponsible manner by deciding to extend the operation of these aging reactors without solving the key problem.

The catastrophic accident at the Fukushima plant has radically changed the Japanese public's perceptions of nuclear power generation.

It is hard to believe that continued use of old reactors will open up a new energy future for this nation.

Kansai Electric Power should stop to reconsider whether extending the operation of these reactors is really necessary.

Another operation approval of aging nuclear reactor contradicts 40-year rule

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161116/p2a/00m/0na/019000c>

The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) has allowed Kansai Electric Power Co. to continue running the No. 3 reactor at its Mihama Nuclear Power Station in Fukui Prefecture beyond the 40-year limit.

- **【Related】** Japan regulator OKs another nuclear reactor to run beyond 40-yr limit
- **【Related】** Another aging reactor passes safety checks to operate beyond 40 yrs
- **【Fukushima & Nuclear Power】**

This is the third nuclear reactor in the country that will have been allowed to continue to operate beyond the 40-year limit -- following the No. 1 and 2 reactors at the Takahama plant also in Fukui Prefecture. The move contradicts rules stipulating that nuclear reactors should be decommissioned after being operated for 40 years, in principle.

It had been viewed as extremely difficult to extend the lifespan of Mihama's No. 3 reactor because of its old design and difficulties in improving the reactor's quake resistance as the plant operator is required to largely increase the estimate of the scale of the maximum earthquake that could hit the plant.

As such, the NRA once hinted that it would discontinue examinations of the reactor to see if it meets the new regulatory standards.

However, Kansai Electric Power spent 165 billion yen on measures to enhance the safety of the reactor. The NRA increased its personnel to accelerate the examination of the plant, and managed to approve the continuation of its operation by the deadline.

Six aging nuclear reactors across the country are set to be shut down and decommissioned. Their operators voluntarily decided to decommission these reactors, whose outputs are small, considering the units' cost-benefit performance.

However, if power companies apply for permission to extend the lifespan of nuclear reactors, the NRA will almost certainly grant permission.

The rules limiting the operation of a nuclear reactor to 40 years, in principle, was established with the aim of reducing Japan's reliance on atomic power stations following the outbreak of the Fukushima nuclear crisis in March 2011. Both the NRA and power companies should go back to the fundamentals of the rules.

Man with (recognised) work-related cancer to sue TEPCO

November 18, 2016

Cancer patient compensated for Fukushima work to sue TEPCO

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611180052.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

November 18, 2016 at 14:10 JST

A 42-year-old man diagnosed with leukemia after working at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant plans to sue Tokyo Electric Power Co., saying the utility failed to take adequate precautions against radiation exposure.

He will also sue Kyushu Electric Power Co., operator of the Genkai nuclear plant in Saga Prefecture where he had also worked, in the lawsuit expected to be filed at the Tokyo District Court on Nov. 22. The man, who is from Kita-Kyushu in Fukuoka Prefecture, will demand about 59 million yen (\$541,000) in total compensation from the two utilities.

“TEPCO and Kyushu Electric, as the managers of the facilities, are responsible for the health of workers there, but they failed to take adequate measures to protect them from radiation exposure,” said one of the lawyers representing him.

“The man was forced to undergo unnecessary radiation exposure because of the utilities’ slipshod on-site radiation management, and as a result had to face danger to his life and fear of death,” the lawyer said. The lawyers group said the man has a strong case, citing a ruling by labor authorities in October 2015 that recognized a correlation between his leukemia and his work in response to the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

It was the first time cancer was ruled work-related among people who developed the disease after working at the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The planned lawsuit will be the first legal action against TEPCO brought by an individual whose work-related compensation claim has already been granted.

Between October 2011 and December 2013, the man worked at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant to set up a cover on the damaged No. 4 reactor building and perform other tasks.

The man also did regular maintenance jobs at the Genkai plant.

His accumulative radiation exposure at the two plants came to about 20 millisieverts.

He was diagnosed with acute myelocytic leukemia in January 2014.

Brazilian Govt worried about Fukushima jobs

November 18, 2016

Brazilian gov't calls for restraint on ads seeking foreign workers for Fukushima jobs

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161118/p2a/00m/0na/007000c>

The Brazilian Embassy in Japan and Consulate-General in Tokyo have asked media outlets serving foreigners of Japanese ancestry to refrain from easily advertising jobs with a risk of exposure to radiation from the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

- **【Related】** Foreigners hired at Fukushima nuke plant under suspected illegal contracts

The finding follows news that seven people including Brazilians of Japanese descent were involved in decommissioning work at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

Brazil wants its citizens to know the risks of working in such areas.

Sources told the Mainichi Shimbun that between March 2014 and May that year, several people, mostly Brazilians of Japanese ancestry, were involved in constructing tanks to hold contaminated water at the Fukushima No. 1 plant without receiving sufficient advance instruction on protecting themselves against radiation. Suspicions have arisen that they were hired through illegal contracts that obscured who was responsible for their safety.

The Brazilian Embassy took exception to a job ad published in a free Portuguese-language paper for Brazilians living in Japan in the spring of 2012, the year after the outbreak of the nuclear disaster. The job was to process debris within a 20-kilometer radius of the Fukushima plant. It paid 30,000 yen a day. Work for foreigners of Japanese ancestry has been declining since the economic downturn following the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, and about 100 people applied within three days of the ad being carried.

At the same time, protests about the ad rose among some Brazilians of Japanese descent, and so the Brazilian Embassy in Japan asked the publisher of the free newspaper to refrain from carrying such ads. The temp staffing agency in Osaka that ordered the ad said it refrained from employing people before the issue caused a stir, and has not sought to employ foreign workers since.

In the spring of 2015, the Brazilian Consulate-General in Tokyo took note of occasional ads in other free newspapers and put up a notice on its website asking advertisers to refrain from seeking people to work in areas around the Fukushima No. 1 plant where workers' health is put at risk.

Consul General Marco Farani told the Mainichi, "Due to the problem of radiation, I think it would be better for them not to work there, but we can't stop people who want to. Rather than looking at the good wages, it's important to properly learn about the health risks of radiation before working there. I would like the media to think about that point before publishing job ads." He said he didn't know that Brazilians of Japanese ancestry had been involved in nuclear plant decommissioning work.

Musashi University professor Angelo Ishi, a third-generation Japanese-Brazilian who is familiar with labor issues involving Brazilians of Japanese ancestry, is among those who protested against the ads.

"I took a serious view of the fact that they carried them without thinking deeply about the effects of radiation on people's health," he explained.

Regarding the suspicions of disguised contracts, he said, "It's not enough to say it was all right in the end because there was no radiation exposure or any accidents. It is necessary to make people understand the risks, providing information in advance that can also be understood by foreigners."

TEPCO must reform but how and with whom?

November 19, 2016

Panel increasingly favors drastic Tepco reforms

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/19/business/panel-increasingly-favors-drastic-tepco-reforms/#.WDBDrn2Dmot>

JJI

A panel discussing reforms for Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. is increasingly seeing a need for the utility to merge its nuclear and power grid operations with those of other companies, the chairman of the panel has said.

The panel commissioned by the industry ministry has been discussing how Tepco should streamline operations as a way to raise money to finance the decommissioning of its crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The view is spreading that tie-ups are not enough and that **Tepco should pursue integration with other firms for some operations**, Kunio Ito, chairman of the panel and professor at Hitotsubashi University, told a news conference Friday after the panel's meeting.

One member, citing a joint thermal power company between Tepco and Chubu Electric Power Co. as an example, said Tepco should explore integration for power grid operations as well, according to the panel's secretariat and other sources.

On nuclear power operations, another member said there are several possible options, including forming a company to run all plants in the country or one company each for the east and west of the country, according to the sources.

But Tepco is highly likely to face problems finding partners for business integration because they may be forced to shoulder part of the burden of funding the decommissioning of the Fukushima plant and compensating those affected by its triple core meltdown in March 2011, sources familiar with the matter said.

The electricity industry is not considering any plan for nuclear power business integration, Satoru Katsuno, chairman of the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan, told a news conference.

Fukushima students visit plant

November 19, 2016

Fukushima students see crippled nuclear plant firsthand

By CHIKAKO KAWAHARA/ Staff Writer



Students from Fukushima High School view the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant during a tour aboard a bus on Nov. 18. The No. 1 reactor building is in the background. (Chikako Kawahara)

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611190023.html>

OKUMA, Fukushima Prefecture--It was no ordinary outing for the 13 students from Fukushima High School.

The teenagers toured the site of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant by bus on Nov. 18 to get a firsthand look at work to decommission the reactors following the triple meltdown in 2011.

It was the first tour by youngsters since the disaster as plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. had deemed the radiation risk was too high.

Through bus windows, the students observed the damaged reactor buildings, rows of storage tanks holding contaminated water and other facilities on the sprawling nuclear complex.

"The tour made me realize that we should arm ourselves with accurate information if we want to change people's perceptions of Fukushima as a scary place," said Keika Kobiyama, a first-year student in the group. "For starters, I want to tell my fellow high school students 'We went to the plant to see for ourselves what was going on there.'"

TEPCO had previously refused to allow tours by those under the age of 18.

But the company gave the green light to this request as an exception on grounds that radiation levels had dropped significantly.

The students were each given a dosimeter as they boarded the bus for the two-hour tour. The trip was held after their parents agreed to the visit.

The students themselves had been releasing updates on the disaster for Japanese and foreign audiences by monitoring radiation levels in the prefecture and studying the decommissioning process.

See also : High school takes students to see Fukushima nuclear reactor decommissioning

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161119/p2a/00m/0na/008000c>

...Following the Labor Standards Act, which forbids employing people younger than 18 from working in places with harmful radiation, **TEPCO generally only allows people 18 or older to enter the plant.** From the time of the disaster through June of this year, TEPCO admitted around 23,000 visitors, but this was the first time it has done so for high school students. **According to TEPCO, the radiation exposure during the students' visit was at the most 10 microsievarts. ...**

Trying to attract tourists to Fukushima

November 20, 2016

Fukushima mounts winter tourism offensive to draw foreign tourists to its snowy charms

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/20/national/fukushima-mounts-winter-tourism-offensive-draw-foreigners-snowy-charms/#.WDHM-32Dmos>

Fukushima Minpo

A project will kick off in Fukushima Prefecture this winter to lure more foreign tourists to its snowy hills and mountains to help revitalize depopulated regions.

For starters, the prefecture will invite tourists from Taiwan, Thailand and Australia to Okuaizu, Urabandai and southern areas of the prefecture, and subsidize nearly all of their transportation and accommodation costs. About 200 people are expected to participate.

The purpose of the project is to promote Fukushima's name overseas, raise occupancy at its hotels and inns, and bolster jobs in its tourism industry.

The project will run until fiscal 2018. The Fukushima Prefectural Government plans to earmark about ¥17 million from the central government's local revitalization subsidies to finance the first year.

The prefecture is coordinating with travel agencies so that areas including the towns of Minamiaizu, Kaneyama and Bandai, as well as the villages of Kitashiobara and Tenei, can welcome visitors from Australia, where skiing is very popular, and Taiwan and Thailand, where Fukushima has tourism offices. The four towns and villages will get three tours each, including an overnight journey, with the prefecture shouldering most of the transport and accommodation fees.

Each tour is designed so participants can ski, snowboard and have snowball fights in Fukushima's powder snow, as well as enjoy local snow festivals. There are also plans to reserve a ski resort for a whole weekday just for foreign visitors.

In addition, tourists will be invited to soak in hot springs to interact with local residents after experiencing snow-removal activities. This will be followed by chances to sample the local cuisine and taste sake popular at home and abroad.

Other trips are being planned to famous tourist spots along the Tadami Line, which has gained an overseas following on the internet, and to fishing spots where pond smelt can be caught in Hibara and Hatori lakes.

Once the visitors return home, the project encourages them to spread information on the ski resorts, tourist spots, food and sake they experienced via SNS.

Already, the Fukushima Prefectural Government is looking to create more tours that appeal to a wider range of countries, including China and South Korea.

It intends to set up a study group comprising officials from cities, towns, villages and local tourism associations to analyze the participants' reactions. Based on the results, the prefecture will set up multiple tourism routes to draw attention ahead of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

"Amid tepid demand from Japanese skiers, if the prefecture successfully emphasizes the high quality of its snow, it is possible to lure more tourists from abroad," said a source connected with a ski resort in the Aizu region.

"We'd like to design a model tour to make the mountainous areas popular in winter," an official in the prefecture's regional development section said.

Even though tourism has rebounded since the Fukushima disaster unfolded in 2011, it has not fully recovered.

Last year, foreign tourists who stayed at lodging facilities with more than 20 employees in Fukushima came to 48,090, more than double the 2011 tally, according to the Japan Tourism Agency.

But that's still far short of the 87,170 who did so in 2010, and the prefecture is hunting for more ways to raise tourism in cooperation with its neighbors in the Tohoku and Kanto regions.

This section, appearing every third Monday, focuses on topics and issues covered by the Fukushima Minpo, the largest newspaper in Fukushima Prefecture. The original article was published on Aug. 5.

November 19, 2016

Check Fukuleaks website for updates on Fukushima recent quake

<http://www.fukuleaks.org/web/?p=15836>
check fukuleaks for updates

Tax breaks to reconstruct no-go zone?

November 22, 2016

Tax breaks mulled to aid reconstruction in Fukushima no-go zone

JJI

The Abe government and ruling coalition are considering giving tax breaks to companies that do business in reconstruction footholds to be set up in the no-go zone heavily contaminated by the 2011 nuclear accident in Fukushima Prefecture, according to informed sources.

Officials believe such measures will help advance industrial recovery in the prefecture hurt by the reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima No. 1 power plant in March 2011, the sources said Tuesday.

Under consideration are corporate tax cuts to promote capital investment and employment of people affected by the crisis by firms damaged by the nuclear accident and companies that newly expand into the area.

The special reconstruction areas will be created starting in fiscal 2017. Priority will be given to decontamination work and infrastructure development in the footholds, so that evacuation orders for local residents can be lifted around the end of March 2022.

The tax measures will be included in the fiscal 2017 tax system reform package that the Liberal Democratic Party-led ruling coalition plans to draw up Dec. 8.

Similar tax breaks are provided in evacuation areas outside the no-go zone. Through the planned measures, the government hopes to encourage the opening of businesses necessary for residents to live in the area, such as convenience stores and gas stations, as well as promoting job creation.

The government and the ruling camp are considering the options of allowing companies to deduct from their corporate taxes 15 percent of the amounts of their capital investment made in the footholds and granting lump-sum depreciation of new equipment and facilities so they can reduce their taxable incomes by larger margins than under regular depreciation rules.

Another possible measure is giving a corporate tax cut equivalent to 20 percent of salaries for employees in the footholds that companies hire from among those affected by the nuclear accident.

Also under consideration extending by four years a corporate tax cut granted to the owners of housing for disaster victims in special economic zones on condition the buildings meet fire resistance and other requirements and that the owners give priority to disaster-affected people in choosing tenants.

Can - definitely - be improved

November 23, 2016

Tsunami warning for Miyagi Pref. issued late despite prediction tech

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161123/p2a/00m/0na/007000c>

When a strong quake struck off the coast of Fukushima Prefecture in the early hours of Nov. 22, a tsunami warning was immediately issued for Fukushima Prefecture's coastal areas. However, there was a delay in issuing a tsunami warning for the coast of Miyagi Prefecture, directly north of Fukushima Prefecture, causing confusion among residents over whether they needed to evacuate.

- **【Related】** Tohoku coastal residents rush to high ground after quake in fear
- **【Related】** M7.4 quake hits northeastern Japan, causing tsunami
- **【Related】** Spent-fuel cooling at Fukushima Daini plant temporarily halts

When an earthquake measures lower than magnitude 8, and tsunamis are expected to reach a height of more than 1 meter up to 3 meters, tsunami warnings are issued. Tsunami advisories, meanwhile, are issued when tsunami heights are expected to be at a maximum between 0.2 meters and 1 meter.

The magnitude-7.4 quake struck at 5:59 a.m. on Nov. 22. But the tsunami advisory issued for Miyagi Prefecture was not switched to a tsunami warning until 8:09 a.m., approximately six minutes after a 1.4-meter tsunami -- the tallest tsunami recorded across the country following the latest quake -- had been observed at Sendai Port. It had already been two hours and 10 minutes since the quake had hit.

"We don't know why the waves were so high at Sendai Port," a befuddled official at the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) said. "It's extremely difficult to make accurate predictions."

At 6:02 a.m., about three minutes after the earthquake occurred, the JMA issued a tsunami warning for Fukushima Prefecture, and tsunami advisories for the Pacific Coast from Aomori Prefecture in the north all the way down to Chiba Prefecture near Tokyo.

The height and arrival times of tsunamis are calculated using a database with some 100,000 possibilities that take into consideration such factors as the magnitude, location and depth of a quake. To increase the accuracy of these calculations, data taken from the surface of the ocean and the ocean floor by GPS wave gauges installed about 20 kilometers offshore by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism is also used. Despite such data, the JMA was unable to predict the 1.4-meter tsunami, ultimately issuing a tsunami warning after the wave had already hit.

According to the JMA, not only is seabed topography more complicated closer to land than offshore, waves can grow irregularly in height after crashing into the coast. At a press conference held at JMA headquarters, senior coordinator for seismological information Koji Nakamura said, "We will analyze the causes for the delay, and consider making changes to our tsunami prediction database if necessary."

The delay in issuing a tsunami warning affected residents' evacuation.

The Miyagi Prefecture city of Higashimatsushima responded to the tsunami warning by cancelling classes at 11 municipal elementary and junior high schools. Yet, a total of 78 students attending two elementary schools arrived at their respective schools, because the school cancellation notification emails failed to reach their parents in time. Looking back on what happened, an official with the Higashimatsushima

Municipal Board of Education said, "It was difficult to determine when we should make the decision to cancel classes."

In the city center of Ishinomaki, residents trying to evacuate to high ground by car surged from around 8 a.m., causing traffic jams. Some 150 cars gathered at Ishinomaki Junior High School and Kadonowaki Junior High School -- both municipal schools on high ground -- forcing school officials to open up their school yards to the public. "As soon as the tsunami advisory was switched to a tsunami warning, people began arriving in droves," the vice principal at Kadonowaki Junior High said. "It drove home the fact that residents remember the 2011 disaster and take tsunami warnings seriously."

Experts have pointed out that the traffic jams caused by people fleeing by car in the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster were an issue that needed to be resolved. Indeed, the traffic jams that occurred following the latest quake were not limited to Miyagi Prefecture.

On a prefectural road running inland from Onahama, a coastal area of the city of Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, traffic was backed up by almost 1 kilometer for about an hour starting at 6:30 a.m. The city's disaster plan drafted after the March 2011 disasters stipulates that evacuation should generally take place on foot; at a disaster drill carried out on Nov. 5, participants walked to designated evacuation sites. An official at the Iwaki Municipal Government's Onahama outpost speculated on the reasons why many residents chose to evacuate by car, saying, "It allows people to stay warm, and to escape together with their families."

No major damage was reported from the quake or tsunami, but there is much improvement needed in tsunami prediction techniques and evacuation methods. Shinji Toda, a professor at Tohoku University's International Research Institute of Disaster Science (IRIDeS) said, "Coastal areas in the Tohoku region must be vigilant toward massive earthquakes and tsunami for another 10 to 20 years."

NRA not worried about quality of steel parts

November 22, 2016

NRA accepts utilities' assessment of plant parts

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161122_41/

Japanese nuclear regulators have accepted power companies' assessment of the durability of steel parts for their nuclear plants.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority asked 11 domestic utilities to check on steel parts made by a method called forging.

The move came after it was found that steel for nuclear plant parts made by the same method in France contained more carbon than it should. Steel with a high carbon concentration can break down easily.

Japanese utilities said last month that steel for their plant parts is unlikely to contain much carbon. [??????]

The authority on Tuesday judged the assessment as appropriate.

It also decided to review the method of inspection to make it easier to detect the amount of carbon in steel.

The authority plans to continue seeking updates on the investigation in France, where regulators have ordered some plants halted for safety checks.

NRA says weak steel components not used in Japan nuclear plants

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/22/national/nra-says-weak-steel-components-not-used-japan-nuclear-plants/#.WDSA_H3rlyU

Kyodo

The Nuclear Regulation Authority says potentially weak steel components manufactured by a Japanese company have not been used in domestic nuclear facilities, after its French counterpart ordered reactors that used the company's parts to be checked.

The NRA determined at a regular meeting Tuesday there is no comparable risk at the domestic nuclear facilities of 11 companies as portions of steel with excessive carbon concentrations had been removed from the components manufactured by Kitakyushu-based Japan Casting & Forging Corp.

The NRA concluded that the removal of portions with higher levels of carbon was insufficient in the components used in the French reactors.

The authority also determined there were no problems with critical parts at domestic facilities that were manufactured by other companies, including Tokyo-based Japan Steel Works Ltd.

The French Nuclear Safety Authority said in June it had found potential weaknesses at a number of nuclear facilities due to steel with higher levels of impurities supplied by Japan Casting & Forging, prompting the NRA to commence its own investigation.

Utilities in Japan checked their facilities and submitted reports to the NRA last month.

According to the reports, Japan Casting & Forging manufactured pressure vessel lids for 11 reactors at seven nuclear power stations, including the No. 2 reactor at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Takahama power plant in Fukui Prefecture.

The company's pressure vessel lids were also used at the No. 2 reactor at Kansai Electric's Mihama plant in Fukui Prefecture and the No. 1 reactor at Kyushu Electric Power Co.'s Genkai plant in Saga Prefecture, both of which are set to be decommissioned.

Has Fukushima quake shaken restart plans?

November 22, 2016

Earthquakes rattle Japan's plan to restart more nuclear reactors

<http://www.beyondnuclear.org/home/2016/11/22/earthquakes-rattle-japans-plan-to-restart-more-nuclear-react.html>

The Shinzo Abe government's plan to restart nuclear power in Japan was shaken to its core with a 7.4 magnitude earthquake that struck on November 21, 2016 (the date here in the U.S.) just off the coast of the destroyed Fukushima Daiichi atomic reactors. Fukushima Daiichi is also the site of a huge radioactive waste tank farm that continues to expand from an on-again off-again radioactive cooling water treatment system for the three still unrecovered melted reactor cores. Little is presently known about how the hastily built tank farm has fared during the earthquake.

The four-unit Fukushima Daini nuclear power complex just seven miles south of Fukushima Daiichi temporarily lost cooling to Daini's Unit 3 spent fuel pool raising concerns for the overheating of high-level nuclear waste configured as 2400 used fuel rods being stored underwater. Fukushima Daini remains shutdown and barred from power operations along with 38 operable units in Japan following the March 11, 2011 8.9M earthquake and catastrophic tsunami. Only two of the nation's nuclear reactors have successfully returned to power operations amid intense public and political opposition that continues to grow.

Tuesday morning's 7.4M earthquake struck around 6 am (JST) 31 miles off the east coast. The large earthquake set off coastal tsunami warnings for several hours, eventually measuring up to a sea level rise of 55 inches. A second 5.5M earthquake struck shortly after with its epicenter on land just 7 miles from Fukushima Daini with another tsunami warning. Aftershocks continue to jolt the area with officials concerned that another major quake can be expected within the week.

During times of natural disaster and national security threats, nuclear power is more a dangerous societal liability than an asset. All of the reactors' safety systems and their nuclear waste cooling systems are 100% reliant upon offsite electrical grid power during normal operations. If the electric grid is disturbed by disaster or sabotage, nuclear power plants automatically shut down and emergency electrical power systems kick in to service a subset of priority reactor safety and cooling systems. If those systems fail or are disabled, nuclear power stations typically have 4 to 8 hours of back-up battery power to prevent a meltdown. Cooling capability to thousands of tons of high-level nuclear waste (irradiated fuel rods) initially rely upon the same off-site electrical power. Since the 9/11 World Trade Center aircraft attacks and the 3/11 Fukushima nuclear disaster, reactor spent fuel pools with high-density storage of nuclear waste are being equipped with make-up water systems should a loss of power threaten to boil off the water filled pools. Each pool containing up to 700 to 1000 tons of thermally hot and highly radioactive nuclear waste can overheat, boil off and catch fire without cooling.

The Beyond Nuclear Facebook page posted live stream coverage broadcasted from Japan during the tsunami warning.

TEPCO told to improve its business practices

November 18, 2016

Ministry warns TEPCO subsidiary over driving up wholesale power prices

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161118/p2a/00m/0na/004000c>

An energy transaction watchdog has warned a subsidiary of Tokyo Electric Power Co. Holdings Inc. (TEPCO) over illicitly driving up wholesale electricity prices by selling power at unreasonably high rates.

- **【Related】** News Navigator: How does the liberalized electricity market work?
- **【Related】** What benefits, options will liberalization of electricity industry bring to consumers?

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry's Electricity and Gas Market Surveillance Commission (EGC) advised the subsidiary, TEPCO Energy Partner Inc., on Nov. 17 to improve its business practices. Many smaller power companies have entered the market following retail electricity liberalization, purchasing power on the Japan Electric Power Exchange (JEPX). However, these small firms have difficulty procuring power if the wholesale prices rise.

TEPCO Energy Partner denied any wrongdoing, but suggested that it would comply with the ministry's order. "We had no intention of manipulating market prices, but will respond to the advisory in an appropriate manner," a company official said.

TEPCO Power Grid Inc., which manages the group's power distribution network, was also issued a business improvement order by the EGC this past June for a delay in notifying smaller power companies of their electricity usage.

TEPCO Energy procures electricity from the TEPCO group, and supplies power to households and sells power on the JEPX. The company put power up for sale on JEPX's spot market -- the market for electricity to be delivered the following day -- at unreasonably high prices between April and August this year, according to the surveillance commission.

The products traded on the JEPX spot market are for 30-minute slots adding up to a 24-hour day. Due to sell orders by TEPCO Energy, power prices were driven up in about 60 percent of daytime slots, with the price rising by some 30 percent in at least one slot.

TEPCO Energy set minimum prices at the same level as the cost of procuring power, based on which the retail prices are calculated.

Considering that TEPCO Energy has an overwhelming influence on JEPX prices, the surveillance commission deemed that this practice constituted intent to drive up prices. The watchdog also hinted at the possibility that the company attempted to avoid supplying power to its rivals at lower prices. "If a company that produces a massive amount of electric power takes an action like this, it could prevent other business operators from procuring necessary power from the market at fair prices and hinder new companies' entry into the retail market, and to maintain and expand their business," the commission stated.

The commission then urged TEPCO Energy to report measures the firm will take to prevent a recurrence within a month. In response, TEPCO Energy issued a statement saying, "We've voluntarily eliminated the minimum selling price. We'll continue to sincerely contribute to revitalizing the power wholesale market."

"Shifting the cost of bad management"

November 21, 2016

EDITORIAL: A preposterous proposal on nuclear accident compensation

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611210025.html>

The industry ministry has put forth a ridiculous proposal on financing compensation payments to victims of nuclear accidents.

In essence, the ministry's proposal is designed to bail out operators of nuclear power plants that have failed to set aside compensation money for possible accidents at facilities that have been in service for decades.

To secure necessary funds for potentially huge compensation payments, the ministry wants to require old customers to bear part of the burden.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which regulates the power industry, has submitted this proposal to a panel of experts discussing the issue.

This effectively means shifting the cost of bad management to people who are not responsible, an approach that defies common sense in the world of business management and obscures the responsibility of the operators. The ministry should withdraw the proposal.

The law concerning compensation for nuclear accident-related damages stipulates that in principle operators are responsible for paying compensation for all damages caused by accidents at their facilities. But the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co., prompted the government to set up an entity to pay compensation to the victims. Under this arrangement, TEPCO and other established electric utilities will pay back the money over a long period of time.

This new system, based on the notion of mutual help, is designed to get nuclear power plant operators involved in a joint effort to cover the risks of nuclear accidents.

The utilities involved are allowed to raise their electricity rates to finance contributions to the system. So the burden is actually borne by customers of the utilities.

The ministry's new proposal would widen the scope of contributors to the pool of money for compensation payments. The new contributors include electricity suppliers that have entered the market in response to its liberalization even though they don't operate nuclear power plants.

Specifically, the new utilities would be required to make contributions through the increased fees they pay to use the power transmission lines operated by established utilities. That would force almost all people in this country to shoulder part of the burden.

Here's the ministry's case for this scheme.

The money needed to pay compensation for damages caused by nuclear accidents should have been set aside since the 1960s, when nuclear power generation started in Japan. So it is appropriate to require people who paid low electricity rates that didn't include this cost to bear the burden now.

Behind the ministry's move is the fact that the total compensation amount related to the Fukushima nuclear disaster has already surpassed the original estimate and is now reaching 6 trillion yen (\$54 billion). The amount is expected to grow in the coming years.

Even so, if past beneficiaries of low electricity rates are involved, the established utilities should be first forced to use the profits they accumulated in the past through their nuclear power operations.

At the very least, no consumer would accept such a new financial burden unless the utilities are held responsible for failing to save up for emergencies during the past half century.

The ministry has also proposed similar plans to tap the fees paid by new power suppliers for use of established utilities' transmission cables to cover the costs of decommissioning the reactors at the crippled Fukushima plant and aging reactors at other plants.

The latest proposal is the third scheme based on this approach.

Imposing part of the burden on newcomers in the power market is tantamount to giving preferential treatment to nuclear power and undermines the fair competitive environment that is the foundation for power deregulation.

Some consumers have switched from established utilities to new power suppliers because of their aversion to nuclear power generation.

Clearly, adequate compensation should be paid to victims of nuclear accidents.

But the costs related to nuclear power generation should be shouldered by the operators of nuclear plants. An unreasonable scheme to shift this burden from the operators is simply unacceptable.

First meeting between TEPCO and Niigata Governor

November 24, 2016

Niigata Governor, Tepco execs to meet Tuesday

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/24/business/niigata-governor-tepco-exec-s-meet-tuesday/#.WDgC032Dmos>

JJI

Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. said Thursday that its first meeting with new Niigata Gov. Ryuichi Yoneyama will be held at the Niigata Prefectural Government's offices in Niigata next Tuesday. The meeting, initially scheduled for last Tuesday, was canceled by the magnitude-7.4 earthquake that coincidentally struck off Fukushima Prefecture the very same day.

At the meeting with Tepco Chairman Fumio Sudo and President Naomi Hirose, Yoneyama plans to convey his cautious attitude toward restarting the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant, informed sources said.

Yoneyama was elected governor last month. At a news conference Thursday, he said he will clarify his stance that **"unless a thorough review of the (March 2011) accident at Tepco's Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant is conducted, the talks on a restart (of Kashiwazaki-Kariwa) can't get started."**

As for the review of the crisis by the prefectural government's technical panel, Yoneyama said: "We can't proceed with the review if Tepco doesn't give us information. We'd appreciate its cooperation."

The Tepco officials, for their part, want the governor's support to restart the giant plant, which straddles Kashiwazaki and the town of Kariwa, because it is critical to the utility's survival.

"We'll sincerely deal with the issue without shutting down discussion," Yoneyama told the prefectural assembly.

TEPCO: Press release

November 24, 2016

Press Releases 2016

Press Release (Nov 24,2016)Financial Assistance from the Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corporation

http://www.tepco.co.jp/en/press/corp-com/release/2016/1339554_7763.html

On November 24, we received a funding grant of 39.9 billion yen from the Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corporation (hereinafter referred to as NDF) based on the revision of the Special Business Plan which was approved on March 31, 2016.

This financial assistance was given in response to the 58th request we made in order to cover the compensation payouts due by the end of December 2016. The amount of the payouts to be paid by that time had been estimated to exceed the sum of the compensation we had received in accordance with the "Act on Contract for Indemnification of Nuclear Damage Compensation" (188.9 billion yen) and the financial assistance that the NDF has provided (6,378.4 billion yen).

With financial assistance from the NDF, we are determined to continue to pay the compensation with courtesy and compassion to all of those who have been afflicted by the nuclear damage.

Fukushima disaster: 20 trillion yen...or more

November 28, 2016

Cost of Fukushima disaster expected to soar to ¥20 trillion

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/28/national/cost-fukushima-disaster-expected-soar-%c2%a520-trillion/#.WDw2kX2Dmos>

Kyodo

The overall cost of wrapping up the Fukushima nuclear disaster is now estimated at more than ¥20 trillion, nearly double the previous estimate, sources familiar with the matter said Monday.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which previously put the overall cost at ¥11 trillion, is considering passing on a portion of the costs, including for compensation and the decommissioning of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, to consumers via higher electricity prices, the sources said.

The aged, six-reactor plant, operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co. Holdings Inc., was plunged into a blackout by the March 2011 earthquake and subsequent tsunami, leading to three core meltdowns and the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986.

According to the new estimate, Tepco's compensation payments will rise to ¥8 trillion from ¥5.4 trillion and decontamination costs will double to around ¥5 trillion.

Trillions more will be needed to decommission the reactors and deal with radioactive water at the plant, on top of the ¥2 trillion earlier estimated, the sources said.

The ministry has been discussing reforming crisis-hit Tepco and is about to draft a plan for the utility based on the new estimate within this year.

Combined with the cost of building interim waste storage facilities, foreseen to remain at ¥1.1 trillion, the total cost is forecast to surpass ¥20 trillion, the sources said.

The government is studying the possibility of expanding a ¥9 trillion interest-free loan program for Tepco that was set up by issuing government bonds to cover compensation payments and decontamination costs in areas hit by the disaster.

It is expected to take up to 30 years to recover the ¥9 trillion through payments from Tepco and other big utilities.

The government also plans to recover the expected increase in compensation payments and decontamination expenses by raising charges for transmission line usage for new electricity retailers.

In principle, Tepco needs to secure funds on its own for decommissioning the plant. The government will manage the funds, which will be established using profits generated by the utility. But it is not clear if Tepco alone can shoulder the cost.

Fukushima plant decommissioning, compensation costs to almost double: gov't est.

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161128/p2a/00m/0na/006000c>

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry estimates that the cost of decommissioning the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant and compensation for disaster damage would top a total of 20 trillion yen -- almost twice the previous government forecast, it has been learned.

- **【Related】** Fukushima nuclear plant decommissioning cost to surge
- **【Related】** High school takes students to see Fukushima nuclear reactor decommissioning

As the government is planning to have major utilities and smaller power companies that newly entered into the power market after its liberalization shoulder part of the snowballing financial burdens, consumers are certain to face increased electricity bills. The ministry is set to draw a conclusion later this year possibly based on the estimate after continuing discussions at an expert panel on the management reform of plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) and on measures to secure financial resources.

The government had previously estimated that a total of 11 trillion yen would be needed to cover the projects -- 5.4 trillion yen for nuclear damage compensation, 2.5 trillion yen for decontaminating areas affected by the nuclear disaster, 1.1 trillion yen for building interim storage facilities for radiation contaminated soil and 2 trillion yen for decommissioning reactors at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant. In the latest estimate, the compensation cost is expected to surge to roughly 8 trillion yen and the decontamination cost is estimated at somewhere around 4-5 trillion yen. It is also highly likely that the decommissioning cost would spike by several trillion yen. The development cost for interim storage facilities remains unchanged.

The previous government estimate was calculated toward the end of 2013, but the coverage of nuclear damage compensation has since increased and decontamination efforts are taking longer than expected. The decommissioning cost has also expanded especially for work to salvage nuclear fuel debris from the

2011 meltdowns. The ministry had earlier projected that the yearly cost for these projects would reach hundreds of billions of yen from the current 80 billion yen.

The government had heretofore explained that: the compensation cost would be temporarily paid by the Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp. (NDF) before being covered by TEPCO and other major utilities; the decontamination cost would be covered by the government after it sells the TEPCO shares that it owns; revenue from the power resources development promotion tax would be used for the construction of interim storage facilities; and the reactor decommissioning cost would be secured by TEPCO.

The government is now looking into boosting the amount temporarily covered by the NDF, while tacking the snowballing compensation cost onto major utilities and new power providers that use power grids operated by existing power transmission companies. The power grid usage fees, which require government approval, are ultimately to be passed on to consumer electricity bills.

As it is highly likely that the proceeds from the sale of TEPCO shares are too small to cover the decontamination cost, the government is mulling demanding TEPCO and other utilities share the financial burden. In that case, the expenses may likely be passed onto electricity bills.

The government will consider establishing a system in which TEPCO accumulates funds through business streamlining efforts to cover the decommissioning cost. As it is widely deemed difficult to cover the cost only through management efforts, however, the expenses may likely be -- again -- tacked onto power bills.

Governor Mitazono: "A mere publicity stunt" before the election?

November 29, 2016

Governor under fire as Sendai nuclear reactor likely to restart

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201611290066.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

KAGOSHIMA—Anti-nuclear activists are castigating Governor Satoshi Mitazono, saying the politician has retreated from his campaign promises regarding the planned restart of a nuclear reactor in the prefecture. Despite stressing that he would take a hard look at safety issues, Mitazono's actions on Nov. 28 indicate that Kyushu Electric Power Co. will be allowed to restart the No. 1 reactor at its Sendai plant on Dec. 8 as was expected.

"What he had done over the past months now appears to be a mere publicity stunt," said Yukio Taira, chief of a confederation of labor unions in Kagoshima Prefecture.

Taira withdrew his candidacy in the governor's race in July after he and Mitazono agreed on many policy measures toward a temporary halt of operations at the nuclear plant in Satsuma-Sendai.

Mitazono on Nov. 28 submitted to the prefectural assembly a budget proposal for establishing an expert panel on nuclear power generation--a centerpiece of his campaign pledges.

“I will make a comprehensive judgment on how to respond when the panel releases its findings of the utility’s reports on ‘special checks,’” Mitazono told the assembly session, referring to the reactor restart plan.

However, given that a governor does not have the legal authority to order a halt, the No. 1 reactor will probably already be running by the time those findings are released.

The assembly is expected to vote on the budget request for the panel on Dec. 16. Kyushu Electric is scheduled to release the outcome of its special checks in early January.

The utility agreed to carry out the additional checks in response to the new governor's concerns. These inspections, including checking bolts fastened on barrels containing nuclear waste, are nothing new and have been done in the past, according to Kyushu Electric.

Two reactors at the Sendai plant were the first in the nation to go online under new nuclear safety regulations set up after the 2011 nuclear disaster in Fukushima Prefecture.

The No. 1 reactor has been shut down for maintenance since October. The No. 2 reactor is scheduled to be taken offline in December for a routine inspection.

Mitazono, a former TV journalist, was elected on campaign promises to take a “strong response regarding a reactor restart if the envisaged committee deems the plant unsafe.”

Concerns over the safety of the nuclear complex arose when roads and other infrastructure were damaged in a series of powerful quakes that began rattling neighboring Kumamoto Prefecture in April.

After gaining support from anti-nuclear groups, Mitazono won the race against the incumbent, who was seen as friendlier toward nuclear power generation.

But after he took office, Mitazono appeared to back off from his campaign promises.

He did request an “immediate halt” of plant operations to Michiaki Uriu, president of Kyushu Electric, in late August and early September.

After the company refused the governor’s requests, Mitazono decided not to pursue the issue, saying a governor does not have the legal authority to demand a halt to operations.

He tried to assuage public concerns about the safety of the plant, citing the extra special checks the utility promised to conduct.

Taira said Mitazono has rejected repeated requests for a meeting with him and other anti-nuclear activists. They have asked Mitazono to quickly establish the expert panel for possible action to counter Kyushu Electric’s reactor restart plans. But the governor did not reply.

Mitazono also did not submit a budget request for the expert panel in the September session.

When asked by reporters, Mitazono merely kept saying he would establish the panel “as soon as possible.”

“He is breaking the campaign promise if he allows the resumption of the plant without obtaining the conclusion of the panel,” Taira said.

According to one source, the governor told an informal gathering of members of the Liberal Democratic Party, the largest group in the assembly, that he shares the LDP’s direction in nuclear power policy.

(This article was written by Takeshi Nakashima and Sei Iwanami.)

No decommissioning costs for new power suppliers

November 29, 2016

New power suppliers won't have to pay Fukushima decommissioning costs

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161129/p2a/00m/0na/013000>

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has decided not to have new power industry entrants shoulder some of the costs of decommissioning the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, it has been learned.

The industry ministry had initially considered a plan to have new electricity suppliers pay decommissioning expenses in addition to "consignment charges" necessary for power transmission if they were to use TEPCO's power grid. But the ministry gave up on the idea due in part to a backlash from the public and experts. The ministry is to deal with the issue by accumulating funds raised through TEPCO's management efforts for decommissioning expenses.

TEPCO plans to raise 2 trillion yen for decommissioning, but it is highly likely that the utility will be several trillion yen short of the fees for scrapping the Fukushima plant because costs such as those for removing nuclear fuel (fuel debris) melted down in reactors are expected to surge in the future. With respect to the idea of tacking on consignment charges, many members of the industry ministry's expert panel on electric power market liberalization said it would be unfair to impose the burden on new power suppliers that had never used and would never use nuclear power.

The industry ministry's expert panel, tasked with discussing costs for decommissioning and compensation as well as TEPCO's rehabilitation, has concluded that **it would be "desirable" for TEPCO to raise the funds for decommissioning and other relevant purposes by reforming its management.**

Because of this, the industry ministry has abandoned a plan to add decommissioning expenses to consignment charges for new power suppliers. But the ministry plans to allow TEPCO not to reduce consignment charges even if it becomes able to do so due to improvements in its management efficiency. It will also have TEPCO contribute the balance and other funds to the Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp.

TEPCO and major utilities currently shoulder compensation payments, but new power suppliers are also paying some of the costs. Proceeds from sales of TEPCO shares will be set aside for decontamination projects, and shortfalls will be shouldered by TEPCO and other entities. Funds stemming from a power resources development promotion tax will be used for interim storage facilities.

Fukushima disaster will cost TEPCO over 170 billion yen

December 1, 2016

Fukushima Daiichi to cost TEPCO \$170 billion

http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161201_19/

Japan's government estimates the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant will end up costing its operator more than 170 billion dollars. The figure includes the costs of decommissioning the facility, as well as compensation and decontamination work.

Tokyo Electric Power Company has said it will secure about 17 billion dollars to decommission the plant's reactors.

However, government officials now say the total cost will be more than 4 times higher. They estimate about 70 billion dollars will be required for the work, which includes removing melted nuclear fuel and dealing with radioactive wastewater.

The costs of decontamination work and constructing intermediate storage facilities for contaminated soil and waste materials are also likely to increase.

An additional 70 billion dollars will be needed to compensate farmers seeking damages.

The government will temporarily shoulder some of the compensation costs, and seek repayment from TEPCO at a later date. Other power companies are sharing some of the burden, which means higher electricity bills for consumers.

Japan's industry ministry is currently working on a plan to reform TEPCO's management and divert its profits to decommissioning work. But the ballooning costs are threatening this plan. The government aims to decide by the year-end how to share the financial burden, and how the work will be done.

New Monju : a "folly not acceptable by any means"

December 1, 2016

EDITORIAL: Plan to build Monju successor is outrageously irresponsible

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201612010046.html>

The government at a closed meeting on Nov. 30 revealed plans to develop a demonstration fast reactor as the successor to the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor in Fukui Prefecture, which will be decommissioned.

A totally irrational policy decision is now being made behind closed doors only by people with vested interests in the trouble-plagued Monju program.

The government is making a head-long plunge into another costly reactor project that has no solid prospects of success. The government has not scrutinized nor learned lessons from the miserable failure of the Monju program.

This behavior is outrageously irresponsible.

More than 1 trillion yen (\$8.8 billion) has been poured into the development and operation of Monju, but the reactor operated for only around 220 days during the 20-plus years since it first achieved criticality in 1994.

The experimental reactor has been mostly idle because of **a series of accidents and troubles**, including a 1995 leak of liquid sodium used as the coolant, a material that is famously hard to handle.

In contrast, the Joyo test fast reactor, which represents the first stage of developing a practical fast-breeder reactor, has operated for a total of 3,000 days, more than 13 times longer than Monju's record. This again shows that technological challenges involved in the development of such sophisticated new technology become far more formidable as the project moves to the later stages.

Unlike Monju, the new experimental fast reactor envisioned by the government would not be a breeder reactor that generates more fissile material--plutonium to be exact--than it consumes. But it will be **based on the same fast reactor technology.**

Given that even operating a prototype fast-breeder reactor has proved such a fierce challenge, there are countless reasons to doubt the viability of the government's plan to develop a cheap and safe demonstration fast reactor.

The government says it will seek international cooperation for the project. But France's Advanced Sodium Technological Reactor for Industrial Demonstration (ASTRID) program, which the Japanese government is counting on for its fast reactor project, is itself facing an unclear future. The French government is expected to decide in 2019 on whether to build the fast demonstration reactor.

The Japanese government is not even bothering to set up a proper forum for discussions on the new project.

The Nov. 30 meeting was attended by the industry minister, the science and technology minister, representatives of the Federation of Electric Power Companies, which is the power industry lobby, executives of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd., which makes nuclear reactors, and officials of the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, the operator of Monju. They are all parties involved in the Monju program. The two officials of Japan Atomic Energy Agency who were present at the meeting are a former Mitsubishi Heavy Industries executive and a former science and technology official.

In other words, **the decision-making process concerning the project is totally controlled by the interests of the government and the nuclear power industry.**

Why is the government so fixated on developing fast reactor technology?

Monju has long been cast as the linchpin of a nuclear fuel recycling program in which plutonium extracted from reprocessed spent nuclear fuel is burned in a fast-breeder reactor.

Now that it has decided to decommission Monju, the government is apparently concerned that the lack of the troubled reactor's successor could cause the entire nuclear fuel recycling program to collapse, undermining its efforts to promote nuclear power generation.

Japan, however, already has a stockpile of 48 tons of plutonium, enough to make 6,000 ordinary nuclear bombs.

With no prospects of practical use of a fast reactor, Japan's fixation on establishing a nuclear fuel recycling system makes no economic sense and only raises suspicions in the international community.

The government has been roundly criticized for its obstinate adherence to nuclear power policy decisions made in the past.

But the disaster that occurred in 2011 at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has led to broad public recognition of the importance of impartial debate on related issues not influenced by special interests or past developments.

Now, however, the government is ignoring the lessons learned from the nuclear disaster. It is seeking to make the decision in collusive meetings to spend a huge amount of taxpayer money on the highly questionable fast reactor project. This folly cannot be acceptable by any means.

--The Asahi Shimbun, Dec. 1

Ballooning costs

NHK video :

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/nhknewsline/nuclearwatch/ballooningcosts/>

Japanese officials estimate that the cost of dealing with the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear accident will nearly double to more than 170 billion dollars.

The officials add that the cost of decommissioning the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant is likely to quadruple, to about 70 billion dollars. And 70 billion dollars will be needed for compensation because farmers will be seeking damages.

The cost of decontamination work is also likely to increase from a previous estimate of 35 billion dollars. The government will temporarily shoulder some of the compensation costs, and later seek repayment from Tokyo Electric Power Company. Other utilities are similarly shouldering part of the burden, meaning higher electricity bills for users.

The officials are also working on a reform plan for TEPCO in the hope of diverting its profits to pay for the decommissioning, but the ballooning costs threaten to jeopardize this plan.

The government hopes to decide how the financial burden will be shared by the end of the year.

Evacuees : End of free housing soon?

December 3, 2016

Fukushima's voluntary evacuees

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/12/03/editorials/fukushimas-voluntary-evacuees/#.WEQ6W32Dmos>

A citizens' group supporting the people in Fukushima Prefecture who have fled from their homes in the wake of the March 2011 nuclear disaster has submitted a petition to the Diet with nearly 200,000 signatures asking for the continuation of public housing assistance for the evacuees. The prefectural government announced last year that it plans at the end of next March to terminate the assistance for people who voluntarily left their homes. However, most such evacuees have yet to find new residences. Halting the housing assistance will place a heavy financial burden on low-income evacuees. Fears also persist over the radioactive contamination in the areas where they lived before the nuclear crisis. Not only the prefecture but the national government, which pays for a large portion of the assistance, should rethink the decision.

As of July, some 89,000 Fukushima people continued to live away from their homes — 48,000 inside the prefecture and 41,000 elsewhere in Japan — after they fled from the dangers posed by the triple meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power's Fukushima No. 1 power plant. Some evacuees followed the government's designation of their hometowns as no-go zones due to the high levels of fallout, while others left their homes on their own out of fear of radiation exposure, particularly for their children, and other reasons even though they lived outside the designated evacuation zones.

The Fukushima Prefectural Government has since been providing housing assistance to the nuclear refugees regardless of whether they stayed within the prefecture — and regardless of whether they were forced out by government order or fled by choice — to cover their rent, including for public housing units owned by local governments. Fukushima has offered the aid by annually renewing the application of the Disaster Relief Law, under which a prefectural government carries out relief measures to residents in the

event of a disaster — including supply of food, water, clothing and medical services as well as emergency repairs to damaged homes — with a large portion of the cost coming from national coffers. The national government has shouldered most of the expense of the housing assistance regarding Fukushima. The prefectural government announced in June last year that it would end the assistance for voluntary evacuees at the end of next March. Gov. Masao Uchibori said the termination is aimed at prompting the evacuees to return to their original homes and at helping promote their sense of self-reliance. He explained that living conditions in the prefecture have improved with the development of public infrastructure and progress in the cleanup of radiation-contaminated soil.

According to a prefectural report based on a survey conducted in January and February, the decision will halt housing assistance for 12,436 households. Of the 3,614 households that voluntarily evacuated but remained in the prefecture, 56 percent have not yet found a place where they can live once the assistance is halted. The corresponding figure for the 3,453 such households living outside the prefecture is much higher — nearly 78 percent. The prefecture should pay serious attention to these findings. Some families may not be able to find and pay for a new home, although the prefecture reportedly plans to offer small subsidies for low-income and single-mother households after the large-scale assistance is ended.

The voluntary evacuees are confronted with various difficulties, both financial and psychological. The amount of compensation they received from Tepco is much smaller than that paid out to evacuees from the no-go zones. They also do not receive the monthly damages of some ¥100,000 that Tepco doles out to cover the mental suffering of those from the designated evacuation zones. Many of them face hardships ranging from the loss of their former jobs to separation from family members, long-distance commuting and divorces of couples due to differences over evacuating. The loss of housing assistance will likely result in even more hardships, both financial and emotional.

Many of the voluntary evacuees remain reluctant to go back to their hometowns for a variety of reasons, including the persistent fear of radiation, the desolate conditions of their original homes, and anticipated low levels of medical and other services in their former communities. The national government says it is safe for evacuees to return if the annual cumulative dose in the area is 20 millisieverts (mSv) or less, but that level is much higher than the legal limit of 1 mSv allowed for people in ordinary circumstances. In Ukraine, hit by the 1986 Chernobyl catastrophe, people are required to migrate if the annual cumulative dose in their area is 5 mSv or more and have “the right to evacuate” if the rate is between 1 mSv and 5 mSv. The national government and Fukushima Prefecture need to address why many of the volunteer evacuees are reluctant to return.

The national government may want to highlight the reconstruction in areas devastated by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami as well as the Fukushima nuclear disaster when Tokyo hosts the 2020 Summer Olympic Games. However, this should not result in the premature termination of vital relief measures for the affected people or untimely lifting of the designation of danger zones hit by the nuclear crisis. The government, which has sought to reactivate the nation’s nuclear power plants idled since the 2011 disaster, should understand why the evacuees felt they had to flee from their homes in the first place. It should not give up its duty of adequately helping the disaster victims.

December 3, 2016

Fukushima's voluntary evacuees

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December 1, 2016

12,000 evacuee households from Fukushima fret over benefit loss

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201612010006.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Anxiety is spreading among many of the 12,000 or so households evacuated after the Fukushima nuclear disaster five years ago as their free housing benefits will end next March.

In late October, about 180 people, who have been receiving free housing after leaving their homes in Fukushima Prefecture, delivered a **200,000-signature petition** to politicians in Tokyo asking for the accommodation allowance to be extended.

At the Upper House Members’ Office Building, they voiced their concerns, one after another.

“We are being told to get out of our house,” one of them said. “We are in a real fix.”

The central government and Fukushima prefectural authorities have been providing prefabricated temporary housing units or paying the rent of those who have evacuated either within or to outside the prefecture, even if they did not come from designated evacuation zones.

The measures were introduced because many residents living outside evacuation zones left their homes out of anxiety over the spread of radioactive fallout.

A total of 231.6 billion yen (\$2.9 billion) had been spent by March 2016 on 44,000 households, including the cost of building prefab temporary housing units.

But the Fukushima prefectural government decided in June 2015 to discontinue the assistance for evacuees from areas outside evacuation zones.

“With cleanup efforts moving ahead, the living environments are getting better,” Fukushima Governor Masao Uchibori said at the time.

The decision will affect the so-called voluntary evacuees, who lived in areas that were never designated evacuation zones, and evacuees from areas where evacuation orders were lifted in 2014.

Briefing sessions have been held by the prefectural government since December 2015 at about 40 locations within and outside the prefecture to explain details of rent subsidy measures for low-income households, which will replace the free housing benefits.

In late September, prefectural government officials faced a barrage of questions from about 70 residents of Kawauchi, Fukushima Prefecture, who packed a meeting hall in a temporary housing complex in Koriyama, also in the prefecture.

The village of Kawauchi had 2,739 residents as of Oct. 1 and at least 889 of them were living for free in rented housing, prefab temporary housing units and elsewhere outside the village.

Fumio Sakuma, 67, is one of them. His wife, who has a kidney disease, takes a 40-minute drive to hospital three times a week to undergo dialysis. Sakuma said he is anxious about having to relocate with his sick wife.

“We would feel grateful if we were allowed to stay here for one or two more years,” he said at the meeting. Municipalities in disaster areas in Fukushima Prefecture, in the meantime, are hoping that the end of the free housing benefits will see a return of residents.

“Assistance measures by the central and prefectural governments cannot continue forever,” said Yuko Endo, mayor of Kawauchi. “We might as well take a step forward to rebuild our livelihoods.”

The town of Naraha, also in Fukushima Prefecture, has seen less than 10 percent of its residents return.

“More than five and a half years have passed since the onset of the nuclear disaster,” said Naraha Mayor Yukiei Matsumoto. “It’s time for every one of us to think about standing on our own two feet.”

(This article was written by Mikio Kano, Kenji Izawa and Akifumi Nagahashi.)

Taiwan not ready to "compromise" on food safety

November 30, 2016

Taiwan-Japan trade talks conclude with signing of two memorandums

<http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aeco/201611300017.aspx>

Taipei, Nov. 30 (CNA) Annual trade and economic talks between Taiwan and Japan concluded in Taipei Wednesday, with the two sides signing two cooperation memorandums on product safety and language education.

Chiou I-jen (邱義仁), head of the Taiwan delegation and president of the Association of East Asian Relations (AEAR), and his Japanese counterpart, Japan Interchange Association Chairman Mitsuo Ohashi, signed the notes stipulating that the two countries will work together in the promotion of exchanges in

the two areas.

Chiou and Ohashi left the venue without speaking to the press after the signing ceremony, but they agreed to be photographed.

Outside the venue, several dozen activists staged a protest against radiation-contaminated food products. The protest came after Ohashi urged Taiwan at the opening of the annual talks a day earlier to lift a ban on food products from five radiation-affected Japanese prefectures.

Asked if Japan had asked Taiwan to ease the ban during the two-day trade and economic meeting, AEAR Deputy Secretary-General Tsai Wei-kan (蔡偉淦) confirmed in a press conference held after the event that the Japanese side brought up the request, as had been expected.

However, the Taiwanese delegates expressed hope for understanding that there are still disputes over the issue, and that they would not discuss the issue during the annual talks, since it was not on the agenda, Tsai said.

Taiwan has banned imports of food products from five prefectures in Japan -- Fukushima, Gunma, Chiba, Ibaraki and Tochigi -- that were contaminated with radiation following the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in March 2011, a catastrophe triggered by a massive earthquake and tsunami.

After Taiwan's new government, inaugurated in May, revealed recently that it was considering lifting the ban on food from all of those prefectures except Fukushima, the idea has received strong opposition.

Economics Minister Lee Chih-kung (李世光) confirmed Wednesday that the controversial issue of Japanese food imports was not on the agenda of the 41st Taiwan-Japan Trade and Economic Meeting.

"It has been the Ministry of Economic Affairs' consistent stance that no compromise can be made in the people's welfare in the area of food safety," Lee told the press.

He also agreed that all food regulations should meet international regulations and scientific rules.

Meanwhile, elaborating upon what was discussed during the meeting, Tsai said that Taiwan, as usual, asked Japan to co-sign an economic partnership agreement (EPA).

Such a pact is not just one that touches on simply economic problems, Tsai said, but involves political considerations.

Nevertheless, the Japanese side said its stance in establishing a comprehensive trade and investment relationship with Taiwan has not changed, he went on.

As for a request by Taiwan for Japan to open its doors to five more kinds of Taiwan-grown fruit, Tsai said the Japanese side requires more data and relevant documents.

At Wednesday's press conference, Liu Ming-tang (劉明堂), head of the Bureau of Standards, Metrology

and Inspection, said the cooperation memorandum on product safety mainly focuses on electronic and electrical products, as well as machinery.

It will help reduce safety risks, allowing consumers to enjoy a higher level of safety protection, Liu said.

On the language education memorandum, the Taiwanese delegation said that under the pact, personnel exchanges will be conducted in the hope of upgrading the quality of language and culture education on both sides.

The Taiwan-Japan trade and economic meeting has been the only official platform for Taiwanese and Japanese officials to discuss issues of mutual concern since diplomatic relations between the two countries were severed in 1972. It has been held annually since 1976.

(By Tang Pei-chun and Elizabeth Hsu)
ENDITEM/J

TEPCO's Interest-free loans ceiling to be increased

December 7, 2016

Loan ceiling for TEPCO to be raised

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161208_01/

Japan's government has decided to lift the ceiling for interest-free loans to the operator of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The government now estimates the facility will end up costing Tokyo Electric Power Company more than 194 billion dollars.

Decommissioning the plant is expected to cost 4 times the original estimate of 17 billion dollars. Compensation for farmers is expected to rise to 70 billion dollars from 47 billion dollars.

The cost of decontamination work and constructing intermediate storage facilities for contaminated soil and waste materials is also likely to increase to 53 billion dollars from 31 billion dollars.

Against this backdrop, the government plans to raise the upper limit of its loans to TEPCO from the current 79 billion dollars to 123 billion dollars.

The government plans to have TEPCO and other utilities pay back the loans. It says the utilities include newcomers to the market following deregulation of the retail power business this year.

Speculation is growing that the decision may result in higher electricity prices, which will increase the burden on consumers.

Japan to help Iran with nuclear safety

December 7, 2016

Japan to offer €2 million to Iran for nuclear safety cooperation

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/12/07/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-offer-e2-million-iran-nuclear-safety-cooperation/#.WEgf4H2Dmos>

Kyodo

Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida said Wednesday that Japan has decided **to offer Iran around €2.05 million (\$2.2 million) in the field of nuclear safety to help the Middle Eastern state steadily implement its historic nuclear deal with the West.**

“We agreed that bilateral relations are steadily making progress in a wide range of areas, including on cooperation for the steady implementation of the nuclear agreement,” Kishida told a joint news conference in Tokyo after his talks with Iranian counterpart Javad Zarif.

Zarif said at the outset of the meeting, which was open to the media, that he welcomes Japan’s “constructive contribution” that “strongly pushes the implementation” of the nuclear agreement.

The move comes amid uncertainty over the agreement’s future following the election of Donald Trump as U.S. president.

In his presidential campaign, Trump said that if elected, his “number one priority” as president would be to “dismantle the disastrous deal with Iran,” one promoted by President Barack Obama.

The nuclear deal Iran struck with six major powers in July last year limits Iran’s nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of most international sanctions. The deal has been endorsed by the U.N. Security Council.

Since the deal, Japan has been stepping up relations with the oil-rich country, lifting its sanctions on Iran in January and signing a bilateral investment pact the following month.

Tokyo is pushing Japanese companies to do business amid intensifying foreign competition for access to the Iranian market.

The ministers’ meeting came after Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expressed his readiness to visit Iran. Abe told of his willingness to travel to the country and boost economic ties during talks with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly in New York in September, according to a Japanese official.

TEPCO to remain under state control

December 6, 2016

State ownership of TEPCO likely to continue as costs keep rising

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201612060043.html>

The government will likely prolong its effective state ownership of Tokyo Electric Power Co. Holdings Inc. because the expected costs for decommissioning its ruined Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and paying compensation continue to soar.

The industry ministry mentioned the rising expenses at a meeting on Dec. 5 with scholars and others.

The ministry at the meeting showed a six-item report titled, "Tokyo Electric Power Co. and the state's role." One pillar of the report was that the state should urge TEPCO to perform its responsibilities.

However, one of the participants said, "The state should hold a certain ratio of (TEPCO) shares for a long period."

The government-approved Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp. currently holds 50.1 percent of shares with voting rights of TEPCO.

The government planned to reduce the stake to less than 50 percent if it concluded at the end of this fiscal year that TEPCO could operate independently.

However, that scenario has collapsed.

Some sources now say total costs, including expenses for decommissioning and compensation, will probably exceed 20 trillion yen (about \$176 billion).

TEPCO initially said that it would need a total of 11 trillion yen to resolve problems related to the plant that suffered a triple meltdown after being hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

That amount includes 2 trillion yen to decommission the reactors, 5.4 trillion yen to pay compensation to people affected by the disaster and 2.5 trillion yen to decontaminate areas polluted with nuclear substances.

However, an internal report worked out by the industry ministry in August showed that the costs for decommissioning would probably increase by 4 trillion yen and the compensation sum would likely rise by 3 trillion yen, making the total amount 18 trillion yen.

(This article was written by Yoichi Yonetani and Naoki Kazama.)

December 5, 2016

Tokyo says Tepco may stay nationalized to deal with massive cost of nuclear disaster

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/12/05/national/tokyo-says-tepco-may-stay-nationalized-deal-massive-cost-nuclear-disaster/#.WEWjGn2Dmos>

Kyodo

Faced with massive ongoing costs stemming from the 2011 nuclear crisis in Fukushima, Tokyo Electric Power Co. Holdings Inc. may remain under state control longer than initially planned, the government said Monday.

Under the current plan, the utility would gradually reduce government involvement in its management from April.

However, at a key panel meeting the government proposed a revised option in light of the huge compensation and decommissioning expenses that are involved.

The government leads the business operations of the utility, known as Tepco, acquiring 50.1 percent of its voting rights through the state-backed Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp.

Some ministry bureaucrats have also been dispatched to the utility.

It is understood the state-backed body will assess efforts to reform the company in late March and make a decision on whether to reduce state involvement.

“The direction of Tepco reform is coming into sight,” said Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Hiroshige Seko at the panel meeting. “We have to come up with a more detailed picture of the reform.”

The government is seeking to split the activities of the utility into “business operations,” including retail sales and power generation, and “Fukushima operations” related to decommissioning reactors at the disaster-hit Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant and paying compensation, which would remain under public control.

As for Tepco’s business operations, the government plans to free them of state control at an early date, hoping to promote industry reorganization involving nuclear and energy distribution businesses.

The plan was revealed at the panel meeting at the trade ministry to study compensation and decommissioning issues facing the utility. The panel will compile proposals by the end of this year.

The government also seeks cooperation from other power companies in reactivating Tepco’s Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture, which would be the main source of its revenue.

With the involvement of other utilities, the government hopes to ease local distrust of Tepco’s nuclear plant operations. Two reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant are under prolonged safety examinations by nuclear regulators.

Japanese companies to invest in Areva

December 8, 2016

Mitsubishi Heavy, Japan Nuclear Fuel to invest in France’s Areva

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/12/08/business/corporate-business/mitsubishi-heavy-japan-nuclear-fuel-invest-frances-areva/#.WEqhm32Dmos>

Kyodo

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. and Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd. are making final arrangements to invest tens of billions of yen in atomic energy company Areva, which is being bailed out by the French government, sources close to the matter said Thursday.

Through the investment, the heavy machinery manufacturer and the spent-fuel reprocessing firm hope to improve technical cooperation with Areva on decommissioning reactors and reprocessing nuclear fuel. Areva has been reeling from weak global demand since the 2011 Fukushima disaster triggered a slump in the nuclear power industry.

Areva is being bailed out by the French government, which has been asking Mitsubishi Heavy to invest since last year.

MHI President Shunichi Miyanaga had said that investing in Areva, which has expertise in decommissioning procedures and fuel reprocessing, would benefit Japan as it faces the prospect of decommissioning more aging nuclear reactors amid high public concern over nuclear safety. A major Chinese nuclear power company is also considering investing in the state-owned group. Mitsubishi Heavy is also planning to invest in Areva's plant-building arm in hopes of winning orders to build nuclear power plants in emerging economies where demand is growing. The heavy machinery maker and Areva are already involved in a joint venture to develop nuclear plants with advanced reactors.

Cleanup bill to double original estimate

December 9, 2016

Fukushima nuclear disaster bill to double to 21.5 trillion yen

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201612090075.html>

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Total costs to resolve the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster will reach 21.5 trillion yen (about \$188 billion), nearly double the previous estimate, which will be passed on to users in higher electricity bills. The industry ministry said on Dec. 9 that the final tab for the accident at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant is estimated to balloon from the 11 trillion yen calculated in 2013.

To prevent the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co., from going bankrupt under the skyrocketing costs for decommissioning, compensation and decontamination, the government said it will increase the maximum amount of its zero-interest loans to the utility from the current 9 trillion yen to 13.5 trillion yen. Much of the additional costs will be eventually covered by the public, as the government plans to raise electricity charges to that end.

Within the total, compensation paid to people affected by the nuclear accident will increase from 5.4 trillion yen to 7.9 trillion yen. Bills for decontaminating areas polluted with radioactive substances will rise from 2.5 trillion yen to 4 trillion yen.

The rise in compensation costs is mainly attributable to a new support measure adopted for people in the agricultural and forestry sectors who cannot restart their work due to restrictions on the shipments of their products.

The increase in decontamination costs was mainly led by the rise in prices of bags to hold contaminated materials and the larger-than-expected personnel costs of decontamination workers.

The compensation costs will be temporarily covered by the government. But TEPCO will eventually shoulder most of the burden, in principle, spending many years paying it off.

Other major utilities and newly established electric power companies will also contribute in the form of a rise in electric power cable usage fees.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry also unveiled plans to increase TEPCO's revenues to decrease the burden on the public.

The plan calls for TEPCO to increase its annual profits from the current 400 billion yen to 500 billion yen by cutting costs in the field of electricity transmission and distribution. It also expects an additional 100 billion yen through restarting the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata Prefecture.

Fukushima cleanup to cost 21.5 trillion yen, double original estimate

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161209/p2a/00m/0na/009000c>

The cost of dealing with the aftermath of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant will reach 21.5 trillion yen, roughly double the government's initial prediction of 11 trillion yen, preliminary calculations released on Dec. 8 by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry have shown.

- **【Related】** Fukushima plant decommissioning, compensation costs to almost double: gov't est.
- **【Related】** Fukushima nuclear plant decommissioning cost to surge

The government plans to have new electricity suppliers and major utilities including the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), tack a portion of the additional costs onto power bills.

The ministry calculated that the cost of compensating people affected by the disaster would rise from 5.4 trillion yen to 7.9 trillion yen. The cost associated with decontamination and the construction of interim storage facilities for radioactive waste, meanwhile, was expected to rise from 3.6 trillion yen to 5.6 trillion yen. The ministry estimated that TEPCO would end up paying around 8 trillion yen to decommission the plant's reactors, up from an initial estimate of 2 trillion yen.

TEPCO and other major power companies are covering the cost of compensation payments but the ministry plans to make new power producers and suppliers also pay some compensation. A ministry representative explained, "Customers of power producers and suppliers that have newly entered the market used power from major utilities in the past, and benefitted from nuclear power plants."

Over a 40-year period beginning in 2020, new power producers and suppliers are set to add part of the additional costs of compensation payments to "wheeling charges" that they pay to use the lines of major power suppliers such as TEPCO, which will be passed onto power bills. However, new power producers and consumer groups say this runs counter to the aims of liberalization of the power market, which aims to stimulate the market with the entry of newcomers.

The ministry hopes to quieten resistance from market newcomers by having major utilities furnish them with relatively cheap power through the market, including nuclear and hydro power. Major utilities, however, are unhappy with this approach.

The cost of decommissioning the reactors at the Fukushima plant will be left in TEPCO's hands. A system will be created to have the Nuclear Damage Compensation and Decommissioning Facilitation Corp. collect profits that TEPCO acquires through streamlining of its management, which will be paid out under government supervision.

At this stage, however, the method of decommissioning the reactors at TEPCO's Fukushima No. 1 plant has yet to be established.

"It is difficult to accurately calculate at this stage how much it will cost to decommission the reactors," a ministry representative commented. There are accordingly fears that the decommissioning cost could rise in the future.

The government plans to extend the amount of compensation bonds loaned to TEPCO from the current 9 trillion yen to 14 trillion yen. It is possible that this could lead to an increased burden on the public in the future.

Panel says Fukushima power plant's cleanup fees are now almost double the 2013 estimate

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/12/09/national/panel-says-fukushima-power-plants-cleanup-fees-now-almost-double-2013-estimate/#.WEqgtH2Dmos>

Kyodo

The combined cleanup costs for the 2011 nuclear crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 plant have nearly doubled the figure estimated in 2013, reaching ¥21.5 trillion, a government panel said Friday.

The panel said it appears inevitable that Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. will have to ask customers to shoulder part of the costs, including compensation for affected people, outlays for decommissioning, and cleanup of areas contaminated with radioactive substances released from the plant. To help the company secure money to cover ballooning expenses, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry said it is planning to raise the maximum amount of government bond issuance for the utility to ¥13.5 trillion from the current ¥9 trillion.

The panel raised its estimate for decommissioning fees to ¥8 trillion from the previous ¥2 trillion, for compensation to ¥7.9 trillion from ¥5.4 trillion and for decontamination costs to ¥4 trillion from ¥2.5 trillion. It also increased fees related to temporary storage facilities for soil contaminated with radioactive substances and other waste to ¥1.6 trillion from ¥1.1 trillion.

Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Hiroshige Seko said at a news conference, "The costs could increase depending on the situation but could also drop in line with technological innovations in decommissioning work."

The panel suggested that operations related to the Fukushima plant effectively stay under state control before reviewing the status in 2019.

The panel meeting, which began in early October, has also agreed on the need to seek cooperation from other power companies in reactivating Tepco's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture, the world's largest nuclear plant by generation capacity, which will be a main source of its revenue.

And who is going to pay?

December 10, 2016

2.4 trillion yen in Fukushima crisis compensation costs to be tacked onto power bills

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161210/p2a/00m/0na/002000c>

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry plans to require power companies including new market entrants to tack approximately 2.4 trillion yen in compensation costs for those affected by the Fukushima nuclear crisis onto power bills.

- **【Related】** Fukushima cleanup to cost 21.5 trillion yen, double original estimate

The plan would result in an 18-yen average increase in monthly household electricity bills, ministry officials said. This policy is part of a draft proposal that the ministry unveiled at a Dec. 9 expert panel meeting to discuss how to share the ongoing cost of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant disaster that broke out in March 2011.

At the meeting, the ministry also revealed that the estimated cost of dealing with the disaster has hit 21.5 trillion yen -- nearly double the initial projection of 11 trillion yen.

Total compensation for people affected by the disaster is estimated to rise from 5.4 trillion yen to 7.9 trillion yen, and decontamination-associated costs are likely to grow from 2.5 trillion yen to 4 trillion yen. The bill for building interim storage facilities for radioactive materials is expected to rise from 1.1 trillion yen to 1.6 trillion yen, while that of decommissioning reactors at the crippled plant will likely surge from 2 trillion yen to 8 trillion yen.

The draft proposal points out that nuclear power plant operators' financial reserves to deal with potential nuclear accidents are 2.4 trillion yen short -- almost equal to the projected increase in Fukushima disaster compensation costs.

The draft proposal urges not only major utilities including Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), operator of the Fukushima power station, but also new market entrants to shoulder the cost. Over a 40-year period from 2020, new companies would be required to add part of their share of compensation payments to "wheeling charges" that they pay to use the transmission lines of major utilities. **All these costs would be passed onto the consumer.**

An increase in the cost of decontamination would be covered by proceeds from the sale of TEPCO shares held by the government, and an increase in interim storage facility costs would be financed with additional taxpayers' money, while that in decommissioning costs would be shouldered by TEPCO.

The draft proposal would also require new power companies to foot part of the cost of decommissioning nuclear plants if major utilities decide to scrap the power stations earlier than initially planned.

Compensation costs

December 13, 2016

Nuke crisis compensation costs tacked onto power bills to face 4 tril. yen cap

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161213/p2a/00m/0na/012000c>

The Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry is set to limit the amount of additional costs of compensating those affected by the Fukushima nuclear crisis, tacked onto "wheeling charges" that power companies pay to use power lines, to 2.4 trillion yen, sources close to the ministry said.

- **【Related】** 2.4 trillion yen in Fukushima crisis compensation costs to be tacked onto power bills
- **【Related】** Fukushima cleanup to cost 21.5 trillion yen, double original estimate

The amount would eventually be added to power charges that consumers pay. Moreover, the ministry admitted that the total amount to deal with the aftermath of the nuclear disaster, which it estimates at 21.5 trillion yen, will certainly increase further.

The ministry made the disclosure at a meeting of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) panel on the issue on Dec. 12 in response to concerns expressed by LDP legislators that the cost of dealing with the crisis could rise.

The estimated total amount of compensation for the Fukushima crisis, which had been estimated at approximately 5.4 trillion yen in 2013, has grown to about 7.9 trillion yen.

Following the outbreak of the nuclear crisis, a system has been established under which Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), operator of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, and other major power companies contribute funds for compensation payments in proportion to the outputs of their nuclear plants.

In order to secure funds to cover an increase in the total compensation cost from 5.4 trillion yen, the ministry has proposed to a panel of experts on decommissioning of the Fukushima plant and compensation payments that the additional cost be added to wheeling charges. Not only major power companies but new market entrants would be required to foot the bill, which would eventually be added to power charges paid by consumers.

The ministry explains that it aims to require market newcomers to foot part of the compensation cost in order to "prevent consumers who have benefited from nuclear power by major power companies from switching to new power companies to avoid footing the compensation cost."

However, some experts have pointed out that such a move would run counter to the liberalization of the power market designed to spur new market entries.

Moreover, since the industry ministry is authorized to set the amount of wheeling charges at its own discretion without going through Diet deliberations, some members of the experts' panel and the LDP have voiced concerns that the amount of compensation costs passed onto consumers could unlimitedly snowball.

In response to such concerns, the ministry is considering obligating power companies to clearly show the amount of compensation cost each consumer is required to shoulder in detailed statements on power charges. Moreover, if the amount of compensation were to increase further, the ministry would consider other measures to cover the additional cost, which could also increase the burden on consumers.

The industry ministry has also disclosed that the estimated cost of dealing with the accident, which it released on Dec. 9, does not include the expense of creating hubs for reconstructing affected areas where residents are unlikely to be able to return in the foreseeable future and that of disposing waste to be generated when fuel debris is removed from the crippled reactors.

Therefore, the estimated total cost of dealing with the aftermath of the disaster, which has almost doubled from 11 trillion yen as of 2013 to 21.5 trillion yen, will certainly increase further.

Add disaster costs to consumers' bills

December 17, 2016

Panel wants new power suppliers to add charges to bills to cover Fukushima costs

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161217/p2a/00m/0na/006000c>

An expert committee of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry put together a recommendation on Dec. 16 for energy policy revisions that would have new, small-scale power suppliers also help cover compensation for the Fukushima nuclear disaster and reactor decommissioning costs by adding charges to consumer power bills.

- **【Related】** 2.4 trillion yen in Fukushima crisis compensation costs to be tacked onto power bills
- **【Related】** Gov't to seek disaster compensation funds from consumers who used nuclear energy
- **【Related】** New power firms likely to share decommissioning costs for aging nuke reactors

The estimated total cost of handling the Fukushima disaster has nearly doubled from 11 trillion yen to 21.5 trillion yen, with further increases possible. Since the disaster, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the operator of the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, has been paying around 70 billion yen a year in disaster-related costs from its own money. TEPCO and other major power providers have also been paying around an additional 163 billion yen a year by charging higher power bills.

The plan would raise consumers' share of the burden yet further. Under a scenario recommended by the committee, up to 60 billion yen a year for 40 years starting from fiscal 2020, or up to a total of 2.4 trillion yen, would be paid through charges to the power transmission costs of both traditional power producers and new producers.

Regarding this 2.4 trillion yen, the ministry argues, "**The money should have been prepared prior to the accident at the Fukushima plant,**" but says that, since that didn't happen, "**It is appropriate for all past users of cheap power (including those who switched to non-nuclear sources after the disaster) to equally share the burden (of post-disaster costs.)**" Under ministry calculations, the proposal would lead to an additional payment of 18 yen per month for 40 years for an average household.

Additionally, the plan, which would also start in fiscal 2020, would have new power producers help finance the plans of major power producers to decommission aging nuclear reactors through higher power transmission costs.

In exchange for new power producers paying part of the compensation costs, major utilities would supply more power from cheap sources to the market, such as nuclear power and coal, which can be used by smaller providers.

Yoh Yasuda, specially-appointed professor at Kyoto University, is critical of this, saying, "**This will lead to the protection of traditional power sources like coal and nuclear, and serve as a barrier to new technologies like renewable energy entering the market.**"

The economy ministry argues that even with the extra costs for the Fukushima disaster added on, nuclear power is still cheaper than thermal power. At the meeting on Dec. 16, committee member Toshihiro Matsumura, a professor at the University of Tokyo, criticized the move, saying, "If the ministry claims that nuclear power is still cheap even after including the massive compensation costs, nuclear power producers and the ministry should realize that there will be people who say those utilities should cover the costs themselves instead of pushing the burden onto others." However, **most of the committee members generally agreed on the plan.** After soliciting opinions from the public, the proposal will be officially decided upon.

The plan would go into effect with just a ministry order, not requiring a law amendment through the Diet, and there is criticism that the plan is being made without enough input from the public.

The non-partisan Diet group working for zero nuclear power plants, jointly headed by Taro Kono of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and Shoichi Kondo of the main opposition Democratic Party, has released a statement saying, "The idea of adopting a proposal after no public discussion, with no participation from the Diet at all in its creation, is unspeakable, as **it will twist the basis of power system reforms and increase the burden on the people.**"

Japan's govt. involved in pushing nuclear power in UK

December 18, 2016

Japan to financially support UK nuclear projects

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161218_12/

The Japanese government will provide financial support for major electronics firms that are involved in the construction of nuclear power plants in Britain.

Increasing exports of infrastructure such as high-speed railway systems is one of the pillars of Japan's growth strategy.

However, Chinese companies have won the bidding for such projects by working closely with the Chinese government.

Japan's government plans to provide funding to help Hitachi and Toshiba to build 5 nuclear power plants in the UK.

The government-affiliated Japan Bank for International Cooperation and the Development Bank of Japan will provide loans and invest in these projects.

The government-linked Nippon Export and Investment Insurance will be asked to provide credit guarantees to encourage Japanese financial institutions to co-finance the projects.

Industry minister Hiroshige Seko is planning to meet his British counterpart, Greg Clark, in Japan this week, to exchange opinions on cooperation between the 2 governments.

Britain's finance minister Philip Hammond told NHK on Thursday in Tokyo that his government welcomes the interest of Japanese businesses and will look carefully at the proposals that have been put forward.

30 billion yen of public funds to decontaminate "difficult to return" areas

December 20, 2016

Government to help fund Fukushima decontamination, easing Tepco's burden

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/12/20/national/government-help-fund-fukushima-decontamination-easing-tepcos-burden/#.WFkrdn2Dmic>

Kyodo

The Cabinet decided Tuesday that the central government will help pay to decontaminate areas worst hit by the 2011 Fukushima reactor meltdowns, marking a shift from earlier rules requiring Tepco to foot the bill.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's team endorsed a plan to set up a reconstruction hub in the most contaminated, off-limits areas in Fukushima Prefecture and secure about ¥30 billion for decontamination work in the fiscal 2017 budget.

The cost of the work could total around ¥300 billion in the next five years and grow further depending on how it progresses.

The plan is in line with proposals made in August by the ruling coalition, but no government panel review or Diet deliberations have been held on it, raising the prospect that it could be criticized as a bailout for Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc.

The government decided to add the decontamination work, including soil and tree removal, to infrastructure projects for making the affected land habitable again, but the special law on decontamination states that Tepco should shoulder the expenses.

The government will have to revise the special law on rebuilding Fukushima to accommodate the shift.

The move to help pay for the decontamination came after the expected price tag surged to ¥4 trillion from the previous estimate of ¥2.5 trillion, which did not include the cost of cleaning the areas with the highest levels of radiation.

If the government-funded cleaning area expands, the use of taxpayer money is likely to balloon to several trillion yen.

Meanwhile, in an effort to turn Tepco's business fortunes around, the government proposed that the battered utility work together with other companies in operating nuclear power plants and distributing power.

A panel of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry urged the company to launch talks with other power companies next year and set up a joint venture in the early 2020s to eventually consolidate their businesses.

"Tepco reform will be the basis of reconstruction in Fukushima and could lead to a new, stronger utilities industry," said industry minister Hiroshige Seko.

"We will profoundly accept the proposal and drastically carry out reform," said Tepco President Naomi Hirose.

December 19, 2016

Public funds earmarked to decontaminate Fukushima's 'difficult-to-return' zone

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161219/p2a/00m/0na/015000c>

The government is set to inject some 30 billion yen in public funds into work to decontaminate so-called "difficult-to-return" areas whose annual radiation levels topped 50 millisieverts in 2012 due to the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant disaster, it has been learned.

- **【Related】** News Navigator: How far has decontamination progressed in Fukushima?
- **【Related】** Temporary radioactive soil storage sites hinder Fukushima farmers

While the government had maintained that it would demand plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) cover the decontamination expenses based on the polluter-pays principle, the new plan effectively relieves TEPCO from the hefty financial burden by having taxpayers shoulder the costs. The new plan is part of the government's basic guidelines for "reconstruction bases" to be set up in each municipality within the difficult-to-return zone in Fukushima Prefecture from fiscal 2017, with the aim of prioritizing decontamination work and infrastructure restoration there. The government is seeking to lift evacuation orders for the difficult-to-return zone in five years.

However, the details of the reconstruction bases, such as their size and locations, have yet to be determined due to ongoing discussions between local municipalities and the Reconstruction Agency and other relevant bodies.

The government is set to obtain Cabinet approval for the basic guidelines on Dec. 20 before submitting a bill to revise the Act on Special Measures for the Reconstruction and Revitalization of Fukushima to the regular Diet session next year. The 30 billion yen in funds for the decontamination work will be set aside in the fiscal 2017 budget.

In the basic guidelines, the government states that decontamination work at the reconstruction bases is part of state projects to accelerate Fukushima's recovery and that the costs for the work will be covered by public funds **without demanding TEPCO to make compensation**. The statement is also apparently aimed at **demonstrating the government's active commitment to Fukushima's restoration**.

Under the previous guidelines for Fukushima's recovery approved by the Cabinet in December 2013, the government had stated that it would demand TEPCO cover the decontamination expenses of both completed and planned work. However, it hadn't been decided who would shoulder the decontamination costs for the difficult-to-return zone as there was no such plan at that point.

Masafumi Yokemoto, professor at Osaka City University who is versed in environmental policy, criticized the government's move, saying, **"If the government is to shoulder the cost that ought to be covered by TEPCO, the government must first accept its own responsibility for the nuclear disaster, change its policy and investigate the disaster before doing so. Otherwise, (spending taxpayers' money on decontamination work) can't be justified."**

TEPCO should try and improve profitability, says panel

December 20, 2016

Govt. panel: TEPCO should improve profitability

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161220_33/

A government panel of experts has compiled a report saying that the operator of the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant should endeavor to improve its profitability to fund the aftermath of the 2011 accident.

The report released on Tuesday says Tokyo Electric Power Company is liable for 16 trillion yen, or about 137 billion dollars, of the entire cost of decontamination, decommissioning the plant, and compensation payments. The total estimate stands at about 180 billion dollars.

However, the panel also notes that there are limits to the amount TEPCO can fund on its own.

The report strongly urges the utility to streamline or merge with other power companies so that the public doesn't have to bear a greater burden.

It says TEPCO could take such measures in the nuclear power business at another of the utility's plants in Niigata Prefecture, or in the business of distributing electricity to households.

The report also says the government should remain involved in the decommissioning and compensation payments.

The government plans to put a new system in place that would require most consumers to bear the compensation costs.

The report asks the government to secure transparency in the system and to mitigate the burden on the public.

Fast reactor future

December 20, 2016

Gap emerges between gov't, private sector over fast reactor project

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161220/p2a/00m/0na/017000c>

The Japan Atomic Energy Agency's Monju fast-breeder reactor is seen in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, from a Mainichi Shimbun helicopter on Dec. 19, 2016. (Mainichi)

Prospects of putting fast reactors into use in Japan remain dim in spite of the government's approval of policy to continue their development with the private sector, as the power industry appears hesitant to contribute during the developmental stage.

- **【Related】** Time for gov't to come clean on Monju reactor muck-up
- **【Related】** Plan to decommission troubled Monju reactor meets local criticism

"We would like to build a system where the government, manufacturers, power companies and research institutions cooperate and share responsibilities in a unified manner, without building walls against each other," Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Hiroshige Seko told the government's Council on Fast Reactor Development at the outset of its Dec. 19 meeting. The committee also agreed to launch a strategic working group to draw up a road map for technology development.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry insists on continuing with the fast reactor project because officials believe that such reactors are essential in nuclear fuel cycle, in which plutonium is extracted from spent nuclear fuel to be reused. While plutonium can be used at regular nuclear plants, its main planned use is in fast reactors -- particularly fast-breeder reactors that can produce more plutonium than they spend to generate power. The development of fast-breeder reactors has therefore been characterized as a trump card to solve resource problems. If the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor is decommissioned, however, the government's plan will lose momentum. The collapse of the nuclear fuel cycle will bring issues pertaining to nuclear power development in Japan to the fore. For example, Aomori Prefecture accepts spent nuclear fuel from nuclear power stations across Japan on condition that plutonium extracted from the spent fuel can be reused. Once the nuclear fuel cycle emerges as a failure, such spent fuel is no longer a "resource" but "waste." And if the prefectural government tries to send the waste back to nuclear plants, it could cause major chaos.

Amid such circumstances, the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA) -- the main administrator of the Monju reactor -- has been declared disqualified from operating the troubled reactor. As a result, pressure has risen for the fast reactor project to be fundamentally reviewed.

The economy ministry came up with a scenario to involve all the interested parties, including power companies and manufacturers, in the development of fast reactors. It seems, however, that the private sector is not as keen. While Satoru Katsuno, chairman of the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan (FEPC) and president of Chubu Electric Power Co., told participants at the council meeting that he was ready to actively be involved in the process of clarifying the goals of technology development, an executive from a major utility revealed that electric companies cannot afford to work on the fast reactor project amid growing competition in the power market following deregulation. The official said, "We would rather work on restarting nuclear plants."

Former Tokyo Electric Power Co. executive Takaaki Masumoto, who served as the vice chairman of the FEPC, pointed out that fast reactors are "necessary in the long run" but said, "The power industry had no intention of getting directly involved in the project until the government was able to put the technology into commercial use." For power companies, promotion of the nuclear fuel cycle hinges on the central government taking responsibility for research and development of the technology, and the private sector being able to operate fast reactors for commercial use. The government had initially tapped the private sector to find a replacement for JAEA as the main operator of the Monju reactor, but power companies refused to take on the role.

Meanwhile, nuclear reactor manufacturers are trying to determine the best relationship with the government. Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd., which was named in 2007 by the government as the core company for the fast-breeder reactor project, reconstructed a development system by spinning off the departments in charge of the project into separate companies. The firm supports the national project and those smaller subsidiaries have continued to hire new employees, but the project is not expected to bring in any profits, as it is believed to take 50 years or longer for technology to become commercially viable.

Those who were involved in the research and development of the Monju reactor are now aged 55 or older, and make up less than 30 percent of the overall staff at Mitsubishi Heavy. As such a shortage of experienced engineers could hinder development of the project, some Mitsubishi Heavy workers are taking part in the ASTRID fast-breeder reactor project in France to gain know-how.

A Mitsubishi Heavy official says the company will secure personnel by making an effort to pass technology on to younger generations, hiring new engineers, and conducting in-house transfers, but if the momentum toward fast-breeder reactor development slows down, it could set the government's plans back.

Japan To Decommission Monju FBR, But Faces Opposition From Prefecture

<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2016/12/20/japan-to-decommission-monju-fbr-but-faces-opposition-from-prefecture>

Research & Development

20 Dec (NucNet): Japan has decided to decommission the Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor, but is facing opposition from authorities in Fukui prefecture where the reactor is located. The Japan Atomic Industrial Forum said Fukui governor Issei Nishikawa said he would not accept the decision and would demand that the government reconsider it. According to Jaif, the government has said that a new experimental research reactor would be built in the prefecture and that Monju will be used for research. Jaif said confirmation of the decision was expected at a Cabinet meeting today, 20 December 2016. Monju reached criticality for the first time in 1994, but it has mostly been offline since 1995. In November 2015 Japan's nuclear regulator, the NRA, said state-run Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA) was not fit to operate Monju because it had repeatedly failed to correctly carry out inspections of the plant. According to Jaif, the NRA recommended at the time that the government find another operator to replace JAEA within six months. In December 1995, just months after Monju first started power transmission, it was shut down when 640 kg of liquid sodium leaked from a cooling system, causing a fire. There were no injuries and no radioactivity escaped plant buildings, but the incident was compounded by JAEA's attempts to cover up the scale of the damage. Monju was allowed to restart in May 2010 after JAEA carried out a review of the plant's design, and its safety procedures, which were shown to be inadequate. However, operation was again suspended in August 2010 after a fuel handling machine was dropped into the reactor during a refuelling outage. In May 2013 JAEA president Atsuyuki Suzuki resigned after the NRA prevented the restart of Monju due to inspection deficiencies. In November 2012 it was revealed that JAEA had failed to conduct regular inspections on almost 10,000 out of a total 39,000 pieces of equipment at Monju. Some of these included safety-critical equipment. Monju is a 246-MW sodium-cooled fast reactor at the Tsuruga nuclear power station in Fukui Prefecture, southwest Japan. It is designed to use mixed fuel rods of uranium and plutonium, and to produce more fuel than it consumes. Regarded as the core facility of the government's policy for nuclear fuel recycling, Monju is different from conventional nuclear power plants, which use water as coolants. Monju uses sodium as the coolant, meaning more sophisticated technology is required for its operation.

Related reports in the NucNet database (available to subscribers):

- Eight Years Needed To Restart Japan's Monju FBR, Says Minister (News in Brief No.237, 30 November 2016)

Scrapping Monju

December 21, 2016

Japan govt. decides to scrap Monju

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161221_24/

Japan's government has officially decided to scrap its prototype fast-breeder nuclear reactor Monju.

The decision was made at a meeting of relevant Cabinet ministers on Wednesday.

They said restarting the troubled reactor in Fukui Prefecture, central Japan, would require at least 8 years of preparation, and continued operation would cost more than 4.5 billion dollars.

They decided to dismantle the facility over some 30 years, citing growing costs.

The government is to oversee the decommissioning work.

It plans to create a system to enable Monju's builder, the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, to carry out the work while ensuring safety.

The government says it hopes to eventually make the area around the site one of the key research bases for developing fast reactors.

The ministers also confirmed that they will promote research and development at facilities in Japan and overseas, including a demonstration reactor to be designed with France and the experimental fast reactor Joyo in Japan.

Japan govt. to formally decide on Monju scrapping

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161221_18/

Japan's government will make a formal decision to scrap its prototype fast-breeder nuclear reactor Monju, at a meeting of relevant cabinet ministers on Wednesday.

Science Minister Hirokazu Matsuno said the government hopes to have a detailed plan by next April for decommissioning the troubled reactor in Fukui Prefecture. He said they will do their utmost to gain local support for the plan.

Matsuno and Industry Minister Hiroshige Seko presented the plan to Fukui Governor Issei Nishikawa on Wednesday, prior to the government's final decision.

Nishikawa had urged the government to review its decommissioning plan. He said discussions on the country's fuel recycling system and the body that will manage scrapping of the Monju were insufficient.

The government stressed at the meeting that the lessons learned from Monju would be applied to development of a fast reactor.

They said the current operator of the Monju will do the decommissioning under a new framework supervised by the government to ensure steady progress and safety.

They also said they will continue to consult with Fukui Prefectural officials on the process.

Governor Nishikawa refrained from endorsing the plan. He said the government was not convincing and that implementation will not go smoothly without local support.

Fukushima clean-up and rigged bids

December 21, 2016

Fukushima's ¥8 trillion cleanup leaves foreign firms in the cold

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/12/21/business/fukushimas-%c2%a58-trillion-cleanup-leaves-foreign-firms-cold/#.WFp1X32Dmif>

by Stephen Stapczynski

Bloomberg

Cleaning up the Fukushima nuclear plant — a task predicted to cost 86 times the amount earmarked for decommissioning Japan's first commercial reactor — is the mother of all salvage jobs. Still, foreign firms with decades of experience are seeing little of the spoils.

Safely dismantling the Japanese power plant, wrecked by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, will cost about ¥8 trillion (\$70 billion), the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry said Dec. 9, quadrupling the previous estimate. While a contract to help clean up the facility would be a windfall for any firm with specialized technology, the lion's share of the work has gone to local companies that designed and built most of Japan's atomic infrastructure.

The bidding process for Fukushima contracts should be more open to foreigners as Japan has never finished decommissioning a commercial nuclear plant, let alone one that experienced a triple meltdown, according to Lake Barrett, an independent adviser at Japan's International Research Institute for Nuclear Decommissioning. While the Fukushima cleanup is unlike any nuclear accident in history, foreign firms that have experience decommissioning regular facilities could provide much-needed support, according to Barrett, and even the plant's operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co. Holdings Inc.

'Cultural Resistance'

"Internationally, there is a lot more decontamination and decommissioning knowledge than you have in Japan," Barrett, a former official at the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, said in an interview in Tokyo. "I hope the Japanese contracting system improves to get this job done safely. There is this cultural resistance — it is almost like there is an isolated nuclear village still."

An **opaque bidding process** plays to the heart of criticisms put forward by independent investigators, who said in a 2012 report that collusion between the government, regulators and the plant's operator contributed to the scale of the disaster.

Of 44 subsidized projects publicly awarded by the trade and economy ministry since 2014, about 80 percent went to the International Research Institute for Nuclear Decommissioning. The group, known as **IRID, was established in the wake of the Fukushima disaster and is comprised entirely of Japanese corporations**, according to the ministry's website.

Japan's trade and industry ministry awarded funds directly to only two foreign firms during the same period. Many of the contracts had only one or two bidders.

Of about 70 contracts awarded since the March 2011 disaster, nine have gone to foreign companies, according to an official in the ministry's Agency of Natural Resources and Energy who asked not be named citing internal policy.

To provide opportunities for foreign companies, the ministry has created an English website for bids and also provides English information sessions to explain the contracts, the official said.

Toshiba, Hitachi

IRID's contracts are given to its members, including Toshiba Corp., Hitachi Ltd. and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd., which have partnerships and joint ventures with foreign firms, spokesman Yoshio Haruyama said by phone. While it doesn't directly contract work to companies overseas, IRID taps foreign experts as advisers and participates in international collaborative projects, he said.

Mitsubishi Heavy has about five or six contracts through IRID, but can't share how many partnerships it has with foreign firms, spokesman Shimon Ikeya said by phone. Hitachi has sub-contracts with foreign suppliers related to the Fukushima cleanup, but can't provide details about these agreements because they aren't public, a spokesperson said by e-mail.

As of March, IRID had about ¥30 billion worth of ongoing contracts primarily related to research and development of fuel removal and waste treatment. IRID, which aims to "gather knowledge and ideas from around the world" for the purpose of nuclear decommissioning, doesn't disclose how much of their money ultimately goes to foreign businesses, according to its spokesman. Barrett, its adviser, said he thinks it's "very low," but should ideally be 5 percent to 10 percent.

'Nuclear Village'

Japan's biggest nuclear disaster isn't void of foreign technology. Toshiba, which owns Pennsylvania-based Westinghouse Electric Co., and Hitachi, which has a joint venture with General Electric Co., are tapping American expertise. A giant crane and pulley system supplied by Toshiba to remove spent fuel from the wrecked reactors employs technology developed by Westinghouse.

"We bring in knowledge from foreign companies, organizations and specialists in order to safely decommission the reactors," Tatsuhiro Yamagishi, spokesman for Tepco, said by e-mail. While the company can't say the exact number of foreign firms involved in the Fukushima cleanup, companies including Paris-based Areva SA, California-based Kurion Inc. and Massachusetts-based Endeavor Robotics are engaged in work at the site, according to Yamagishi.

However, foreign firms independently securing contracts is still a tall order.

"When it comes to Japan's nuclear industry, the bidding system is completely unclear," Hiroaki Koide, a former assistant professor at Kyoto University Research Reactor Institute, said in an e-mail. "The system is designed to strengthen the profits of Japan's nuclear village," he added, referring to the alliance of pro-nuclear politicians, bureaucrats and power companies that promote reactors.

Tepco's annual cost to decommission its Fukushima plant may blow out to several hundred billion yen a year, up from the current estimate of ¥80 billion, the trade and industry ministry said in October. As of June, almost ¥1 trillion has been allocated for decommissioning and treating water at Fukushima, according to Tepco's Yamagishi.

'Ripe for Corruption'

With that much money at stake, Japan has become ground zero for a plethora of companies looking to benefit from the cleanup work. The structure of Japan's nuclear industry and the closed procurement preferred by the utilities that operate atomic plants means that the most lucrative opportunities for foreign companies are in the area of subcontracting, according to a report by the EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation released in March.

"Foreign firms have long argued that the Japanese bidding process is one that is ripe for corruption due to a lack of openness and transparency," Daniel Aldrich, professor and director of the security and resilience studies program at Northeastern University in Boston, said in an e-mail. For nuclear decommissioning "there is even less clarity and transparency due to security and proliferation concerns," he said.

Rigging Bids

The Japan Fair Trade Commission raided the offices of five companies last year in relation to rigged bids for maintenance contracts from Tepco, according to Jiji Press. Eleven road-paving companies were fined in September on projects to repair roads following the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, Jiji reported. Andrew DeWit, a political economy professor at Rikkyo University in Tokyo, agrees that the contract-awarding process isn't transparent. A lot of foreign companies seek Japanese partners to better their chances, he said.

Purolite Corp., a closely held water purifying company, spent millions of dollars developing and testing a system that could be used to treat radioactive water at Fukushima. Pennsylvania-based Purolite partnered with Hitachi to help win a contract to use its technology at the wrecked facility.

Those plans didn't pan out. Purolite is suing Hitachi in New York and Tokyo, alleging that Hitachi is using its technology at Fukushima in breach of agreements made in 2011, shutting it out of more than \$1 billion in contracts, according to court documents filed in September.

Hitachi doesn't comment on ongoing legal matters, a spokesperson said by e-mail.

"With a smaller pool of competitors, firms can expand their profit margins," said Northeastern University's Aldrich. "There are French and Russian firms that have the technical expertise to participate in nuclear decommissioning processes, but it is unclear if they will be able to compete on a level playing field with Japanese firms, which have far more experience with Japanese regulations and expectations."

Nukes not an answer to global warming

Why nuclear energy is not an answer to global warming

Talk from Dr. Alex Rosen, Medact-Conference

On December 9th, Dr. Alex Rosen, Vice-President of IPPNW Germany, was invited to talk on the subject of nuclear energy and climate change at the MedAct Conference "Healthy Planet - Better World". The subject of his talk was "Why nuclear power is not an answer to global warming". In it, he argued that nuclear power was not a good investment and that the true and long-term costs and effects of nuclear power far outweigh its potential short-term benefits. He named the detrimental effects of uranium mining and nuclear waste on the environment and on public health and listed the most relevant studies on the effects of uranium mining and civil nuclear energy on childhood leukemia, lung cancer and other radiation-related diseases. He explained the underestimated risks of nuclear catastrophes and talked about the

nuclear legacy that we are leaving to future generations. He also cited studies showing that nuclear energy is in fact irrelevant when it comes to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions or alleviating climate change. The inextricable links between nuclear power and nuclear weapons, brought to light in the common interests between the civil nuclear industry and the British Trident nuclear submarine program recently was also discussed, as were the attempts of the nuclear lobby to create fake citizen groups and NGO's in order to greenwash its business model. His presentation ended with an outlook to what could be described as a real energy revolution: modern energy conservation and efficiency methods, combined with 100% renewable energy generation, feeding flexible, distributed, community-based smart grid systems that would offer energy autonomy and independence of fossil and nuclear fuel imports. The main arguments of his talk can be found in the attached document.

"Why nuclear energy is not an answer to global warming" by Dr. Alex Rosen

Link to PDF :

http://www.ipnwn.eu/commonFiles/pdfs/Atomenergie/Why_nuclear_energy_is_not_an_answer_to_global_warming.pdf

Time to scrap nuclear fuel cycle (1)

December 22, 2016

Editorial: Time to scrap nuclear fuel cycle, not just Monju reactor

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161222/p2a/00m/0na/009000c>

The government formally decided on Dec. 21 to decommission Japan's Monju prototype fast-breeder nuclear reactor, yet will continue to pursue the nuclear fuel cycle in which plutonium is extracted from spent fuel through reprocessing to be used again. This stance by the government takes the existence of fast reactors and the nuclear fuel cycle as a foregone conclusion.

Over 1 trillion yen in public funds has been injected into the Monju project, yet due to recurring trouble and scandals, the reactor has operated for just 250 days over 22 years. The Nuclear Regulation Authority went as far as to point out that Monju's operator, the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, was not capable of running the reactor and should be replaced.

It is only natural for the reactor to be scrapped, but there remains a problem in that the government has closed its eyes to various issues in reaching its decision. Why was it unable to act sooner to put an end to the waste of taxpayers' money and decommission the reactor? Disregarding any probe into such issues, the government went ahead and made its decision behind closed doors. This in no way to win public approval.

An even more fundamental problem is that while the government is set to decommission the Monju reactor, it has decided to proceed with the development of a demonstration fast reactor -- a step up from Monju.

Fast reactors form a cornerstone of the nuclear fuel cycle. The decommissioning of Monju should mean the cycle is broken, and if that is the case, then what needs to be reviewed above all is the fuel cycle policy itself.

The government, however, is still trying to promote fast reactor development, on the grounds that maintenance of the nuclear fuel cycle was included in the nation's basic energy policy that the Cabinet approved in 2014.

As a step in that direction, the government has proposed taking part in France's project to build the Astrid fast demonstration reactor, but the feasibility of this project remains unclear, and the government's move sticks out as a seemingly stop-gap measure.

The reason the government has stuck to maintaining the nuclear fuel cycle is that as soon as it takes down its fuel cycle banner, spent fuel that was previously a "resource" becomes mere "waste." As a result, the Aomori Prefectural Government would probably have to ask power companies to take back the "resources" that have been piling up at the nuclear fuel reprocessing facility in the prefecture. And once the storage pools for spent fuel at the nation's nuclear power plants are full, those plants' reactors will have to be taken offline.

Politicians should be sitting down and working out measures to solve this problem; maintenance of the nuclear fuel cycle should not be used as an expedient.

Some may see officials as wanting to maintain the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel from the viewpoint of potential nuclear deterrence, but this position lacks persuasiveness.

Five years and nine months have now passed since the onset of the disaster at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant, and as we prepare to usher in a new year, there are still people living in temporary dwellings and other places to which they evacuated. And the government is trying to widely push the swelling costs of the disaster cleanup, reactor decommissioning, and compensation payments onto the public.

Looking squarely at this reality, fast reactor development is not something the government should be placing priority on tackling. It should give up on the nuclear fuel cycle and put the money to use in measures to assist Fukushima's recovery.

Time for gov't to come clean on Monju reactor muck-up

<http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20161219/p2a/00m/0na/017000c>

December 19, 2016 (Mainichi Japan)

On Dec. 19, the central government informed Fukui Prefecture that the Monju fast-breeder reactor would be decommissioned. In its 22-year history, Monju has cost Japanese taxpayers more than a trillion yen, and been in actual operation for a grand total of 250 days.

- **【Related】** Plan to decommission troubled Monju reactor meets local criticism

Nevertheless, on the same day the government broke the news about Monju's impending end to Fukui Gov. Issei Nishikawa, it also decided internally to continue attempts to develop fast-breeder reactor technology, and all without any examination or investigation into why Monju failed in the first place. Fast-breeder technology holds out the promise of "dream reactors" that produce more fuel than they use. However, its cost and complexity have proven too much for other would-be developers, and Britain, the United States and Germany all abandoned their own fast-breeder efforts in the 1990s. Monju reached

criticality in 1994 with high hopes that it would prove the technology's efficacy, and become the "Model T" of fast-breeder reactors.

However, the reactor suffered repeated mishaps including a 1995 sodium leak, and never surpassed 40 percent of its power output capacity. Even so, the government claims that "much technological knowledge was gained (from Monju) that can be put to use for the development of the next test reactor." That is, the government has not admitted that Monju was a failure.

Or to put it another way, no one is willing to take responsibility for the Monju money pit, and Japan's taxpayers have been stuck with the bill.

Meanwhile, the government's committee on fast-breeder development decided unanimously on Dec. 19 to pursue, in cooperation with France and using domestic facilities, the construction of a new experimental reactor. It must be pointed out, however, who sits on this august body. Joining officials from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and the Japan Atomic Energy Agency -- who run the Monju project -- are those from two nuclear fuel cycle boosters, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan. Rounding out the membership is the chief of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, which makes nuclear reactors.

The proceedings of these committee meetings -- which are, as a rule, "private" and therefore never revealed to the public -- have always been based on the presumption that the problem-plagued nuclear fuel cycle policy (reprocessing spent fuel into MOX mixed-oxide fuel) will continue.

Continuing the fuel cycle and the fast-breeder project is costing Japan enormous sums, and if in the end it fails, the Japanese people may very well end up paying for it. To prevent another Monju muck-up, the government should conduct a very public examination of exactly what went wrong.

Time to scrap nuclear fuel cycle (2)

December 22, 2016

Review the failure of Monju

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/12/22/editorials/review-failure-monju/#.WFvFMX2Dmid>

Just as the government finally makes a belated decision to decommission the trouble-plagued Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor, it is seeking to pursue a successor project in order to keep alive its bid for a nuclear fuel cycle in Japan. What it should be doing first is conducting a thorough examination of why the Monju project ended in failure and holding an open discussion on whether the nuclear fuel cycle — in which Monju's technology was supposed to serve as a core component — is still a practical and feasible option for this country.

The formal decision to decommission the nation's sole prototype fast-breeder reactor in Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture, was long overdue. Billed as a dream nuclear reactor for resource-scarce Japan because it produces more plutonium than it consumes as fuel, Monju first reached criticality in 1994, but it has been mostly offline after it was hit by a sodium coolant leak and fire in December 2015. Its trouble-prone operator was judged by the Nuclear Regulation Authority as unqualified to run the facility, but the government has been unable to build a new viable regime to restart its operation.

Despite the injection of more than ¥1 trillion in taxpayer money, Monju was in operation for a mere 250 days over the past 22 years, and never reached 100 percent of its output capacity. It is estimated that

restarting the reactor under the updated safety regulations will take at least eight years — a process that, including acquisition of necessary data that will require an additional eight years, is calculated to cost at least ¥540 billion. The decision to decommission the reactor — which in itself would require at least ¥375 billion over 30 years — was inevitable.

The problem is that the government seems to be moving headlong to the next project for its stalled nuclear fuel cycle policy without carrying out a proper assessment of Monju's failure — either from scientific viewpoints or policy perspectives. The government plans to compile by 2018 a road map for the domestic development of a demonstration fast reactor, which also consumes plutonium as fuel.

The government has long pursued a nuclear fuel cycle policy — in which spent fuel from nuclear power plants are reprocessed to extract plutonium for reuse as fuel — due to its efficient use of uranium resources. Monju was a facility in the second stage of development (from experimental to prototype, demonstration and commercial) of fast-breeder reactor technology — which was to be the core component of the policy. Still, the government says it will not review its nuclear fuel cycle policy. It intends to promote the use of plutonium-uranium mixed-oxide (MOX) fuel at conventional nuclear power plants — although MOX fuel is much more costly and its use remains low because the restart of nuclear plants idled since the 2011 meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power's Fukushima No. 1 plant has been proceeding at a snail's pace.

What's puzzling is the plan to pursue the development of a demonstration fast reactor, even after the failure of the Monju project. The government reportedly says that even without restarting Monju, the same level of technological knowledge and data for development of a demonstration reactor can be obtained through a joint project with France to develop an advanced sodium technological reactor for industrial demonstration (ASTRID) and by using the Joyo experimental fast-breeder reactor. Still, ASTRID remains in its design stage, and it is unclear how much of its cost Japan will be sharing. The government has yet to publicly explain how much the development of a demonstration fast reactor will cost and how it plans to pay for it.

A bigger problem is that the plan to move forward on a fast reactor development was formulated in a closed discussion among a small group of people with stakes in nuclear power. The plan was adopted at the Council on Fast Reactor Development, which was set up by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and includes as members the economy and trade minister, the education and science minister, the head of the Japan Atomic Energy Agency — which operates Monju — the chairman of the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan, and the president of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, a major nuclear power plant maker. It is unacceptable that the future direction of the nation's policy on nuclear energy and the decision to launch a costly new project are being made by a closed circle of interested parties without public discussions that reflect on Monju's failure.

The government has yet to give a convincing explanation of why the pursuit of a nuclear fuel cycle is still relevant as it seeks to reduce the nation's dependency on nuclear power and expand energy supply from renewable sources after the 2011 Fukushima crisis, which made it difficult to proceed with nuclear power generation in the same manner as before. The decision to end the Monju project should serve as a chance for the nation to rethink the policy itself and hold an open discussion on our energy needs and nuclear power.

EDITORIAL: Government still refuses to face up to reality, failure of Monju project

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201612220041.html>

The government officially decided on Dec. 21 to decommission the troubled Monju prototype fast-breeder reactor and instead develop a new fast reactor to maintain Japan's nuclear fuel recycling program.

The decision can be likened to a theater director determined not to declare an end to production despite dropping the spendthrift leading actor whose scandals have prevented him from performing on stage.

Fearing possible repercussions from the termination of the production, the director keeps promising to stage the play "sometime in the future." The director refuses to say clearly when the play will be staged because there is no actor in sight who can substitute for the dismissed one.

But this policy decision cannot be simply laughed away as an absurd piece of political theatrics. An enormous amount of taxpayer money has already been poured into Monju, and the government is poised to spend a huge additional amount to deal with its demise.

There is no doubt the Monju project has been a costly failure. The government cannot be allowed to put the debacle behind it by simply scrapping the experimental reactor and having the science and technology minister offer to return part of his salary for several months.

Despite an injection of more than 1 trillion yen (\$8.5 billion) of public funds into the project, the reactor has been mostly out of operation for the 20-odd years since it first reached criticality in 1994.

Decommissioning the reactor will require an additional expenditure of nearly 400 billion yen, according to a government estimate.

An exhaustive postmortem for the project to identify the causes of its failure is in order.

The government should not waste any more money or make unreasonable efforts to keep its nuclear fuel recycling program alive.

The government has made the questionable claim that "a certain amount of useful knowledge" has been acquired through the Monju project that can be used to develop a new fast reactor. Instead, the government should confront the grim reality of this undertaking.

Four years ago, the science and technology ministry submitted a report on technological achievements in the Monju project to the Japan Atomic Energy Commission.

The report included estimated levels of achievements, weighted in terms of importance, in different areas.

The degree of achievement, expressed as a percentage, for equipment and system tests was, for instance, 16 percent. The figure for reactor core tests and irradiation issues was 31 percent, while that for operation and maintenance was nil. The overall achievement level was estimated at 16 percent.

Does the government believe this poor track record justifies its claim that "a certain amount of useful knowledge" has been obtained?

The clear moral of the Monju saga is that a huge price must be paid for failing to take a hard look at the reality and underestimating risks and problems.

Serious concerns about the cost-effectiveness of a nuclear fuel recycling program and the risk of nuclear proliferation from accumulating stockpiles of plutonium led many countries to give up developing fast-breeder reactors. Japan, however, bucked the trend and embarked on building Monju.

When sodium leaks occurred overseas, Japanese proponents insisted that such an accident would not happen at the Monju reactor.

When a sodium leak accident did occur at Monju in 1995, they made false announcements and covered up vital information.

Monju resumed operations in 2010 after a long hiatus, but mechanical trouble soon caused it to be shut down again.

Eventually, the ability and competence of the Monju operator, Japan Atomic Energy Agency, was called into question.

The government's decision to decommission the reactor has long been delayed apparently because of fears that the step would raise questions about how to reprocess spent nuclear fuel in the recycling process and could have a negative impact on nuclear power generation itself.

The government should take this opportunity to confront the reality of its nuclear fuel recycling policy and try to create a new nuclear power policy that can win support of the public through open and broad debate.

Forging ahead with the plan to develop a fast reactor without following this process would be tantamount to betraying the people.

State funds will be used to clean up Fukushima

December 22, 2016

State funds to be used for clean-up in Fukushima

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20161222_21/

The Japanese government, for the first time, is using state funds for decontamination work in areas affected by the 2011 nuclear accident in Fukushima Prefecture.

The environment ministry earmarked roughly 30 billion yen, or about 250 million dollars, in the fiscal 2017 budget plan, which was approved by the Cabinet on Thursday.

The allocation will be for cleaning up no-entry areas where radiation levels remain prohibitively high.

The government has so far made the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company, pay for the cleanup, based on the principle that the entity responsible for the contamination should bear the cost.

Some lawmakers within the governing coalition are opposed to the turnaround in policy, saying the government should continue to make TEPCO pay.

Environment minister Koichi Yamamoto told reporters on Thursday that the ministry will carefully explain the decision in an effort to seek public understanding on the use of state funds.

The Environment Ministry says it estimates the cost of decontamination work carried out by TEPCO so far at around 36 billion dollars.

But the cleanup of the heavily-contaminated areas that starts from fiscal 2017 is expected to be more time- and labor-consuming than the work in lesser tainted areas.

Who is responsible?

December 23, 2016

The cost of cleaning up Fukushima

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/12/23/editorials/cost-cleaning-fukushima/#.WFz9Jn2Dmic>

The Abe administration has decided to use taxpayer money for decontaminating areas in Fukushima Prefecture off-limits to people due to fallout of radioactive substances from the March 2011 meltdowns at Tokyo Electric Power's Fukushima No. 1 power plant. The decision, which deviates from the current policy that Tepco should pay for the decontamination efforts, reflects a proposal put forward in August by the ruling coalition of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito but never discussed by the government's council of experts or in the Diet. The government may want to justify the move as an effort to help accelerate evacuees' return to their hometown communities. Still, it will be difficult for the administration to evade criticism that the measure is nothing but a taxpayer-funded bailout for Tepco, which is responsible for the nuclear fallout that affected so many people in Fukushima. By proceeding with the decontamination work, the administration hopes to lift evacuation orders in some of the no-go areas in about five years. It is hoped these areas will serve as bases for activities to promote reconstruction from the nuclear disaster. As the first step, the government plans to set aside ¥30 billion in the fiscal 2017 budget. So far, no full-scale cleanup work has been carried out inside these zones, which straddle seven municipalities around the Tepco plant.

The government's position is that it is safe for evacuees to return to their communities if the annual cumulative dose there is 20 millisieverts (mSv) or less, although the legal limit allowed for people in normal circumstances is 1 mSv. The millisievert is a measure of the absorption of radiation by the human body. In no-go zones, the annual dose tops 50 mSv and is not expected to fall below 20 mSv in the next five years.

Faithful to the standard polluter pays principle, which was also applied to the Minamata mercury poisoning disaster in the 1950s and '60s, the special law to cope with the damage from the Fukushima disaster stipulates that Tepco should shoulder the cleanup cost, and when decontamination work is paid for by taxpayer money, the utility must later reimburse the government. Now the government plans to revise the special law on decontamination and other legislation so it can pay for the planned decontamination work in Fukushima. To counter possible criticism that the scheme is intended merely to help Tepco, the government argues that the planned work aims to improve public infrastructure in the no-go zones so evacuees can return. However, the work will include scraping off top soil and cutting down trees, making it no different than decontamination efforts in other areas.

To justify the use of taxpayer money, the government also says that Tepco has paid compensation to evacuees from the no-go zones on the assumption that they would not be able to return to their homes over an extended period. Thus, in a revised guideline for the reconstruction of Fukushima Prefecture, the government says it will pay for the planned decontamination without asking for reimbursement from Tepco.

Behind the government's decision for the use of taxpayer money is the **mushrooming expense of decontamination, with the latest estimate rising from the original ¥2.5 trillion to ¥4 trillion, which does not include the cost of cleaning up the no-go areas.** The government expects the planned work in those areas to cost roughly ¥300 billion over five years, but the price tag could rise if the work becomes protracted. And the burden on taxpayers may further increase if the scope of government-paid decontamination in those areas is expanded.

In a related move, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has come up with an idea to pass part of the cost of Tepco's compensation for Fukushima disaster victims on to consumers in the form of higher electricity bills, as the total estimated cost for decommissioning the Fukushima No. 1 plant, compensation

and decontamination has swollen from the original ¥11 trillion to ¥21.5 trillion. **These moves not only increase people's financial burden but also blur the power company's responsibility for the devastation it caused.** The government may say the measures are necessary to help promote reconstruction in Fukushima. But they could distract public attention from the principle that it is Tepco which must pay for the decommissioning of its reactors, compensation for the victims and cleanup of the contaminated areas.

UK and Japan's nuke agreement

23.12.2016_No254 / News in Brief

UK And Japan Sign Nuclear Cooperation Agreement

<http://www.nucnet.org/all-the-news/2016/12/23/uk-and-japan-sign-nuclear-cooperation-agreement>

Plans & Construction

23 Dec (NucNet): The UK and Japan have signed an agreement that significantly expands cooperation in the nuclear energy sector and paves the way for Japanese companies to build nuclear plants in the UK, the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy said in a statement. The agreement also covers cooperation in the areas of decommissioning and decontamination and it is anticipated that the deal will give UK companies with advanced technologies greater access to projects at the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear station, where three of the six reactors suffered meltdowns after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami. The agreement was signed in Tokyo on 22 December 2016 by Hiroshige Seko, the Japanese trade and industry minister, and Greg Clark, the UK business and energy secretary. The agreement is the first of its kind for Japan, while Mr Clark described it as “vital” to the UK's industrial strategy and the development of clean energy sources. One of the key components of the agreement is the proposals to build new reactors in the UK. Two Japan-led consortia, Horizon and NuGen, are developing plans to build new nuclear projects in the UK. Horizon, bought by Hitachi from a German company in 2012, has delivered the outline of a project at Wylfa Newydd in Wales, and has plans to build as many as six reactors in the UK. Toshiba joint venture NuGen is planning the Moorside nuclear station in Cumbria, northwest England, and is considering additional projects. The first of the three Westinghouse AP1000 reactors at Moorside is targeted to come online in the mid-2020s.

Related reports in the NucNet database (available to subscribers):

- UK's NuGen Signs Land Contract For Moorside Reactors (News in Brief No.137, 14 July 2015)

TEPCO will sell gas

December 26, 2016

Tepco to sell gas to households

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/12/26/business/tepco-sell-gas-households/#.WGE-a32Dmid>

JJI

Tepco Energy Partner Inc. will start selling gas to households next July in response to the full liberalization of the gas retail market coming in April.

Tepco Energy Partner, a unit of Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc., also said Monday it has concluded a basic wholesale agreement to supply gas to Nippon Gas Co., a major liquefied natural gas provider.

The two companies aim to win 150,000 new customers together in the service area of Tokyo Gas Co., until now the region's monopoly gas supplier, in the initial year of the alliance.

Last May, Tepco EP and Nippon Gas concluded a contract to switch the wholesale gas supplier for 320,000 current Nippon Gas customers to the Tepco unit from Tokyo Gas starting in April.

Tepco EP and Nippon Gas will discuss the possibility of jointly setting up a new company in a bid to expand their alliance and boost their competitive position against Tokyo Gas.

Tepco ready for bond offering?

December 27, 2016

TEPCO, investors eye 1st bond sale since Fukushima, sources say

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201612270064.html>

REUTERS

Tokyo Electric Power (TEPCO) is gauging demand for its first bond offering since the 2011 Fukushima nuclear calamity, with some market participants expecting a sale as early as February, sources familiar with the plans said.

While the size of the sale has not been decided, potential maturities being discussed are three-, five- and 10-years, bankers and investors told Thomson Reuters DealWatch, asking not to be identified because the information is private.

The company is likely to have to pay investors a premium of 1 percentage point above Japanese government bonds, about three times more yield pick up than on other electric utility bonds, they said. The company was in discussions last year with investors to sell as much as 330 billion yen of bonds. A TEPCO spokesman said the company still plans to issue bonds by the end of March but declined to comment on specific target dates or sizes.

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